

# **The Underdogs a Novel of the Mexican Revolution Study Guide**

**The Underdogs a Novel of the Mexican Revolution by  
Mariano Azuela**

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



# Contents

|                                                                                  |                    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| <a href="#">The Underdogs a Novel of the Mexican Revolution Study Guide.....</a> | <a href="#">1</a>  |
| <a href="#">Contents.....</a>                                                    | <a href="#">2</a>  |
| <a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>                                                | <a href="#">3</a>  |
| <a href="#">Part I, I - IV.....</a>                                              | <a href="#">4</a>  |
| <a href="#">Part I, V - X.....</a>                                               | <a href="#">6</a>  |
| <a href="#">Part I, XI - XV.....</a>                                             | <a href="#">9</a>  |
| <a href="#">Part I, XVI - XXI.....</a>                                           | <a href="#">11</a> |
| <a href="#">Part II, I - IV.....</a>                                             | <a href="#">13</a> |
| <a href="#">Part II, V - X.....</a>                                              | <a href="#">15</a> |
| <a href="#">Part II, XI - XIV.....</a>                                           | <a href="#">17</a> |
| <a href="#">Part III, I - VII.....</a>                                           | <a href="#">19</a> |
| <a href="#">Characters.....</a>                                                  | <a href="#">21</a> |
| <a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>                                              | <a href="#">25</a> |
| <a href="#">Themes.....</a>                                                      | <a href="#">27</a> |
| <a href="#">Style.....</a>                                                       | <a href="#">30</a> |
| <a href="#">Quotes.....</a>                                                      | <a href="#">33</a> |
| <a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>                                       | <a href="#">37</a> |



# Plot Summary

The Underdogs follows the rise and fall of Demetrio Macias and his band of rebels during the Mexican Revolution of the early nineteen hundreds. The novel charts Demetrio's rise from farmer to general of the northern rebel army, and his subsequent decline and the deterioration of his army.

Demetrio is forced to flee from his farm by Federal soldiers, and he accumulates a group of twenty similarly disaffected peasant men. In a skirmish with Federals, in which Demetrio's band is greatly outmatched, Demetrio nevertheless displays superior tactics and marksmanship, causing the Federals to retreat, though he is shot and becomes very sick in the process.

Feverish, Demetrio is brought to a ranch where his men are hailed as heroes of the peasants. There, he meets a man named Luis Cervantes, a former medical student who provides a larger, intellectual perspective on the Revolution. Demetrio becomes smitten with a local girl named Camilla who nurses him back to health, but Camilla has eyes only for Luis, who rejects her because of her low class origins.

Demetrio continues to score victories against the Federals and eventually displays heroics at the Federal army's last stronghold, Zacatecas, snatching victory from the jaws of defeat. He attains the rank of general.

After Zacatecas, Demetrio's army and his own psychological state, begin to decline. Where before they were motivated by the ideals of the revolution, now his army uses the revolution as a pretext for looting and murder. Two new recruits in particular, Blondie and War Paint, epitomize the sadistic abuse of power perpetrated by the men, as Blondie tortures townspeople for no reason, and War Paint delights in destruction, madness, and looting, completely unconcerned with the larger history being made around her. Towns begin to turn on Demetrio's army, viewing them as intruders and pirates rather than saviors. There is some promise that warfare may come to an end with an agreement for a new President at a town called Aguascalientes, but, appropriate to the pessimistic mood of the novel throughout, Aguascalientes only ends with more uncertainty and an extension to the revolution, when it is revealed that two rebel leaders are now vying for the Presidency. Demetrio understands little of the politics of the war and wishes only to fight and be told what to do and where to be.

In the final days, Luis abandons Demetrio, and many of Demetrio's friends and soldiers have died. Demetrio revisits his wife and child at his farm, but, a changed man, he can no longer go back to his old existence. Thereafter, Demetrio pessimistically trudges toward certain death against a rival rebel faction near his former farm, forever changed and made soulless by war.



# Part I, I - IV

## Part I, I - IV Summary

I: There are strange noises outside a home. A woman and child live in the home, along with a man named Demetrio Macias. Demetrio suspects trouble and hides while arming himself with a rifle. The dog goes to investigate the noise and is shot dead. It turns out a sergeant and lieutenant have visited. They are drunk and aggressive. They loudly yell for food and a place to stay, and the woman scolds them as she drags the dog they shot back home. They see her and make sexually suggestive threats. They seem ready to bully themselves into the home, but Demetrio appears. They are cowed by him; they call him a "genuine man," and it is clear he has some sort of reputation with them. They leave without Demetrio having to say a word, but nevertheless Demetrio urges his wife and child to flee with him, as the soldiers will come back with more of their kind. They leave and climb a mountain, and Demetrio turns to see his home in flames in the distance.

II: Demetrio, apparently separated from the woman and her child, makes his way through the mountain and into a ravine. He figures his pursuers will probably be unable to make their way through the mountainous area as quickly as he does. At a certain place in the ravine, Demetrio blows a horn three times, which is answered by a whistle, and men pour out from hidden places. He tells the ragged group that his house was burned, and they share anger and curses. He tells them to prepare for a firefight, and the men take turns bragging about their battle prowess and courage. It is clear Demetrio is this band's leader. They share a bit of liquor and salt and wait.

III: A horn announces the arrival of soldiers, and Demetrio and his twenty-one men hide behind rocks and such. The army comes, and it seems there are hundreds of them. Demetrio announces "Fire!" and the soldiers are ambushed. His men display excellent marksmanship, and many soldiers fall. His men include Anastasio Montanez; Pancraccio; Meco; Manteca; and Quail, among others. His men are boastful and make a game of it, wagering who will kill who, etc. The soldiers seem powerless to even find the hidden men, much less engage them. Eventually the men become too confident, and Quail stands, using his pants like a bullfighter's cape to mock the soldiers. The band must now retreat and find new positions because of Quail's stupidity, and the soldiers gain ground. Demetrio warns his men of danger, but they pay no heed, still boastful, and eventually the soldiers get close enough to let go a hail of bullets. One hits Demetrio in the thigh and he goes unconscious.

IV: After the battle is over and the soldiers have retreated, the band is missing two men, Serapio and Antonio, and find them hung to death from trees. Anastasio says a prayer for them. Demetrio's wound and bleeding worsen, and he must be carried on a makeshift stretcher, no longer able to travel on horseback. Venancio, one of the band, is the closest thing they have to a doctor, and he ties up Demetrio's wound. They make their way through the mountains, depending on the kindness of the mountain people



sympathetic to their cause for food and shelter. Eventually they reach a group of huts, and a young pretty woman offers Demetrio a drink. He passes out from fever. A woman named Remigia offers them food and her hut to stay for the night.

## Part I, I - IV Analysis

The novel starts in classic in media res style, in the middle of things. As opposed to careful explanation of the larger conflict (the Mexican Revolution) and an explanation as to how Demetrio Macias came to be a hunted man, the reader is thrust directly into the action, creating confusion and questions in the reader that will only gradually be answered. Authors have long employed this technique to create suspense and tension and to sustain interest in the reader, who will read on in order to answer his/her questions and correct any confusion. Who is Demetrio, and why is he being harassed by soldiers, becoming the two pressing questions. Chapter II answers these questions by showing Demetrio's relationship with his men and, though unstated, his obvious leadership role. The ensuing battle with the Federals, who seemingly have vastly superior numbers, demonstrate this small band's tenacity and Demetrio's battle prowess, including his superior marksmanship, bravery, and intelligence as a tactician in overcoming such an imbalance in number of troops. The particulars of Demetrio's abandoning his family and this battle will become very important, as the end of the novel will link to the beginning in what's known as a cyclical narrative.



# Part I, V - X

## Part I, V - X Summary

V: Quail hears a gunshot and wakes up Anastasio. They investigate and find Pancracio (who had been on guard) dragging a man toward them. He had shot the man in the foot. This man is called Luis Cervantes, and he wishes to speak with Demetrio. Luis says he was a private in the army but deserted. The mention of the army incenses the men, who call Luis a "Federal" and seem about to kill him, but Demetrio hears the ruckus and orders Luis to be brought to him. Luis tells Demetrio he is a medical student and journalist who was persecuted because he wrote a pro-revolution essay; he emphasizes that Demetrio and he share the same values and beliefs, and Demetrio sardonically wonders what those are. His men urge Demetrio to kill Luis, but Demetrio denies them, ordering his band to keep watch on the man and keep him in the corral.

VI: Luis Cervantes cannot sleep in the pig-pen, exhausted and wounded, and thinks back to how he got there. He was originally pro-Government, joining the soldiers to kill bandits, but he was not suitable to the harsh life of traveling the country on horseback and certainly not suitable to killing with guns. He deserted and was caught by his superior. He narrowly escaped death as a deserter, instead was humiliated by getting kitchen detail as punishment. Then, his hatred of his superiors grew, and along with that, hatred of the Government and upper class, and his ideas became anti-Government and pro-rebel, sentiments he began to quietly proclaim. Some soldiers responded and made confessions that they, too, did not want to be soldiers. After another desertion, Luis now finds himself with the bandits he praised, and he finds plenty of sad irony in the fact that his ideological "brothers" have greeted him with a gunshot wound and a pig-pen prison.

VII: Demetrio's fever is gone and he feels better. He is visited by the girl who gave him a drink when he entered town (whose name is Camilla). Demetrio is attracted to her and reaches for her, but she leaves, embarrassed. Anastasio asks Demetrio what they should do about Luis. Demetrio says that Quail should go and fetch some priest's robes from a nearby church and pretend to be a priest. Demetrio will "condemn" Luis to death, and Quail will hear his confession, which will reveal if Luis is as he says, or is an assassin for the Government. Luis is brought in, exhausted, disillusioned, and resigned to his fate, and Demetrio, per the ruse, condemns Luis to death. Quail later reports that, while talkative, Luis is who he says he is, and is not there to murder Demetrio. Luis is allowed to live, for now.

VIII: Luis tends to his foot wound, helped by Camilla. Camilla wonders at all the modern medical methods he employs, like boiling the water and using alcohol as an antiseptic. Camilla is becoming attracted to Luis. However, Luis is occupied with his own thoughts and his disillusionment with Demetrio and his men. He was expecting noble rebels, well-dressed and equipped like Pancho Villa's men. Instead, Demetrio and his band are mangy and half-starved, with old horses and rotting clothes. He wonders if Demetrio's



band are just pirates and murderers using the revolution as a convenient excuse to raid and pillage.

IX: Women enter Remigia's hut (where Demetrio is still recovering), and they begin to gossip about a neighboring girl, her possible pregnancy, and the possible father, who might be her uncle or who might be a soldier. This gossip wakes Demetrio. One of the women, Panchita, brought a pigeon as part of an old cure for fever. Remigia splits the pigeon in two with a knife and lays the bloody pieces on Demetrio's abdomen. This is thought to help a fever. Another woman, Fortunata, relates a story where her daughter was taken away by a government soldier and how she wishes Demetrio's band would kill every Federal alive. Demetrio is not listening but instead plotting the best way to the band's next destination, Durango.

X: After days of no improvement in Demetrio's fever, Anastasio suggests they allow Luis Cervantes to tend to the wound. Venancio objects, but Quail states that he's no sort of doctor, and they argue. Demetrio silences them and calls for Luis. Luis finds a badly swollen and bound wound, and he cleans the wound and re-dresses it. Gradually, over perhaps a two-week period, Demetrio gets much better, and he comes to trust Luis and enjoy his company. Meanwhile, the band still treats Luis as an outsider, calling him "Tenderfoot" and giving him only scraps of food. Demetrio aims to change this, and the band's mood toward Luis starts to change when Luis praises Venancio for a story he tells, and he assures Venancio that, once the revolution is won, Luis is confident Venancio can get a job in a hospital and become a real doctor. From that point, Venancio affectionately calls Luis, "Louie."

## Part I, V - X Analysis

This section introduces Luis Cervantes, the intellectual and student. He serves to offer a broader perspective on the revolution, and his initial discouragement (his rebel "brothers" welcome him by shooting him in the foot, nearly killing him, then throwing him in a pig pen for days) introduces material for the primary subject of the book, that of the true nature of the rebels, vacillating between freedom fighters and murderous cutthroats.

Chapter VI introduces a flashback structure, wherein present circumstances (here, Luis trapped in the pig-pen) compel a character to think back to or relate past events. Through this, the reader is given Luis' backstory and how he came to seek out Demetrio. Later in the novel, a similar flashback structure will provide Demetrio's backstory and his dealings with Don Monico.

Finally, there is with these chapters an examination of the Mexican peasant class. They are quite primitive and backwards: Camilla marvels at Luis' basic medical knowledge, and Remigia and her friends offer up the voodoo remedy of the pigeon parts laid on Demetrio's stomach to cure his fever. These subtle touches contribute to a kind of overall pessimism that equality and enlightenment of the common people, the goal of the revolution, is even possible. In this same vein, consider also that even the

"enlightened," college-educated Luis is disgusted by the romantic advances of Camilla, a disgust mostly characterized as stemming from her low class.





## Part I, XI - XV

### Part I, XI - XV Summary

XI: Camilla aims to express her feelings for Luis, but Luis snaps at her and she flees and is not seen for three days. After the three days, she comes back and seems more determined than ever to court Luis. She asks him if he will help her learn the lyrics to a revolutionary song, but he seems to have no interest. Undaunted, she tells him that Demetrio tried to grab her wrist and pinch her legs, hoping that Luis would become jealous, but Luis only laughs and asks her why she doesn't let him go all the way. Luis is in fact disgusted with this simple peasant girl. Camilla cries and leaves, heartbroken.

XII: As the men gamble, Luis Cervantes dreams away a lazy afternoon. Anastasio approaches him and tells him a bit of his story, how he was a successful farmer before and only joined the band because he had stabbed a captain. Meanwhile, Pancraccio and Manteca argue over cards, using elaborate insults about family members and nearly come to blows. Anastasio hears a noise from over the hill and thinks it might be soldiers; he informs the men and they seem jubilant to see any action. However, it is only two Indians and their burros. They bear the news that the revolutionaries have been scoring victories, and that General Huerta has taken up the region called Zacatecas as a final stronghold. Later, Demetrio pulls Luis aside and asks if he really wants to come with the band, for even Demetrio would still be at home sowing his fields had he not quarreled with his town's leader.

XIII: Demetrio tells the story of how he got to be an outlaw. He came to town to drink with friends and had too much. He became belligerent with the police and told them to go to Hell. He even "spit on the beard" of the mayor, Don Monico, and threatened him with a gun. In retaliation, Don Monico labeled Demetrio a revolutionary and tried to get him imprisoned or killed. But Demetrio heard of the plot from friends and escaped by going on the run. He eventually accumulated men like himself to his current band.

Luis urges Demetrio to join the revolutionary army at Zacatecas so they can join in the final success of the revolution. Demetrio only wants to go back to his home and farm. Luis argues that there is more to life than a hand-to-mouth existence on a farm, as it had been, and that the revolution is a chance not simply to return to the status quo, but to obtain rights for the poor, to allow them to rise up, and to level the classes. Demetrio is not just fighting because he pulled a gun on the mayor, he is fighting for the larger cause of ending tyranny and oppression.

XIV: Demetrio and his men are impressed by Luis' argument and regret they never had the chance to read and write like smart Luis. They decide to leave to join the other revolutionaries and organize a farewell dance. The men want to bring women with them when they leave, and Demetrio still has his eye on Camilla, but Demetrio cautions they should not steal daughters from a village like the Federals.



Away from the village, Luis encounters Camilla. Luis thanks her for her help in his time of need and tells her of the dance. Camilla says she will not go because Demetrio will be there. Luis says she is a fool for regretting Demetrio's advances, as Demetrio will be a wealthy general one day. She only wants Luis and is again heartbroken.

XV: The dance happens that night with Camilla conspicuously absent. The next morning the band leaves the village, much to the chagrin of all because the men had hunted for the village during their time there. Camilla is found, still crying and distraught, and her mother beats her with a leather strap to exorcise the evil spirits from her. Meanwhile, Demetrio is fully healed and in top spirits. The band, after traveling for a day, stop at a church, where an old Indian tells them of further success by the various revolutionary armies, including one led by a man called Natera. They bed there for the night.

## Part I, XI - XV Analysis

In these chapters, the seeds are sown for Demetrio to begin a professional career as a soldier and leader, instead of leading the informal band he now leads. It is interesting to note that Luis, passionate with the ideals the revolution stands for, essentially pours poison into Demetrio's ear, convincing a man (who would rather go back to his farm to live out his days) that there are greater glories at hand and greater destinies than the hand-to-mouth meager existence to which he is accustomed. Here, the theoretical underpinnings of the revolution serve as a kind of siren's call to Demetrio, who, lacking much intelligence or perspective, succumbs to the (ultimately hollow) promises of wealth and prestige the revolution and Luis offer.

A fight over gambling between Pancracio and Manteca foreshadows their later deaths in just such a fight. Camilla's heartbreak over Luis and his cold indifference to her feelings provide the beginnings of a particularly human sub-plot that will be tragically resolved much later.



## Part I, XVI - XXI

### Part I, XVI - XXI Summary

XVI: Demetrio and his men march to a nearby town, where Federal soldiers are stationed in the chapel. Luis advises they get a guide and learn the lay of the land, but Demetrio is confident he can simply barge in and surprise them; this is what he has always done.

Once there, they get a frightened man to take them to where the soldiers are stationed. The soldiers suddenly shoot, and the man, along with Demetrio's horse, are shot dead. A workman ushers the rebels into his home, where he instructs them how to sneak up on the chapel from a back alley.

Meanwhile, the soldiers are headed by a "coxcomb" of a captain, who cowardly urges his lieutenant to go outside to kill the bandits as he arrogantly begins a communication to his superior, stating how he led his soldiers into glorious victory. His letter is interrupted by the sound of gunshots.

XVII: Winding the narrative back a bit chronologically, Demetrio and his men head from the workman's home to a corral, and then climb onto the chapel wall. They unload their shots and grenades onto the church room full of sleeping, unsuspecting soldiers. They are like rats in a trap, cornered, going down quickly. The workman implores Demetrio to stop until he tells his brother (who was forcibly drafted) to desert, but he goes unheeded. When the rebels run out of bullets, they pull out knives and proceed to butcher the remaining soldiers. Pancraccio cuts the head off the workman's brother as the workman screams. One of the last to die is the coxcomb captain, who is pushed off the wall to his death by Pancraccio. When the last soldier is dead, Demetrio yells to his band that it's time to "get those city fellows!" now.

XVIII: Demetrio has been given the rank of colonel by the leader of the northern division of the rebellion, General Natera, and they have a party to celebrate. At the celebration, Luis runs into a fellow intellectual rebel, Solis. Solis has been disillusioned by the violence and savagery of the rebels; Luis dismisses him as a man whose heart is no longer in the rebellion. Meanwhile, Demetrio is simply too elated and swept up in the moment to have a care. In the morning after the celebration, two of Demetrio's men are found murdered; Demetrio orders, simply, "Bury them!"

XIX: Demetrio's band, among other units, comes back from Zacatecas (the Federals' last stronghold) defeated, not having taken the town. Demetrio is distraught at the result, telling his men it should have just been a simple matter, but the common rebels seem content with pillaging towns on the way back and smashing valuables, including a typewriter nobody wants because it's too heavy. Demetrio is still thinking about Camilla (the girl who gave him water when he had a fever), but Pancraccio warns him that



women are from Hell and aren't worth the trouble. Still, Demetrio muses about going back to that ranch and seeing her.

XX: There is a rumor that Pancho Villa is coming. The bandit and rebel leader has achieved near god-like status among the men. It is said that Villa's men live like kings and that he can decide to give you land and treat you like a lord or shoot you dead on the spot. His various victories against the Federals are discussed and exaggerated. It is also said the Americans help Villa by using airplanes filled with bombs that can decimate a battlefield. Anastasio realizes that none of the people telling these stories have even met Villa or any of his men, and he states that Villa is probably like any other man, like them even. He is mocked by the men.

XXI: In the midst of a heated battle, Luis is left for dead and is scrambling for a place to hide amid smoke, bullets, and the dead. He is pulled into a safe ditch by Solis, who explains what has just transpired here on the road to Zacatecas. The rebels climbed the hill to the town, but the Federals were well entrenched, and machine guns cut down hundreds of rebels. Just as the rebels and their officers were frozen and defeat seemed certain, Demetrio rallied his men forward on horseback, surprising the Federals with his quickness and ferocity. Soon the machine gun entrenchments were gutted by Demetrio, and the soldiers cleared out of their position. Demetrio's brave (or foolish) charge had won the day.

A few bullets whiz by Solis and Luis, and Solis seeks higher ground. He is puzzled by a different smoke mixing with the gunsmoke by the town and climbs a hill to get a view. He sees that the smoke is from a locomotive carrying desperate fugitive Federals out of town. A shot rings out, and Solis catches it in the belly, rolling down the hill, dead.

## Part I, XVI - XXI Analysis

These chapters fully expose the gap between the ideal and the real, specifically in regards to war and, more broadly, the Revolution. In the battle at the chapel, the expectations of two naive participants, the workman whose brother is in the Federal army, and the dandy captain, are shattered. In the case of the former, he believes in the nobility and professionalism of Demetrio's band, but the rebels' savagery results in Pancraccio cutting off his brother's head, even as the workman yelled far in advance for them to spare his life. In the case of the dandy captain, his conception of a neat and tidy war, one in which he doesn't even have to participate in but for which he will receive accolades and promotions, is shattered when war literally bangs down his door and he is unceremoniously flung down the stairwell to die. From the very start of the chapel conflict, when Demetrio and his men shoot bullets and fling grenades into sleeping soldiers who die like cornered rats, it is clear this is not a noble war.

Solis provides perhaps the most wisdom of any perspective in the piece, seeing things as they are, if with an overly sarcastic and ironic air. His death, coinciding as it does with the end of Part I, extends the sense of pessimism permeating the novel, seeming to say that cooler heads such as Solis will not be heeded in this conflict.



## Part II, I - IV

### Part II, I - IV Summary

I: Some time has passed. Demetrio is at a bar, drinking. He now wears fine clothes, and it is clear he has been promoted significantly since his heroics at Zacatecas. Rebel men around him brag about killing and pillaging. The door opens and Demetrio is thrilled to see members of his own gang, including Pancraccio and Anastasio. They hug, then introduce Demetrio to Blondie, a violent rebel with a short fuse, and a woman named War Paint. As the party continues, and Blondie punches the bartender for not moving fast enough, Demetrio takes War Paint with him to have sex at a hotel.

II: Instead of to a hotel, War Paint has directed Demetrio and his men to a rich person's mansion, believing it to be a rebel's right to enter any home he pleases. The band gets drunk and rips books and other valuables to shreds, looking for loot. Luis pockets two diamonds, then hypocritically warns Demetrio that this type of pillage hurts their reputation. Demetrio makes Blondie a major under his command. We learn that Demetrio has attained the rank of general when a band outside plays in his honor.

III: Luis introduces the men to his "future wife," a mousy fourteen-year-old girl. Blondie immediately takes a lecherous interest. Amid the fanfare of the band outside, Luis makes a grand speech in honor of Demetrio's promotion to general, after which Luis presents Demetrio with the eagle pin signifying the rank. Demetrio wryly wonders what he's going to do with the "buzzard." The rest of Demetrio's men make awkward, drunk speeches; meanwhile, crazy War Paint brings a black horse into the room, calling it her "war booty." Drunk Blondie announces he's fed up with neither girl in attendance showing him any attention (War Paint or Luis' future wife), and he "commits suicide" by shooting a full-length mirror, narrowly missing War Paint's head with the bullet.

IV: Luis wakes up bloody and bruised and recalls the final events of the night before. He retreated to a bedroom with his future wife, but Demetrio, full of lust, lunged for his girl. War Paint wrestled with Demetrio, who became enraged and had to be disarmed of his gun by Anastasio. Demetrio proceeded to pound everyone around him, including Luis, with his fists.

Luis goes in search of his future wife but doesn't find her. Finally, War Paint wakes up and tells him she locked her in a bedroom to keep her safe from Demetrio. However, Luis can't find the key. We learn that Luis traded for his future wife with a pair of cuff links from members of Demetrio's band. War Paint can't find it either and goes to the locked bedroom, where she spies a naked Blondie and Luis' future wife, also naked, on the bed. She proclaims Blondie is a "smart fellow" for finding the key, and she leads the future wife out to the street, giving her a dirty blanket for decency.



## Part II, I - IV Analysis

Part II begins with Demetrio and his men having fully succumbed to the seduction offered by the revolution, that of an easy, lawless, parasitic existence in which today is the only day that matters and tomorrow may never come. Any sense of fighting for a larger purpose is gone, underscored by the introduction of Blondie and War Paint. Blondie, violent and insane, would rather torture townspeople than engage in war; at least Pancraccio, who was also crazy, drew the line at war and did not engage in such wanton sadism. And War Paint is not even part of the army, formally, nor does she give a whit about the revolution; the revolution is an opportunity for her to drink, loot, and carry on with men. Whereas early in Part I a house might be looted for ammunition, food, and other necessary military supplies, the mansion looted in Chapter II is looted for the pure delight of destruction.

In the style of previous foreshadowing, Blondie's "suicide" by shooting his image in a mirror presages his actual suicide as later related in Luis' letter in Part III. Luis' attempt to persuade Demetrio to run away to another country with him (quite a difference from Part I, where it was Luis who urged Demetrio to enter the rebel army), as well as his declaring a "future wife," a mere child he bartered for, displays a certain naivete that shows Luis is not like Demetrio and his men. Whereas it might be said that Demetrio is trudging toward a pessimistic and inevitable destiny, Luis still retains a shred of innocence and a sense that there might be a brighter tomorrow. Perhaps this explains why, by Part III, he has left Demetrio.



## Part II, V - X

### Part II, V - X Summary

V: Demetrio and his band visit his home town of Moyahua, where Don Monico still reigns, the man who forced Demetrio into banditry. As they pass through the main avenue, soldiers branch off to invade homes and take ammunition, money, and valuables. They arrive at the large noble house, Don Monico's house. A pair of old women, along with a few children, answer and swear it is not Don Monico's house; they are only renting it from him. Demetrio demands guns (they produce an old shotgun and broken pistol) and money (a "moth-eaten wallet"), and then he allows his men to storm into the house as the women wail and attempt to stop them in vain. From a closet, Don Monico emerges with a rifle but he doesn't have the courage to use it, instead begging for his life, recognizing Demetrio and the wrong he did to him.

Demetrio orders everyone out of the house, and his band stands outside, ready to loot the place. After a few minutes, Demetrio emerges and orders that the house not be looted. This disappoints the men, and a few refuse to disperse, including a young rebel who laughs at Demetrio. Demetrio displays his old marksmanship by shooting the man dead in a blink. Demetrio then orders Luis to burn the house to the ground.

VI: Demetrio has established himself in an abandoned noble's house, and Luis visits him. Demetrio regrets he has done such damage to his home town, but Luis counters that, since they are fighting for the people, they are free to take payment from the people in the form of pillaging for their own good. Demetrio seems unconvinced, and Luis shows him a bagful of jewels and gold. No one knows about Luis' riches, and with them Luis says Demetrio and he could leave the country and live comfortably for the rest of their lives. Demetrio thinks that option doesn't seem to have much courage. In fact, Demetrio doesn't need wealth; he's perfectly happy with a drink and a good woman. He again thinks of Camilla, and Luis says on his order Luis can go back and get her for Demetrio.

VII: Luis leaves for Camilla. Upon arriving at the tiny ranch, he tells Camilla (who is still smitten for Luis) that he loves her and wants to run away with her. Naturally, Camilla's delight turns to horror when she is instead given to Demetrio. It's unclear, but Demetrio probably has sex with Camilla. War Paints takes pity on the used and lied-to Camilla and cooks up a scheme for Camilla to feign illness. With Camilla "sick," War Paint can volunteer to care for her as the army moves on, and then Camilla can escape.

VIII: Demetrio is drinking and having a good time with his men in the saloon. There is some question about a body in the middle of the street. It's decided that the corpse was a church sexton, and that the blame fell squarely on the sexton for his death because he wore city man clothes, and city men are shot on sight, especially by Pancraccio. Luis arrives and tells Demetrio of new orders; they are to ride to battle against Orozco and his men. Demetrio and his men celebrate; this is an opportunity to have a real fight,





instead of the lopsided ambushes against pockets of Federal soldiers. As they mount up, Demetrio invites Camilla, and Camilla refuses to feign illness, stating she is starting to fall for Demetrio, much to War Paint's dismay.

IX: Demetrio's band is traveling across the plains. They have not found Orozco, only more pathetic Federal soldiers, and the men are content to raid little villages along the way. Blondie is dragging a prisoner along behind his horse, and Pancraccio wonders why Blondie doesn't kill him outright. Blondie states he wants to see him hang and he's looking for a good tree or pole. Blondie frightens the prisoner by pointing a gun at his head and nearly pulling the trigger, done for Blondie's amusement. Camilla is shocked at Blondie's behavior and tells Demetrio, who can only shrug, indifferent. War Paint then warns Camilla that Blondie is her man, and any attack on Blondie is an attack on War Paint.

X: Demetrio and his men stop at a farm, where the owner gives them shelter and food. They rest a day, mostly to rest the horses. They marvel at a servant on the farm who works tirelessly, yet has a leg deformity which makes basic movement difficult. Demetrio considers him a fool to work that hard for only the eight cents a day he is given. The farm reminds Demetrio of his own farm, and thus his own wife and kid, and he wonders if he should visit his wife. War Paint terrorizes Camilla by telling her Demetrio loves his wife and will dump Camilla in a second, but Demetrio assures Camilla that War Paint is full of lies.

## Part II, V - X Analysis

Demetrio gets his revenge against Don Monico in Chapter V by burning Monico's house to the ground (presumably with Monico still in it). The symbolic act of burning, as a kind of cleansing or purge, is given a perverted double meaning, since such an act in fact extends Demetrio's destruction of villages, this time one near his own farm. Once again in the novel's pessimistic vein, even in Demetrio's seemingly righteous revenge against the man who wronged him, there are no winners but in fact simply more destruction, especially in the tragic case of Monico's wife and children.

There are a few other sundry things of note. Luis' "seduction" of Camilla (through lies) mirrors Luis' convincing of Demetrio to join Natera's army instead of returning to his farm. In a larger historical sense, this is more than likely social commentary on the author's part, a dramatization of the intelligentsia's manipulation and betrayal of the peasants. Also, the image of the farmhand with the deformed leg is an important one that Demetrio will hearken back to shortly before the close of the novel. Demetrio laughs at the poor peasant, struggling with his deformity as he limps back and forth endlessly across the farm for a mere eight cents a day. Demetrio (for now) lacks the perspective to realize that he is in fact just like the deformed farmhand, wounded (in soul rather than leg), toiling endlessly for no reward.





## Part II, XI - XIV

### Part II, XI - XIV Summary

XI: The army continues with the goal to get to the "sierra." Luis warns Demetrio that they are hiring too many men and that funds are becoming exhausted, but Demetrio pays little heed. Luis haggles with Quail over some valuables, showing continued greed on Luis' part. Blondie's prisoner becomes too exhausted to walk any further, and even at the prodding of Blondie's sword, he doesn't move.

The army moves into the city of Guadalajara. They turn the school into a barracks, and the men loot the locals as usual. One city resident, a widower with nine children, begs to see Demetrio and is given audience. He says that the rebels stole every grain of his corn and that he'll starve. Demetrio, not seeing the obvious violence in his men, simply asks the man why he let them. Luis, with more sense, makes Demetrio sign an order to give the man nearly a year's worth of corn, for which the man rejoices.

XII: Anastasio tells Demetrio that the widower was tricked by Blondie into thinking he would receive even more corn than Demetrio signed the order for, with Blondie feigning kindness only to lash out in violence, beating the man until he cried for mercy. Camilla voices her disgust at Blondie's cruel ways. War Paint takes exception and drags Camilla by her hair from her horse. Camilla falls and is wounded badly, though she states she will die before accepting Luis' medical help. Camilla tells Demetrio that, while she likes him, War Paint has become intolerable, and Camilla will leave. Demetrio urges her to stay, instead stating that War Paint will be the one to go. Meanwhile, Luis receives a telegram stating that the army is to divert to a place called Aguascalientes instead of the sierra, which angers Demetrio and his men.

Demetrio later tells War Paint she has been ousted from the group. War Paint begs Blondie to take up for her, but Blondie in fact says she can go to hell and he doesn't care about her fate. Enraged, War Paint whips out a dagger and stabs Camilla to death. Demetrio orders his men to kill War Paint, but War Paint dares Demetrio to do it himself. After a stand-off, Demetrio simply orders her to leave, which she does, sapped of energy. Blondie thanks God he is done with that woman.

XIII: Demetrio is saddened by Camilla's death, singing sad songs all day. He asks Luis why they have to go to Aguascalientes, and Luis says it is to vote on the provisional President. Demetrio knows nothing of politics and considers it foolish. They enter a town called Lagos and occupy the saloon. Blondie displays his usual cruelty by making some bar patrons "dance" by shooting at the floor beneath their feet. He wounds one patron and laughs. Next, he proves his marksmanship by shooting a tequila bottle off the head of a very scared and very unwilling bartender. His first shot is right on, and he sets up a bottle for a second shot; this shot misses and hits the bartender in the ear.



The band has run out of money, and Blondie, wrecking bottles and glasses, tells the bartender to charge it to Pancho Villa. Outside, Blondie makes a tailor "dance" by shooting at his feet, afterward forcing the tailor to take him to where the prostitutes in town are. Demetrio still sings his sad songs.

XIV: Demetrio and his men are on the train bound for Aguascalientes. While on board, an old woman begs for money, claiming her life's possessions were stolen. This gets the men thinking of the times they stole things, and everyone has a story to tell of the fantastic or mundane things they've looted. Talk of looting is soon taken over by gambling.

They arrive at Aguascalientes, which is a shell of a town. Some men buy some quack relics from a priest. Demetrio meets with Natera, who informs him that two rebel leaders, Carranza and Pancho Villa, are now against each other, and therefore choosing a President has become a very complicated business. Natera wonders for whom Demetrio wants to fight. Demetrio, eschewing politics or the larger picture, simply wants to be told what to do and when, indifferent to a cause.

## Part II, XI - XIV Analysis

These chapters demonstrate, in stark terms, three different behaviors towards the revolution to this point. Blondie is cruel, violent, power-hungry, and cares nothing for what the revolution means. He denies a starving widower corn; he drives a man to death by exhaustion by dragging him with a rope; he plays target practice and couldn't care less when it results in a man's ear being shot off. On the other extreme is Luis. He empathizes (or at least sympathizes) with the plight of the starving widower, making Demetrio sign an order to give him corn. He offers Camilla medical aid when she is ripped from her horse by War Paint. He has a realistic perspective on the army, telling Demetrio they are acquiring too many men and their funds are running out and he understands the importance of the meeting at Aguascalientes and leads Demetrio there. Somewhere in the middle is Demetrio, who is much harder to gauge. He mostly seems in a fog. One interpretation is that he has become hardened to the horrors of war and is indifferent to what is happening around him; another interpretation could be that he is in fact traumatized by events rather than merely hardened. Yet another thought on Demetrio is that he realizes he is essentially powerless in the face of destiny and history, and he has surrendered entirely to pessimism and determinism.

Camilla's tragic death denies the possibility of even temporary pleasure for Demetrio.



## Part III, I - VII

### Part III, I - VII Summary

I: Perhaps a year or two has passed. The chapter opens with a letter, written to Venancio by Luis Cervantes. Luis has left the band. He is broke and wishes for Venancio to leave the band to partner with him in the opening of a restaurant. We learn in the letter that Pancraccio and Manteca killed each other in a fight over gambling, and that Blondie killed himself. These events were some time ago.

Meanwhile, Demetrio and his band still walk the earth, but they seem worn down and exhausted, with Anastasio especially unable to articulate why they fight anymore. A poet named Valderrama has joined with them, who tells jokes and stories and is somewhat of an intellectual. They enter the sierra, and townspeople flee at their coming. Demetrio orders the escaped townspeople run down and captured. Many in the army object at this handling of people from the sierra (they are mostly all from the sierra), but they seem too frightened to defy Demetrio. The band enters the town to find not a scrap of food or loot, as the remaining townspeople stare them down in hard defiance.

II: The escaped townspeople are captured and brought before Demetrio. They turn out to be deserters from Pancho Villa's army. They tell Demetrio of the defeat of Villa at Celeya and of the many victories of his enemy, Carranza. Demetrio had sided with Villa, and to him and the men hearing that Villa was defeated was a stab in the heart; "Villa defeated was a fallen god." There is now a sense of doom, but Valderrama proclaims they are fighters that should die in glory, and who cares what the names in the conflict are; only the fight and the revolution matters. The men are emboldened by his speech.

III: The land seems barren, and even finding a bottle of tequila is a rare prize. Demetrio is sad and has Valderrama sing him a sad song, which the poet does with such gusto that it brings a tear to Demetrio's eye. Meanwhile, the men stage a cockfight.

IV: The band arrives at Juchipila, Demetrio's own farmland where he first started. Demetrio's officers are now young dandies and ex-Federals, a fact sorely resented by old rebel members who were passed over. Anastasio voices this concern to Demetrio, who agrees that it isn't right but says he must keep the band together for a battle at Cuquio, where he has been instructed to battle the Carranzistas. Valderrama hears this and, sensing the inevitable doom in such a conflict, slips away from the army, never to return.

V: The band enters the little town of Juchipila. Everywhere there is destruction and hunger. Demetrio and company become nostalgic for the past when towns were jubilant at their arrival. Now, ragged townspeople simply stare at them in hatred. Soldiers try to buy food with paper money, but the townspeople laugh at the currency as worthless.



VI: Demetrio meets his wife and child for the first time in two years. To Demetrio it looks like his wife has aged ten or twenty years, and he only recognizes his child because he sees parts of himself in his son. The wife's elation is cut short when she realizes Demetrio has decided to battle on instead of staying on the farm. Exasperated, she asks why Demetrio continues to fight. Demetrio can only throw a rock down a deep canyon and ask why the stone continues to fall.

VII: Demetrio and his men return to near the same spot he first scored a victory against the Federals at the beginning of the book. Demetrio is about to boast of that battle when they are ambushed by Carranzistas. Machine-gun fire mows them down; it's a rout. Demetrio manages to hide behind a rock, roaring with sadness and rage as he watches his old friends die in a hail of bullets, including Venancio, Anastasio, and Meco. Demetrio displays his old expert marksmanship as he manages to shoot a number of enemies, but nevertheless there is an impending sense that Demetrio will die. The book ends poetically on an image of Demetrio, rifle drawn and ready, crouching behind a rocky hollow.

## Part III, I - VII Analysis

Part III charts the last, frankly pathetic days of Demetrio and his band. Luis, who served as an intellectual and moral center, is gone. Appropriately, then, there is no sense of purpose, and even Anastasio wonders why they continue on. Demetrio's army is now full of ex-Federals and young cocky captains, men who don't understand the rebel cause or the plight of the peasant class. Demetrio's band roves like a ghost through ghost towns, completely sapped of energy and motivation. Even the violent energy of Pancraccio and Blondie is gone, as they died some time ago. Valderrama's dirge-like songs have replaced the raucous energy the men used to have. To punctuate the mood, the men learn of Pancho Villa's defeat at Celeya, the final blow to anything resembling hope among the men.

If Demetrio is essentially resigned to his destiny by this point, his army is more of a mix. There are some who are neophytes and don't understand the horrors of war or the slaughter to which they are marching. There are men who were forced into joining and operate largely from fear. There are "dandies," captains more concerned with their appearance or prestige than with war, who are in for a rude awakening indeed in the final battle. And there are men, like Venancio and Anastasio, who follow Demetrio out of old loyalty, even as they sense death nipping at their heels. What might unite them all is a mixture of fear and respect for Demetrio, who like the Federal general in the first battle of the novel, will yell for the deaths of his own men who begin to desert the battlefield.

Demetrio's final frozen moment, with his army decimated, friends dead, and enemies closing in all around him, encapsulates the pessimism of the novel, linking directly back to the beginning of the novel. Now Demetrio has become the Federal, the professional soldier pillaging the land and ruining the lives and livelihoods of the peasants he initially sought to protect.



# Characters

## Demetrio Macias

Demetrio Macias, the protagonist, is a farmer who is forced from his home after, in a drunken state, he insults the powerful mayor of his town, Don Monico. Monico sends soldiers to Demetrio's home, and Demetrio must abandon his wife and child, after which he watches his house burn down. He initially leads a band of 20 or so men, all with different stories, but all victims of one or another kind of injustice. He is a great marksman and is fearless in battle, qualities which undoubtedly draw more and more men to Demetrio as his reputation increases. At Zacatecas, Demetrio snatches victory from the jaws of defeat with reckless bravery, and he is eventually promoted to general in the rebel army, fighting against the Government and its Federal army.

Demetrio has little understanding or care for the larger revolution at hand, but unlike his men who use the revolution largely as an excuse to plunder and vandalize, Demetrio has a different relationship to the revolution. He demonstrates his tragic trajectory by throwing a rock down a deep canyon and asking why the rock doesn't stop. In the same way, Demetrio cannot stop being a soldier, even in the face of certain death at the final battle at Cuquio. Demetrio is that falling stone, doomed to move from town to town, even as gratitude turns to hatred. Revolution has, by the end, stripped Demetrio of much of his humanity.

## Luis Cervantes

Luis Cervantes is a former journalist and medical student. He wrote essays against the rebels and in his fervor joined the Federal army. He did not find the regimented lifestyle to his liking and developed a hatred and suspicion of his superiors, to the point that he gradually came to believe in the rebels rather than the Federals. He abandoned the army and stumbles across Demetrio's men at a ranch.

Luis, in his status as an intellectual familiar with the social, political, and philosophical underpinnings of the Revolution, provides a kind of commentary on the action, grounding the actions of Demetrio's band (who have no broader perspective) into the larger context of the Mexican Revolution. At first with Luis there is a degree of disillusionment - he expects to find noble and professional patriots and instead finds starving murderers and looters dressed in rags. The possibility of deep disillusionment is voiced by the character of Solis, but by Part II, Luis is firmly entrenched with Demetrio's band, abandoning any intellectual misgivings for the instantaneous pleasures of being a rebel in the company of a famous general. It is here, drunk in the moment, that Luis displays characteristics consistent with the rest of the band, hoarding goals and jewels. However, he is able to imagine a time in the future after the revolution is over, as demonstrated when he foolishly takes on a "future wife," or when he invites Demetrio to leave the country with him. In Luis, there is a naivete, or at least a lack of



love for bloodshed, that allows him to stray from Demetrio's fatal and determined path and leave the band. In the end, he has seemingly abandoned the revolution intellectually, giving up hope for a medical degree in favor of opening up a Mexican restaurant.

## **Pancracio**

Pancracio is one of Demetrio's original (and most loyal) rebel members. He is violent and sometimes crazy. He is the first in to the battle and the last out, and murder comes quickly and (too) easily to him. He dies in a gunfight with Manteca over a poker dispute.

## **General Natera**

General Natera is the head of the northern rebels, a man who promotes Demetrio to colonel and later to general. He has a broad understanding of the Revolution that Demetrio lacks.

## **Anastasio Montanez**

Demetrio's right-hand man, he is fairly level-headed, especially in comparison to a sociopath like Pancracio. While loyal to Demetrio until the end, where he is killed at the final battle at Cuquio, he questions their role in the revolution and why they continue to fight.

## **Quail**

Quail is a minor member of Demetrio's band. He is chiefly characterized by his love of loot and his enthusiastic bartering and buying of goods from other soldiers.

## **Solis**

Natera's chief of staff, Solis is a former newspaperman who, like Luis, switched sides and joined the rebels. He becomes disillusioned when he witnesses first-hand the violence and savagery of the revolution, wondering whether the rebels are men of principle or merely murderers looking for the next thrill. He dies at Zacatecas from a bullet to the stomach.

## **Pancho Villa**

Though never actually appearing in the novel, Pancho Villa is an important presence because of his legendary, almost god-like status among Demetrio's rebels. He is the



legendary bandit and rebel leader who scored important victories against the Government in the north of Mexico.

## Valderrama

Valderrama appears briefly in Part III. He is a poet and intellectual who entertains Demetrio's men with songs and stories. In the tradition of the "jester" character being wiser than most of the other characters, he leaves Demetrio's band right before its slaughter at Cuquío.

## General Huerta

General Huerta is the last remaining general of the Government army (or Federals), who takes a last stand at Zacatecas. Demetrio's successful siege of Zacatecas and defeat of Huerta lead to Demetrio's promotion to general.

## Blondie

Blondie joins Demetrio's band in Part II. He is unhinged, violent, and particularly cruel, as demonstrated when he drags a prisoner to his death, or shoots a bartender's ear off trying to shoot a bottle from the man's head for sport. War Paint is attracted to him, but Blondie wants rid of the woman and tells her to go to hell. We are later told he commits suicide.

## War Paint

War Paint, along with Blondie, joins in Part II. She is a hanger-on; reading between the lines, she is likely trading sexual favors for the right to accompany the army and engage in carefree drinking and looting. Like Blondie, she seems to have a proverbial "screw loose," demonstrated when she stabs Camilla to death after Demetrio chose the latter over her. Instead of killing her on the spot, Demetrio has War Paint leave the band.

## Camilla

Camilla is a local girl from an unnamed ranch town who aids Demetrio by giving him water. From that moment, Demetrio is smitten by her, but Camilla instead has feelings for Luis. Luis uses these feelings as bait to capture Camilla and bring her to the band, where she eventually feels comfortable with Demetrio. Her life is cut short when War Paint stabs her to death after Demetrio orders War Paint out of the army.



## Remigia

Remigia is the kindly old lady in an unnamed mountain ranch town who takes Demetrio in and cares for him during his gunshot-induced sickness. Having no real medical knowledge, she depends on voodoo remedies, like spreading warm pigeon entrails on the sufferer's stomach to reduce fever.





# Objects/Places

## Zacatecas

Zacatecas is the last stronghold of the Federals (the Government army), led by Huerta. Demetrio, through brave recklessness, rallies his troops and takes the town when it appears a defeat is imminent. For his heroics, Demetrio is promoted to General after the siege of Zacatecas.

## Cuquio

Cuquio is the region in the sierra where Demetrio is instructed to stop the Carranza army. In cyclical fashion, it is very near the spot where he won one of his first battles against the Federals. Demetrio's second battle at Cuquio ends in the decimation of Demetrio's entire army by machine-gun fire.

## Juchipila

Juchipila is Demetrio's home. He fled his farm (and wife and child) to join the rebel cause and returns to his farm shortly before his final battle.

## Aguascalientes

Aguascalientes is the town where they are to elect a new Provisional President after the fall of the government. However, infighting breaks out among two rebel factions, making the election realistically impossible.

## The Eagle Pin

The eagle pin is the symbol a general is given to wear on his uniform. Demetrio is granted this pin by Luis after he is promoted to general. Demetrio wonders what he will do with the "buzzard."

## The Typewriter

A typewriter is looted by Demetrio's men, which serves a symbol of the futility and senseless destruction of the revolution. They barter the typewriter back and forth because it weighs too much to carry far. Eventually it is bought for a quarter by Quail, who flings it against a wall just to get rid of it.



## **Celeya**

Celeya is the site of Pancho Villa's major defeat. Demetrio's band's morale is permanently injured when they hear of Celeya, as Villa had risen to god-like status in many of their minds.

## **Demetrio's Thirty-Thirty**

The Thirty-Thirty rifle is symbolic of Demetrio's power, violence, and expert marksmanship. It is what he clutches at the end of the book, ready to die in a blaze of glory.

## **Moyahua**

Moyahua is where Demetrio was essentially run out of town and made an outlaw after insulting the local mayor, Don Monico. Demetrio eventually returns to Moyahua, burning Monico's house to the ground in revenge.

## **Gambling**

Gambling is noteworthy insofar that it is the de facto recreation of Demetrio's men when they are not fighting or traveling. It is also over a game of cards in which Pancraccio and Manteca kill each other in rage.



# Themes

## Heroes or Criminals?

One of the main themes of the book is the nature of Demetrio's men and the rebel cause in general during the Mexican Revolution. At the beginning of the book they are hailed as heroes in the towns where they arrive. Everyone has a hatred of the Federals; Federals, or so is the perception, are the ones who force men unwillingly into its armies, who loot indiscriminately, and who kidnap daughters and wives, and it is the rebels who fight heroically for the people against tyranny. Yet from the very first appearance of Luis Cervantes, the author problematizes these easy characterizations. Luis wants to join the rebels and is shot in the foot, held in a pigpen, and nearly dies for his efforts. Instead of the noble soldiers he envisioned, Luis sees the men for what they are—peasants in ragged clothes. Indeed, as the narrative unfolds, the reader is presented with events and facts which undercut the "hero" label, as town after town is essentially sacked by the pirate-like rebels, who are unconcerned with any notion of personal property, drunk with power, and given to unnecessary violence, "unmoral as hyenas" as the author states it.

This aspect of the characterization is driven to its extreme in Part II with Blondie and War Paint. Both Blondie and Pancraccio are ultra-violent men, but while Pancraccio reserves his fury for battle and is a loyal soldier, Blondie has a sadistic cruelty about him and is capable of torturing and tormenting perfectly innocent civilians, such as the prisoner he drags in back of his horse until the man expires. War Paint has no real connection to the army or any sense of the revolution; she wants only to have fun and loot indiscriminately. By the third act, the rebels have in fact become the enemy they fought at the beginning: unwelcome intruders, as evidenced by the hard stares of hatred they get from townspeople at every turn.

## The Never-Ending Cycle

Author Mariano Azuela takes pains to create a cyclical narrative, a sense that the events of the narrative will continue over and over without end. Overall, this contributes a pessimism and a sense of futility, in that things can never change and the characters can achieve no progress or break the deterministic loop in which they find themselves. Azuela accomplishes this by making the beginning and ending of the book bear many similarities. Demetrio began the novel by leaving his wife and child and fleeing his farm. In the penultimate scene, he essentially leaves them a second time, unable to stop warring, pulled inexorably toward battle. The difference is that, while the first escape was predicated on necessity, the final escape indicates how much the revolution has changed Demetrio and how he could not return to his former life.

In the final chapter, Demetrio and his men ride through the same part of the sierra where he scored his first important victory against the Federals. He is in fact about to



brag about that same story when gunshots are heard and the front ranks begin to crumble. Particularly tragic parallels can be drawn here. Where at the beginning his men were brave and would have stood their ground and foot, here Demetrio's army is full of ex-Federals and neophyte officers who become cowards. Also, in the beginning his ragged band of men were the ones who surprised and slaughtered the large professional army; now it is Demetrio's army which is the surprised, professional army. Thematically, this is the final testament to the fact that Demetrio has in fact become his enemy, the army general in a losing battle.

Demetrio displays his famous marksmanship by gunning down several men, and then he hunches inside a rock hollow, the reader guesses for the right moment to rise and go out in a blaze of bullets. By freezing (and indeed ending) the book here, and by giving Demetrio an "eternal glance," the author makes a powerful statement that there is a larger human cycle at work in the revolution that goes on and on. More men like Demetrio will get swept up by the siren's call of the revolution only to lose their souls in the process. Today's Government will be tomorrow's Rebels, and those Rebels will become the Government, only to be assailed by a new class of Rebels. The Revolution is thus a cycle.

## **Luis Cervantes' Role in Presenting the Larger Picture**

One of Demetrio's key attributes is that he has little capacity for introspection and, on the other end, little concern or understanding of the larger meaning of the revolution; at one point, he tells General Natera he is only a loyal soldier and only wants to be told what to do. The character of Luis Cervantes provides this sense of a larger picture (as an intellectual and journalist). He is the outsider who, like the reader, questions the very nature of Demetrio's rebels, wondering if they are the people's heroes or merely murderers using the revolution as a pretext. He gives reasons for the men's behavior, justifying the rampant looting as payments by the people to the soldiers fighting for them.

Arguably, unlike Solis, Luis (beyond the initial shock of expecting noble soldiers and finding peasants in ragged clothes) never succumbs to deep and permanent disillusionment, despite his misgivings about the men's true relationship to the revolution. Instead, he himself changes, reaching for less and less rational arguments to justify the rebels' reckless piracy and finally abandoning any intellectual position whatsoever. He in fact surrenders to greed just as the rest of the men, pocketing valuables with as much gusto as the men.

His final position in the novel is intriguing. As communicated in a letter to Venancio, the man he grew closest to besides Demetrio, Luis reveals he has left Demetrio's army, attained his college degree but has no money, and he wants Venancio (as an investor, because of his money) to help him open a Mexican restaurant. In one sense, like Valderrama, Luis was smart enough to "jump ship" before the ship sank. Luis again shows an inherent greed and an irresponsibility with money, asking Venancio for start-up funds (where did his bag of gold and jewels go?). More than that, what is most



damning is that Luis has abandoned the revolution entirely. Where once he was passionately involved, now it seems he wants no part of it, with the flippant tone of his letter and the semi-ridiculous notion to open a restaurant in the midst of chaos and revolution. Has Luis been traumatized by the events of the novel to the point that the revolution has ceased to exist in his mind? Or did he treat his stint with Demetrio's men as a kind of field trip, "slumming it" for a time but knowing he had a cozy, upper-class, violence-free existence to return to? Either way, Luis' status at the end may stand as a criticism of the intellectuals behind the Mexican Revolution, of the kind who would stir up the peasantry with rhetoric by day only to retire to a cozy home in the United States at night.

# Style

## Point of View

The Underdogs is told in a third-person limited perspective. The "limited" here is quite limited; not only is the reader confined to (with very few exceptions) Demetrio's army and its immediate concerns, but rarely is the reader privy to the thoughts and feelings of characters. Dialogue is instead given the large responsibility to relay thoughts and feelings; as a result, dialogue is many times obvious and "on-the-nose," meaning characters speak exactly what they think and feel. On the other hand, dialogue can also serve as the author's "soap box," an opportunity to present thematic material and musings on the nature of the revolution that would otherwise be difficult to insert naturally into the unfolding of events. This kind of dialogue is relegated to Luis and to a lesser degree Solis and Valderrama.

The choice of this limited perspective is appropriate to the very nature of Demetrio and his men, who are characterized largely by their inherent lack of introspection or an appreciation of a larger picture. Cursed with a myopic worldview, Demetrio has no appreciation of the larger meaning of the revolution, no sense of politics, and no concern for the long-term results of his actions. He lives hand-to-mouth, town to town, battle to battle, a soldier following orders blindly. His men are even more extreme in this regard, content with looting and pillaging. The limited perspective and choice to not include thoughts and feelings is thus a kind of symptom of the myopia that plagues the protagonists.

## Setting

The setting of the Underdogs is the Mexican Revolution of the early nineteen hundreds. Specifically, this is the time when Huerta has taken the reins of government from Madero, with several revolutionaries battling Huerta, including Villa, Obregon, and Carranza. The book is historical fiction, insofar that its main characters are fictional, but nevertheless events are rooted in a definite historical framework. Events dramatized in the book, such as the battle at Zacatecas and the convention at Aguascalientes, actually did happen. About two years in the story pass, from Demetrio's leaving his farm to his return to the farm and battle at Cuquio.

Setting is actually an interesting barometer to judge both the deteriorating state of Mexico as it continues to be ravaged by revolution and the state of Demetrio's men and the reception they receive. At the beginning of the book, for example at the unnamed ranch town where Remigia and Camilla tend to Demetrio's fever, Demetrio's men are greeted as heroes and liberators. Food and accommodations seem plentiful. But as the narrative proceeds to chart Demetrio's fall, appropriately the very nature of the towns he comes into contact with change. Instead of open arms, Demetrio is met with hard stares full of hatred. And instead of towns full of food and loot, in the end there is barely a



tortilla or bottle of tequila to be found, and towns themselves feature gutted and burned-down buildings. Setting thus becomes a powerful way to present a general malaise and deterioration.

## Language and Meaning

Azuela writes in a modern style; several parallels can be drawn to American author Ernest Hemingway. Like Hemingway, Azuela employs a clipped, laconic style, with the narrative being "the tip of an iceberg," only hinting at deeper things left unstated. Appropriately then, devices like metaphors and similes are largely absent, in favor of an unadorned, straight-ahead style. Azuela also displays a fragmentary approach, both to structure and to "in-the-moment" considerations. Specifically, the very brevity of the text can make events, setting (which town are they in now? How much time has passed?), and character motivations vague, leaving holes for the reader to interpolate, to fill in the gaps. Contributing to this style, Azuela many times opens a chapter or part in media res, in the middle of things, with initial confusion only gradually giving way to comprehension of scene.

Because Azuela is laconic does not mean he is lacking in detail, however. In particular, descriptions of the landscape and natural formation achieve a certain elegiac poetry, reminding the reader of the beauty amid the barbarism.

Also of note is the contrast between the advanced, thoughtful intellectualism of Luis and Solis, whose words make up the bulk of the thematic considerations in the text, and the relatively clumsiness and inarticulateness of Demetrio and his uneducated men. Here again, on the side of Demetrio there is a great deal unsaid, necessitating the likes of Luis to give form to what the men cannot easily utter.

## Structure

At the broadest level, *The Underdogs* is divided into three parts. Part I tracks Demetrio Macias' rise from leader of about 20 rebels to perhaps the zenith of his military career, his heroic surge at Zacatecas that led to the fall of the Federal army making its last stand. Part II presents Demetrio at his highest (attaining the rank of general), ending with the realization that the revolution is not going to end quietly, with two rebel leaders now battling each other for supremacy. Part III presents Demetrio and his band in steep decline, ending with the suicide-like stand at Cuquío. Classically, this structure presents a clear beginning, middle, and end.

Within the three parts, short chapter divisions lend an episodic nature to the narrative. The narrative is fairly free with its chronology; that is to say, there are many time ellipses, both between chapters and parts, indicating a larger story in which we are given the most important snapshots. Interestingly, many of what could be considered crucial events are not portrayed directly, but instead relayed second- or third-hand by a character, such as Solis relating to Luis the nature of Demetrio's capture of Zacatecas, or Luis' letter relaying that Pancracio and Blondie are dead. This fragmentary approach

reflects both the chaos of war and the Mexican revolution, and the likely quite realistic way in which information was disseminated during such a time - as rumors, as tidbits of information passed between men as they passed through town.





## Quotes

"Well, men,' Demetrio said, 'you know we've only twenty rifles, besides my thirty-thirty. If there are just a few of them, we'll shoot until there's not a live man left. If there's a lot of 'em, we can give 'em a good scare, anyhow.'

He undid a rag belt about his waist, loosened a know in it and offered the contents to his companions. Salt. A murmur of approbation rose among them as each took a few grains between the tips of his fingers.

They ate voraciously: then, glutted, lay down on the ground, facing the sky. They sang monotonous, sad songs, uttering a strident shout after each stanza." (9, 11)

"Thank God, a kind soul and tortillas full of beans and chili are never lacking,' Anastasio Montanez said with a triumphant belch.

The mountaineers would shake calloused hands with the travelers, saying: 'God's blessing on you! He will find a way to help you all, never fear. We're going ourselves, starting tomorrow morning. We're dodging the draft, with those damned Government people who've declared war to the death on us, on all the poor. They come and steal our pigs, our chickens and corn, they burn our homes and carry our women off, and if they ever get hold of us they'll kill us like mad dogs, and we die right there on the spot and that's the end of the story!'" (17-18)

"Where are those men on Pancho Villa's payroll, so admirably equipped and mounted, who only get paid in those pure silver pieces Villa coins at the Chihuahua mint? Bah! Barely two dozen half-naked mangy men, some of them riding decrepit mares with the coat nibbled off from neck to withers. Can the accounts given by the Government newspapers and by myself be really true and are these so-called revolutionists simply bandits grouped together, using the revolution as a wonderful pretext to glut their thirst for gold and blood? Is it all a lie, then? Were their sympathizers talking a lot of exalted nonsense?" (32)

"Now, Chief,' Cervantes pursued, 'I took a fancy to you the first time I laid eyes on you and I like you more and more every day because I realize what you are worth. Please let me be utterly frank. You do not yet realize your lofty noble function. You are a modest man without ambitions, you do not wish to realize the exceedingly important role you are destined to play in the revolution. It is not true that you took up arms simply because of Senior Monico. You are under arms to protest against the evils of all the caciques who are overrunning the whole nation. We are the elements of a social movement which will not rest until it has enlarged the destinies of our motherland. We are the tools Destiny makes use of to reclaim the sacred rights of the people. We are not fighting to dethrone a miserable murderer, we are fighting against tyranny itself. What moves us is what men call ideals: our action is what men call fighting for a principle.'" (51-52)

"Kill the soldiers, kill them all!"

Pantracio and Manteca surpassed the others in the savagery of their slaughter, and finished up with the wounded. Montanez, exhausted, let his arm fall; it hung limp to his side. A gentle expression still filled his glance; his eyes shone; he was naive as a child,



unmoral as a hyena.

'Here's one who's not dead yet,' Quail shouted.

Pancraccio ran up. The little blond captain with curled mustache turned pale as wax. He stood against the door to the staircase unable to muster enough strength to take another step.

Pancraccio pushed him brutally to the edge of the corridor. A jab with his knee against the captain's thigh - then a sound not unlike a bag of stones falling from the top of the steeple on the porch of the church.

'My God, you've got no brains!' said Quail. 'If I'd known what you were doing, I'd have kept him for myself. That was a fine pair of shoes you lost!'" (68)

"'Tired? My dear fellow, I'm twenty-five years old and I'm fit as a fiddle! But am I disappointed? Perhaps.'

'You must have sound reasons for feeling that way.'

'I hoped to find a meadow at the end of the road, I found a swamp. Facts are bitter; so are men. That bitterness eats your heart out; it is poison, dry rot. Enthusiasm, hope, ideals, happiness - vain dreams, vain dreams . . . . When that's over, you have a choice. Either you turn bandit, like the rest, or the timeservers will swap you . . . .'

Cervantes writhed at his friend's words; his argument was quite out of place . . . painful. . . . To avoid being forced to take issue, he invited Solis to cite the circumstances that had destroyed his illusions.

'Circumstances? No - it's far less important than that. It's a host of silly, insignificant things that no one notices except yourself . . . a change of expression, eyes shining - lips curled in a sneer - the deep import of a phrase that is lost! Yet take these things together and they compose the mask of our race . . . terrible . . . grotesque . . . a race that awaits redemption!'" (70-71)

"The mob moves slowly; some carry ropes to tie about their bundles, others wooden trays. The women open out their aprons or shawls calculating their capacity. All give thanks to Divine Providence as they wait for their share of the booty.

When Demetrio announces that he will not allow looting and orders them to disband, the mob, disconsolate, obeys him, and soon scatters; but there is a dull rumor among the soldiers and no one moves from his place.

Annoyed, Demetrio repeats this order.

A young man, a recent recruit, his head turned by drink, laughs and walks boldly toward the door. But before he has reached the threshold, a shot lays him low. He falls like a bull pierced in the neck by the matador's sword. Motionless, his smoking gun in his hand, Demetrio waits for the soldiers to withdraw.

'Set fire to the house!' he orders Luis Cervantes when they reach their quarters.

With a curious eagerness Luis Cervantes does not transmit the order but undertakes the task in person.

Two hours later when the city square was black with smoke and enormous tongues of fire rose from Monico's house, no one could account for the strange behavior of the general." (104-105)

"Blondie pulled his gun out, pressed the muzzle against the prisoner's chest and brought his finger against the trigger slowly . . . slowly . . . . The prisoner turned pale as



a corpse; his face lengthened; his eyelids were fixed in a glassy stare. He breathed in agony, his whole body shook as with ague. Blondie kept his gun in the same position for a moment long as all eternity. His eyes shone queerly. An expression of supreme pleasure lit up his fat puffy face.

'No, friend Federal,' he drawled, putting back his gun into the holster; 'I'm not going to kill you just yet. . . . I'll make you my orderly. You'll see that I'm not so hardhearted!' Slyly he winked at his companions. The prisoner had turned into an animal; he gulped, panting, dry-mouthed [...]" (115)

"Blondie, Blondie, love of my life! Help! Come and show them you're a real man! Show them they're nothing but sons of bitches! . . . ' [...]

'Yes? Really? Well, if you want my opinion, I think this is just what ought to happen. So far as I'm concerned, you can go straight to hell. We're all fed up with you, see?'

War Paint's face turned to granite; she tried to speak but her muscles were rigid.

The soldiers laughed. Camilla, terrified, held her breath.

War Paint stared slowly at everyone about her. It all took no more than a few seconds. In a trice she bent down, drew a sharp, gleaming dagger from her stocking and leapt at Camilla.

A shrill cry. A body fell, the blood spurting from it.

'Kill her, Goddamn it,' cried Demetrio, beside himself. 'Kill her!'

Two soldiers fell upon War Paint, but she brandished her dagger, defying them to touch her:

'Not the likes of you, Goddamn you! Kill me yourself, Demetrio!'

War Paint stepped forward, surrendered her dagger and, thrusting her breast forward, let her arms fall to her side." (128-129)

"As sure as there's a God in heaven,' Natera said, 'this mess hasn't blown over yet. Now it's Villa fighting Carranza.'

Without answering him, his eyes fixed in a stare, Demetrio demanded a further explanation.

'It means,' Natera said, 'that the Convention won't recognize Carranza as First Chief of the Constitutionalist Army. It's going to elect a Provisional President of the Republic. Do you understand me, General?'

Demetrio nodded assent.

'What's your opinion, General?' asked Natera.

Demetrio shrugged his shoulders:

'It seems to me that the meat of the matter is that we've got to go on fighting, eh? All right! Let's go to it! I'm game to the end, you know.'

'Good, but on what side?'

Demetrio, nonplussed, scratched his head.

'Look here, don't ask me any more questions. I never went to school, you know. . . . You gave me the eagle I wear on my hat, didn't you? All right then; you just tell me:

'Demetrio, do this or do that,' and that's all there's to it!" (137-138)

"Valderrama's gesture was disdainful and solemn as an emperor's. 'Villa? Obregon? Carranza? What's the difference? I love the revolution like a volcano in eruption; I love the volcano because it's a volcano, the revolution because it's the revolution! What do I



care about the stones left above or below after the cataclysm? What are they to me?' In the glare of the midday sun the reflection of a white tequila bottle glittered on his forehead; and, jubilant, he ran toward the bearer of such a marvelous gift.

'I like this crazy fool,' Demetrio said with a smile. 'He says things sometimes that make you think.'" (146-147)

"The soldiers stopped among the huge rocks, buoyed by the happiness of the morning. None for a moment dreamed of the treacherous bullet that might be awaiting him ahead; the unforeseen provides man with his greatest joy. The soldiers sang, laughed, and chattered away. The spirit of nomadic tribes stirred their souls. What matters it whither you go and whence you come? All that matters is to walk, to walk endlessly, without ever stopping; to possess the valley, the heights of the sierra, far as the eye can read." (159)



## Topics for Discussion

Sometimes author Mariano Azuela skips over crucial events to return to them later, as when Solis relates Demetrio's heroics at Zacatecas to Luis, or when Luis' letters informs the reader of the death of Pancraccio and Blondie. Why might Azuela employ this technique? What does it do to the reader's relationship with the narrative?

What role do women play in the revolution?

Make the case that *THE UNDERDOGS* is a cyclical narrative; specifically, relate the begin to the end. Why might the author have chosen to treat the narrative in this fashion?

One basic question the narrative poses has to do with the nature of Demetrio and his men. Are they virtuous rebels fighting for the people against an oppressive government, or a band of cutthroats using the revolution as a pretext to murder and pillage? Discuss the narrative techniques used to get at this question. Is there a definitive answer to the question?

What is Demetrio's goal? Does that goal change sometime during the story? What does he hope to accomplish long-term, or is he wholly unconcerned with the future? Why does he continue to fight and wander across the country?

The three-part structure of *THE UNDERDOGS* serves to elide a large amount of time in between Parts I and II, then II and III. Why might the author have used this structure? Why do we "rejoin" the narrative when we do?

Chart Luis Cervantes' character arc. Does he experience a period of disillusionment, as Solis had? What does his end status (departed from the men, college-educated, no money, giving up on medicine in the hopes of opening a restaurant with Venancio) say about his character?