

Pedro Paramo Study Guide

Pedro Paramo by Juan Rulfo

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Plot Summary

Pedro Páramo's estranged son, Juan Preciado, comes to find his father after his mother's death, but instead he finds only a town deserted except for its ghosts. Through a complex narrative told from multiple points of view, which skips forward and backward in time, author Juan Rulfo explores the life of don Pedro, a man who is both a villain and a tragic figure.

The novel opens as Juan Preciado is headed to Comala after his mother's death. He meets a stranger on the road, who later turns out to be dead. In the town, he stays with a woman who is also a wandering soul. Comala turns out to be a kind of purgatory, full of its dead souls, who wander the town, usually unaware that they are dead. Juan himself, after being taken in by a woman and her brother who are living in sin, dies in Comala and is buried there, never able to meet his father, who is now dead as well. Juan hears the voices of the other people buried around him and learns stories about the town and its people.

Pedro Páramo is a wealthy landowner. When his father dies, Pedro finds he is in debt, and he marries Dolores, Juan Preciado's mother, because he owes her family the most money. Don Pedro is an ambitious, ruthless man, and he is willing to kill whoever gets in his way or play any angle that will keep him in power. However, don Pedro only wants to acquire wealth to give to his lost love, Susana, a girl that moved away from the town when don Pedro was a boy.

Don Pedro tires of his wife Dolores quickly, and he seems pleased when Dolores leaves with his son Juan to go live with her sister. Dolores refuses to return unless don Pedro sends for her, which he never does. She dies in bitterness, begging Juan to find don Pedro and make him pay. After Dolores moves away, don Pedro takes in one of his illegitimate sons, Miguel, who grows up to be a rapist and murderer. The priest who brought Miguel to don Pedro is riddled with guilt and wants to refuse to pardon Miguel when he dies in an accident, but ultimately don Pedro buys a pardon for Miguel from the priest.

Don Pedro is obsessed with his own personal bitterness. All his life, don Pedro has longed for Susana, who moved away when don Pedro was a child. Don Pedro learns that Susana is now a widow. He does everything in his power to get Susana's father to return to Comala and to get Susana as a wife. Finally, Susana and her father move back to Comala, and don Pedro gets rid of her father and takes Susana as a wife. She, though, is lost in a dream of the past, moaning and brooding over her husband's death, until finally she dies.

Don Pedro's hope and dreams that lived in Susana are never fulfilled. Susana, who truly had happiness, has lost it forever. Juan, whose hopes are tied to his father, dies, like his mother, with those hopes unfulfilled. In the end, don Pedro himself dies. The empty, purgatorial town Comala, lives on, filled with its ghosts and unfulfilled dreams.



Pedro Páramo, pages 1 - 11

Pedro Páramo, pages 1 - 11 Summary

Pedro Páramo's estranged son, Juan Preciado, comes to find his father after his mother's death, but instead he finds only a town deserted except for its ghosts. Through a complex narrative told from multiple points of view, which skips forward and backward in time, author Juan Rulfo explores the life of don Pedro, a man who is both a villain and a tragic figure.

As the novel begins, Juan Preciado, don Pedro's son, is on his way to Comala to find his father. On her deathbed, Juan's mother begged him to find don Pedro. She tells him that his father will want to know him, not to ask for anything, and to make don Pedro pay for the hurt he has caused.

On the road to Comala, Juan walks along side a stranger heading the same way. The stranger says he is also don Pedro's son and directs him to a place to stay in Comala. He also tells Juan that don Pedro is dead. As Juan leaves the road, he asks the stranger his name, and Juan only hears his first name, Abundio.

Comala is not as Juan's mother described it. She had fond, nostalgic memories of her home. Now, the town is deserted. Juan sees one woman, who points him in the direction of Eduviges Dyada's house, where Abundio told Juan to stay.

When Eduviges opens the door, she says she was expecting Juan. She tells Juan his mother told her that he was coming. When Juan says his mother is dead, Eduviges comments that it explains why Dolores's voice was so faint. Eduviges gives Juan an empty room to sleep in and asks him to eat something before he goes to bed.

Pedro Páramo, pages 1 - 11 Analysis

The novel begins, not with the title character, but with his son Juan. Pedro Páramo himself is absent from this first section, and Juan learns that don Pedro is dead. The journey to Comala is a journey into don Pedro's world, a journey into the past and into death. The road to Comala rises and falls as Juan walks along it, but upon the approach to Comala, the road goes down and down. The heat becomes almost unbearable. These physical indicators mark Comala as hellish: down below, filled with heat. Actually, Comala will turn out to be more of a purgatory, a symbol of lost and impossible hopes.

Dolores, Juan's mother, describes Comala with loving nostalgia, but the Comala Juan finds is empty, hot, dead. Comala itself is a lost and impossible hope, a place remembered with fondness but gone forever. This is the first of many hopes and dreams that will turn sour, corrupt, or empty as the novel unfolds.



When Juan reaches Comala, he finds a woman who has spoken with his dead mother. The reader begins to suspect that Comala is full of the dead. When, at the end of this section, Eduviges insists that Juan has something to eat, it is an indication that Juan is in a land of the dead and that, most likely, he will never leave. It is common in mythological stories that eating the food in a land of the dead fates you never to leave.



Pedro Páramo, pages 11 - 24

Pedro Páramo, pages 11 - 24 Summary

The point of view changes to an unknown first-person narrator. The young boy is dawdling in the privy during a rainstorm, dreaming about a girl named Susana as he watches the water drop to the earth. His mother scolds him and tells him that he must do something useful. She sends him to help his grandmother shell corn.

The boy's grandmother tells him that she's done shelling corn but needs help grinding chocolate. The boy discovers that the mill is broken, and although they're broke, the grandmother sends the boy to buy a new mill. She adds some other items to the list of things to buy, and as the boy is leaving, his mother asks him to buy some cloth. The boy takes some money and goes off to town.

That night, it rains again. The boy hears the water falling and thinks of Susana. In the house, he can hear the women praying. They are mourning for the boy's grandfather, who recently died. His mother comes to ask the boy to join the prayers, but he tells her that he is sad. She leaves, crying.

Back at Eduviges's house, Juan tells Eduviges about the man named Abundio who told him to go to her house to find a room. Eduviges tells Juan that when the town was still full, Abundio had a deal with Eduviges that he would send travelers to her, and she would pay him a commission. Abundio brought the mail to them and gave them the news. Then, a rocket went off by his head and he lost his hearing. After that, he seldom spoke. Juan protests that the man he met was not deaf, and Eduviges says it must not be the same man. Besides, Eduviges realizes, the Abundio she means is dead. Then, Eduviges tells Juan the story of how she was almost his mother.

Inocencio Osorio is a mystic who told fortunes, but Eduviges is skeptical of his powers. Osorio tells Dolores, Juan's mother, that the moon is wrong for her to sleep with a man on her wedding night. Dolores begs Eduviges to take her place and sleep with don Pedro. Eduviges, who finds don Pedro attractive, accepts the proposition after some initial reluctance. However, don Pedro is too drunk to have sex with her. Juan is born a year later, and Eduviges says she was almost his mother.

Eduviges tells Juan that his mother hated don Pedro and was unhappy with her. She left to go live with her sister, and don Pedro was happy to see her go. Later, Eduviges asked don Pedro about her, and don Pedro expressed no desire to send for her or care for her. Juan begins telling Eduviges about their life after he and his mother left, but she isn't listening.

The scene changes to the young boy again. He believes he will never see Susana again. His grandmother asks him what he is doing, and he explains that he's watching his boss's child. The boy complains that he can't work and watch the boy, and that he's



not being paid. His grandmother cautions him to have humility, but the boy says patience is not for him. The grandmother calls the boy by his name: Pedro Páramo.

The story returns to Eduviges and Juan. Eduviges tells him that the noise he heard is Miguel Páramo's horse, riding the countryside in remorse for its dead master, but Juan didn't hear any horse. She tells him how Miguel Páramo visited her after he died. He didn't know he'd died. He only remembered jumping a fence on his horse and then being lost in the fog, unable to find his way. After Eduviges sent him away, a man came from don Pedro's ranch to tell her Miguel was dead.

The point of view changes to the boy again. It is raining again, and he hears noises. Someone is trying to wake him, but he remains asleep until he hears crying. When he is awake, his mother tells him that his father is dead, murdered.

Pedro Páramo, pages 11 - 24 Analysis

The novel is told from varying points of view, contains stories within stories, and presents its narrative in bits and pieces from different times and places. When the reader first meets Pedro Páramo, he is just a boy, nameless and faceless. This dissociates don Pedro from the reader's pre-existing ideas. Readers know don Pedro failed to care for his wife and son. Abundio has made it clear that don Pedro did not care for or acknowledge many sons. He is, people say, an evil man.

The boy the reader meets is not evil. He is a dreamy boy, lost in the sadness of the rains. His mind is with only one person, a girl named Susana who is gone and not coming back. In subsequent sequences about Pedro, the reader sees him growing up.

Pedro's family is in debt, living on credit, so his attitude toward money may be warped. He becomes impatient. He lives through his father's death. All of this takes place against the background of the missing Susana. She is his hope and his dream. Without her, don Pedro seems to turn cold to the world around him. His deepest feelings exist only with the dream of Susana, and he has no feelings left for the world.

Meanwhile, Eduviges tells Juan the story of his mother, Dolores, and the stories of some of the characters who have lived in the town. Eerily, most of the characters Eduviges speaks of are dead. Miguel is dead. Abundio is dead. The reader begins to suspect that everyone inhabiting this town is dead.



Pedro Páramo, pages 25 - 37

Pedro Páramo, pages 25 - 37 Summary

At Miguel Páramo's funeral, Father Rentería refuses to pardon Miguel so that he can go to heaven. He calls Miguel evil. Finally, though, he blesses the corpse with holy water. After the funeral, don Pedro talks to the priest. Miguel murdered the priest's brother and raped his niece. Don Pedro acknowledges that the priest must hate Miguel but begs the priest to forgive the dead boy. Don Pedro gives the priest money. After don Pedro leaves, Father Rentería is torn, offering the money to God. He knows that salvation can be bought by the rich, but he wants to damn Miguel to hell.

That night, Father Rentería tells his niece, Ana, that Miguel is dead. She recounts the rape to him. She thought Miguel would kill her and made herself dead inside. Only when she saw it was morning did she realize she was alive. Ana has been praying for Miguel to go to hell. Father Rentería doesn't tell her that he's already pardoned the dead boy.

After Miguel's funeral, the men of don Pedro's ranch, Media Luna, stand around talking. They complain about the hard work of carrying the coffin and say that Miguel's spirit is still chasing women.

Father Rentería lies restlessly in bed. He is overcome with guilt for selling pardons for money, but he has no other way to survive. He remembers when Eduviges Dyada's sister came to beg him to pardon Eduviges. Eduviges killed herself, and her sister had no money to pay for a pardon. The priest did not pardon Eduviges, even though it would only mean saying a few words.

The scene shifts back to Eduviges and Juan. Eduviges leaves him, and Juan goes to his room and sleeps. He is wakened by a cry, but then he hears nothing. Later, a woman named Damiana Cisneros comes to the room. She says she is from Media Luna ranch, and Juan remembers his mother speaking of her. She tells him that Toribio Aldrete was hanged in the room Juan is sleeping in and that Eduviges is dead, "wandering like a lost soul."

Fulgor Sedano is an administrator who has filed a charge of falsifying boundaries against Toribio Aldrete. Toribio and Fulgor are drinking at Eduviges's house, and Fulgor has hired a room. Toribio knows that the complaint against him is false.

Fulgor knock on Pedro Páramo's door for the second time. He thinks of his first visit, two weeks prior. On that first visit, Pedro's parents have recently died. Fulgor tells Pedro that he is broke and his family owes money to everyone. Pedro asks whom he owes most, and Fulgor tells him it's the Preciado family. Dolores Preciado is the one he must pay. Don Pedro orders Fulgor to arrange don Pedro's marriage to Dolores immediately. Fulgor mentions that Toribio Aldrete is putting up fences, dividing his land from don Pedro's. Don Pedro tells Fulgor that there will not be any fences.



Pedro Páramo, pages 25 - 37 Analysis

The theme of redemption runs throughout the novel, and this theme is highlighted by Miguel's death. Miguel is not moral; Pedro is not moral. However, Pedro deeply loves his son and has, by hook and by crook, enough money to buy redemption for his son, though he is a murderer and a rapist. The priest feels trapped in a system where he must accept money for pardons, guaranteeing only the wealthy a place in heaven. Simultaneously, wealth is generated by immoral behavior, so the immoral are guaranteed a place in heaven, leaving the common people to wander purgatory.

Eduviges's story is contrasted with Miguel's story. Eduviges has born children out of wedlock and raised them without help from the fathers. As Miguel is a womanizer and rapist, Eduviges is the woman who gives herself to men. While Miguel is rich, Eduviges is poor. While Miguel gives to no one, Eduviges gives hospitality to all. While Miguel died through recklessness, Eduviges killed herself through sorrow. Miguel gains a pardon because of his father's money. Eduviges sister is poor and can do nothing for her after death. The hope of salvation and redemption is lost.

The story of Toribio Aldrete confirms don Pedro's immorality. He has no regard for anything but maintaining his land and growing his wealth. Toribio legally owns part of the land, but don Pedro will have it back. When Toribio does not give in to a threat of legal action, don Pedro's men hang him at Eduviges's house.

Juan's mother's relationship with don Pedro is also further revealed in this section. Dolores happily, joyously gives up all of her possessions to have don Pedro as a husband. Don Pedro uses her coldly and calculatedly and leaves her penniless.



Pedro Páramo, pages 37 - 47

Pedro Páramo, pages 37 - 47 Summary

On Fulgor's second trip to Media Luna, he wonders how don Pedro learned so many tricks to hold on to money and power. Fulgor expected to have to leave Media Luna after don Lucas's death, but don Pedro has turned it around by proposing to Dolores.

When Fulgor visits Dolores, she gushes at the idea of marrying don Pedro. Fulgor lies to her, telling her that don Pedro always loved her from afar but couldn't do anything about it while his father was alive. Dolores tries to delay the wedding because she's expecting her period, but Fulgor arranges for the marriage right away.

Fulgor reports that he has arranged the wedding. Don Pedro chastises Fulgor for not asking Dolores for a cash advance to cover expenses. Then, don Pedro asks Fulgor to file a complaint against Toribio Aldrete about dividing the land, making up a fake charge. He advises Fulgor to send some thugs over to deal with Toribio.

Again, Fulgor visits don Pedro. Again, he notes the black bows over the door, indicating don Pedro's parents' deaths. This time, Fulgor reports that Toribio Aldrete has been dealt with.

The scene changes to Damiana and Juan Preciado. Damiana tells Juan that the town is full of echoes, the sounds of the past. She relates a time when her dead sister Sixtina came to on the street and begged Damiana to pray for her. Then, Juan tells Damiana that his mother has died. He asks Damiana how she knew he was coming. She says nothing. Juan asks if she is dead, and she disappears.

Juan wanders the streets of the town. He hears two women talking. They think a man is following them, the man who gets girls for don Pedro. They seem relieved when the man stops.

Later, Juan hears two brothers-in-law talking. One man says he can't pay his debt unless he has a good corn crop. The other says everyone knows the first man sold his land to don Pedro. The man denies it. His brother-in-law says it doesn't matter. Don Pedro is set on having the land. He'll have it one way or the other. Don Fulgor will come calling, and if he doesn't get the land, the man will come to a bad end.

More voices talk. A man asks his girl, Chona, to run off with him, but she says she must care for her father. He has waited for her for a year. Still, she refuses. Finally, he tells her that he will run off with Juliana instead. More voices continue.

Juan seems to see carts and oxen moving by, and he remembers his mother's descriptions of the town. Finally, a man finds Juan and invites him into a house. Juan asks the man and his woman if they are dead, and they think he's drunk or scared out of his mind. They all go to sleep.



Pedro Páramo, pages 37 - 47 Analysis

The story of don Pedro continues to unfold through Fulgor's point of view. Fulgor admires don Pedro's wifes, so we see don Pedro from a sympathetic viewpoint. Still, the reader is not sympathetic. Fulgor is as unethical as his boss is.

Don Pedro becomes more and more alienated from the reader, as he grows older and more immoral. The tales of don Pedro's wickedness, including the death of rival landowners and his mistreatment of Dolores, are all told from the perspective of outsiders like Ediviges and Fulgor. The only time the reader has been inside don Pedro's head is when don Pedro is a young man, yearning for his love Susana.

When the reader is inside don Pedro's head, the reader is sympathetic, because only don Pedro's love and pain are visible. From an outside perspective, the reader sees don Pedro's actions, which hurt everyone around him. Don Pedro seems almost blind to his own immorality. He seems to be morally dried up and distorted by the loss of Susana. Nothing but her matters, so he treats nothing but her with respect. Possibly, don Pedro only becomes conniving and ambitious to gain the resources to win back Susana.

Dolores is thrilled to have don Pedro as a husband. She seems to have no qualms about giving up all of her money and land to be with him. She even says to herself that she's glad, even if he eventually tires of her, so she must foresee her eventual hardships. This highlights the vulnerability of women in don Pedro's society.

Jumping forward in time, Juan sees and hears the ghosts throughout the town. He has met no one alive during his sojourn there. Juan sees his father, don Pedro, only through the stories of these ghosts, so Juan sees only the external perspective on don Pedro—his heartless, ruthless actions. Don Pedro's employees go find women—willing or unwilling—for him to bed. His administrator blackmails or murders to get land for him. Don Pedro seems to take and take. He leaves behind the ghosts of the past, replaying the trauma of a town ruled by don Pedro. His love for Susana, the only beautiful thing about don Pedro, does not leave any mark for his son to find.



Pedro Páramo, pages 47 - 61

Pedro Páramo, pages 47 - 61 Summary

When Juan awakes, he realizes that the voices he'd heard previously weren't real sound. Now he hears the man and woman arguing and talking in the bed. They speculate about who Juan is. The woman can't sleep and tries to keep the man in conversation. Finally, the woman gets up, and Juan falls asleep again.

When Juan wakes again, the man, Donis, is gone. Juan asks the woman how to get out of the town. She reveals that she is Donis's sister and that they live in sin. She thinks she looks diseased. She hardly ever goes out of the house. At night, the town is full of ghosts, she says, and there aren't enough prayers to save them.

The woman explains that she confessed to the bishop, but he would not forgive her sin because she refused to leave her brother. The living have too many sins to help the dead. Donis returns. Juan wants to leave, but they convince him to wait until morning.

As Juan tries to sleep again, while Donis and the woman are out, an old woman comes in and takes something out from underneath the bed. Juan is afraid she is a ghost. When the man and woman return, Donis thinks Juan is sick.

Juan wakes with the woman naked, next to him. She is afraid Donis will never return and has left Juan to take care of her. Juan feels stifled and goes outside. He speaks to his mother, but her voice says that she can't see him. Juan returns and goes to sleep with the woman. Juan wakes again in the middle of the night, oppressed by the heat and by the woman's sweating body. He goes outside again, and there seems to be no air.

The scene changes. A woman tells Juan they found his body in the town plaza and buried him. Her name is Dorotea. Juan agrees that he went to the plaza and says the murmuring of ghosts scared him to death. He reminds Dorotea that he told her at the beginning he came searching for his father.

Dorotea tells Juan that she dreamed she had a son and carried him around in a bundle. Then, one day, he was gone. She had another dream, where a saint explained that she was barren. She died after she found Juan, and they buried her in the same grave with him. The two dead people hear the rain falling above them.

Pedro Páramo, pages 47 - 61 Analysis

When Juan meets Donis and his sister, he finally exits the realm of the dead, but the world he's found in Comala does not seem any less strange or distorted. Donis and his sister are living in sin, and although they feel thrown together by circumstances, unable



to part, they have no hope and no forgiveness. Their sins are too massive, and they are helpless in the face of the masses of unforgiven souls that surround them.

By now, Juan is anxious to leave the horrors of Comala. Its living life is no better than its dead. Still, Juan has become trapped, encompassed in the tangled web of life in the town. The woman on top of him feels like a trap, as if he is drowning in mud. This symbolizes his entanglement in the land of Comala. He cannot escape. This is no place for the living, and Juan dies.

When the perspective changes to Juan lying in his joint grave with Dorotea, the reader learns that Juan's story is a narrative told to Dorotea. He reminds her that, at the beginning, he told her that he came in search of his father. At this midpoint, his comment brings the reader back to the beginning of the novel, and now the reader must look at Juan's story from a new perspective, knowing that Juan has been telling this story to Dorotea.

The falling rain is a symbol of sorrow. Rain falls while young don Pedro pines for Susana; rain falls while the dead lay restless in their graves. The rain falls over everyone, as sorrow and pain bind all people together. Ironically, this is also the rain that falls on the fields and allows the crops to grow. Perhaps this means there can be no life without sorrow.



Pedro Páramo, pages 61 - 75

Pedro Páramo, pages 61 - 75 Summary

Fulgor watches the rain fall down on the farmland, and he is pleased. Miguel Páramo rides in, recklessly jumping off his horse. He jokes with Fulgor that he's been with a mother, and Fulgor chaffs him that he must have been with Dorotea. Miguel goes inside and gets Damiana to give him breakfast. He asks who Dorotea is, and Damiana tells him that she comes sometimes to beg. Dorotea is wrong in the head and carries around a bundle as if it's her baby. Miguel thinks about how he can take advantage of Dorotea, and then he goes outside and makes a deal with her. Afterwards, he instructs Damiana to feed Dorotea as well as she feeds him.

Fulgor notes that Miguel has not unsaddled his horse. He recalls talking with don Pedro about the murder charge against Miguel. Don Pedro says that he will take responsibility for all of Miguel's sins and that the boy is just a child.

The scene changes to Juan and Dorotea's grave. Juan says that he never saw the sky in Comala, and Dorotea says she was not interested in the sky after she learned her sins could not be forgiven. She speculates that her soul is wandering, lost, around Comala, like so many other souls.

Again, the scene changes. Don Pedro is lying in his rooms, and he recognizes the sounds of commotion and people carrying back a dead body in the house. He does not open the door. He is remembering learning of his father's death. Finally, Fulgor comes into don Pedro's room and tells him that Miguel is dead. Don Pedro expects to hear that someone has killed his son, but Fulgor tells him Miguel died in an accident, from falling off his horse. Don Pedro orders the horse to be killed.

Father Rentería walks the streets, restlessly. He remembers many confessions from women who slept with don Pedro or bore his children. He always thought don Pedro would come confess, too, but he never did. Then, a woman died in childbirth, bearing don Pedro's child, and Father Rentería brought the boy to don Pedro to raise. The priest blames himself, since this boy, Miguel, grew up to be a villain under don Pedro's care.

When the priest returns from his long walk to Contla, he finds that women are waiting to confess, but he puts them off. He remembers what happened in Contla.

Father Rentería sees a priest in Contla and confesses his sins. The priest refuses to pardon him and tells Father Rentería to seek confession higher up in the Catholic Church. Afterward, the two priests talk, commenting that all fruits that grow in Contla are bitter. They bemoan the fact that don Pedro owns all the land of Comala.

Back in Contla, Father Rentería hears Dorotea's confession. She tells him that she found all of Miguel Páramo's women for him, and he tells her she will not go to heaven.



Pedro Páramo, pages 61 - 75 Analysis

Fulgor rejoices in the rain falling on the lands. He loves Media Luna, and he knows the rain will make the crops grow. Still, the rain symbolizes sorrow, and Fulgor, don Pedro's lackey, is an evil man, rejoicing in his gains from others' sorrows.

Miguel is the result of don Pedro's way of life. The boy is completely reckless, embodying all his father's worse traits and unregulated by any controls. Filled with power, Miguel is also, therefore, filled with corruption. He loves his horse, but he does not think about or care for the animal, leaving the horse to run saddled around the ranch. While Miguel's father has at least love for one person, Miguel loves no one and nothing enough to care for it. This recklessness will lead to Miguel's death. It has already led him to murder and rape.

Miguel is the downfall of Father Rentería and of Dorotea. He takes advantage of Dorotea's poverty to recruit her to locate girls for him. In all likelihood, Dorotea told Miguel where and when to accost Father Rentería's niece. It is no wonder the priest does not forgive Dorotea's sin.

The priest himself is overcome with guilt for bringing Miguel to don Pedro in the first place. When the priest is so rooted in sin, taking money for pardons and not stopping the corruption of don Pedro, how can anyone expect salvation?



Pedro Páramo, pages 75 - 85

Pedro Páramo, pages 75 - 85 Summary

The point of view changes to Susana, lying in her mother's bed after her mother's death. She is only remembering, though. Really, she is dead, lying in her own coffin. Susana thinks about her mother's death. The day was so beautiful that she didn't cry or mourn. She celebrated life. No one came to pay their respects to Susana's mother. Susana and her servant Justina had to pay to have her mother buried.

Juan at first thinks the voice is Dorotea, but she tells him it must be Susana, whose mother died of consumption. No one came to pay respects, fearing to catch the disease. They listen for Susana's voice again, but instead they hear a man who was beaten and left maimed by don Pedro after his father's death.

Dorotea tells Juan that don Pedro killed almost every person who was at the wedding where don Pedro's father, don Lucas, was killed. Don Lucas was not even the real target. The shot was meant for the groom. Juan and Dorotea hear Susana moaning. Dorotea tells Juan that don Pedro loved Susana and abandoned everything after she died. The whole town dried up.

Fulgor comes to don Pedro to tell him that Bartolomé San Juan and his daughter are back in town. Don Pedro has waited thirty years for Susana, collecting everything he could for her, begging and bargaining with Susana's father to return. Now, she is finally back.

Susana's father tells her that don Pedro wants her in exchange for giving them a place to live and letting Bartolomé work a local mine. Susana is distant. She does not seem to care what happens to her. She questions whether she is Bartolomé's daughter. Bartolomé asks if she is mad, and she replies that of course she is.

Pedro Páramo, pages 75 - 85 Analysis

Susana's disjointed story, told from her grave, is just beginning in this section. Don Pedro has pined away for Susana, caused immeasurable misery to acquire wealth to give her, and used all his power to try to track Susana and get her back. This section reveals that the novel is, in a way, a love story.

Don Pedro's love is unrequited. Susana exists for him, not as a person, but as a memory. She is idealized. She is his hope and his dream, but hopes are not truly attainable in this novel. When Susana's father is forced to move back because he has no other options, don Pedro believes his love will finally be fulfilled.

Susana, though, is irreparably damaged. She cares for nothing and no one, not even herself. In this way, Susana is a parallel to don Pedro. She is lost in a dream far from

reality. Just as don Pedro, who embodies hope to the town, is lost to Comala's inhabitants, Susana, who embodies hope for don Pedro, is lost to him.



Pedro Páramo, pages 85 - 96

Pedro Páramo, pages 85 - 96 Summary

Don Pedro tells Fulgor that he wants Susana more than anything. He arranges for Susana's father to "disappear" in the mines. The scene changes. A light rain is falling in Comala. Justina Díaz walks out to the marketplace and buys some rosemary, which she puts in Susana's bedroom at Media Luna. Susana is in bed, sleeping, and Justina is happy, because when Susana is not sleeping she is writhing in distress.

Justina thinks Bartolomé has come to tell her to leave. When she sees him clearly, she screams. Susana wakes and complains of the scream and that Justina's cat keeps her awake. They argue. Then, Justina swears she won't ever leave Susana. Susana wakes and thinks she sees her father. She wakes again and calls for Justina. Justina tells her that Bartolomé died two days ago. They found his body in the mines.

Susana remembers: Years earlier, Bartolomé sends Susana down into a mine. A skeleton is down there, and Bartolomé wants Susana to search for gold near it, but she hands him up only the skeletal bones.

Father Rentería comes to comfort Susana in her grief, but Susana sends the priest away. Her thinking is disjointed, and she remembers when she learned her husband, Florencio, was dead.

A man comes to report to don Pedro that Fulgor is dead. He has been killed by revolutionaries. Don Pedro says he wants to meet with the rebels, but his mind is on Susana, who spends all her time in her room, sleeping or writhing in agony.

The scene changes to Juan and Dorotea's grave. Juan and Dorotea hear Susana talking to herself in her grave. Susana is remembering the sensual experience of swimming naked in the ocean.

Pedro Páramo, pages 85 - 96 Analysis

Susana is essentially a sensual person. She rejects Father Rentería when he comes to comfort her. The priest is a spiritual man, and Susana rejects the spiritual and instead rejoices in the physical. Her description of herself swimming naked in the ocean is exultation in the physical world. Her joy is not in hope for something far away, in the sky. Her joy is celebration of the earth around her and her own body.

However, when don Pedro finally attains Susana as his wife, she is no longer celebrating the world around her. She is locked in a private hell, where she exists in agony. Susana herself is pining for something now unattainable, her dead husband. She leaves don Pedro in the same situation, pining for her. He has her body, but he wants the woman he knew from the past. Neither of them can regain lost passion.



Pedro Páramo, pages 96 - 108

Pedro Páramo, pages 96 - 108 Summary

The revolutionaries come to Media Luna. Don Pedro feeds them a meal, and then he asks what they want. The men don't seem to know what their mission is. One of them says they're sick of the corrupt men who run the government and own the land, but they seem to be aimless, revolting for the sake of revolution.

Don Pedro promises the men money and enough men to double their army's size, and the revolutionaries leave. Don Pedro has sent for El Tilcuete, a mercenary. He instructs El Tilcuete to raise a band of reliable men to join the revolutionaries, and tells El Tilcuete that he is now the revolutionaries' leader. He gives El Tilcuete a ranch in payment, but the mercenary is more interested in the fight.

Back in Juan and Dorotea's grave, they listen to Susana. She is remembering how she warmed her feet between her husband's legs. She mourns for his loss. On the night that she learned he was dead, she fell asleep waiting for him. She thought he was there, warming her feet, but it was really her newspaper, fallen from her hands and wrapped around her feet.

Susana remembers: A big man comes to tell her that Florencio is dead. She thinks God only cares about souls, but she wants Florencio's body. She misses his sensuality. This is the reality Susana is lost in as she tosses and turns in her bed at Media Luna.

Pedro watches Susana as she sleeps restlessly. He knows that he cannot help her. He cannot know what she suffers from, but he is still obsessed with her. He leaves her room to walk in the night. Susana awakes, sweating, and throws the covers off her naked body.

The scene changes. Don Pedro's lawyer reports that El Tilcuete has been killed in the revolution. The lawyer is leaving to go to Sayula. He gives don Pedro his papers, saying that they could compromise don Pedro if the wrong person ran across them. Don Pedro wishes him well, and the lawyer leaves slowly. He had expected a cash gift from don Pedro, since he's gotten Miguel out of jail many times and done many other services that saved don Pedro a fortune over time. He is counting on the money to start over again in Sayula.

The lawyer turns back and tells don Pedro that he's changed his mind about the papers. He wants to continue working for don Pedro in Sayula. He asks for an advance to help him get started. Don Pedro only gives him a fifth of the money he asks for.

Damiana Cisneros hears a knocking on the wall, and she believes it's a saint, portending the death of a faithful Catholic. She goes to the window and sees don Pedro sneaking into a young girl's room. She thinks of the time he came to her room, but she was half-asleep and did not let him in. He never returned.



One of the mercenaries comes to don Pedro to ask for money to feed the men, but don Pedro tells him to go raid a nearby town. He thinks of Susana and of the young girl he just had sex with, trying to make her into Susana in his mind.

Pedro Páramo, pages 96 - 108 Analysis

Although Susana is lost to him, don Pedro continues blindly along the same moral road he's been traveling. The world is in disarray. Men are fighting, but they don't know what they're fighting for. Don Pedro takes advantage of the situation, putting his own men into the fray so that he can come out ahead in the end. His heart, though, is not in this muddle. His whole self is consumed with his unattainable, suffering Susana.

Susana, meanwhile, is trapped in her memories of her husband. The memories are sensual. Her experience of love and joy is a natural one, an experience of sex and the intertwining of bodies. She scolds God for loving the soul. She misses, not her husband's soul, but his body.

Susana's love of the body over the soul reminds the reader of Juan and Dolores, their bodies living in their graves and talking over their lives and the neighboring dead people. Dolores is freed from her soul, which always gave her sorrow and guilt.

Juan, too, is at peace in his body in the soil, whereas while he lived in Comala, he was overcome with fear and terror. The soul doesn't seem to have a chance in this world. There is too much sin to overcome and too much unfairness. Only rejoicing in life and in the body (things that exist here and now, not after death) seems to bring joy.



Pedro Páramo, pages 109 - 124

Pedro Páramo, pages 109 - 124 Summary

Susana talks with Justina, wondering what life is if not sin. She tells Justina she only believes in hell, not heaven and then falls asleep. Don Pedro asks about Susana, and Justina says she is not well. The priest gave her confession the previous day and is supposed to come with Holy Communion. When Father Rentería comes, Susana is writhing in agony. He gives her communion.

Some women in Comala notice that Susana's window is dark. They discuss how sick she's been and say that perhaps she's died. They see a doctor hurrying toward Media Luna. They hope Susana does not die without confessing.

Father Rentería tests Susana's repentance, asking her to repeat a horrible description of her body dying and decaying. She seems distant, unconcerned, and the priest doesn't know what to make of her. He describes heaven and hell. He tells Susana that she is going to God, who is vengeful against sinners, and Susana sends him away. She tells Justina to leave if she's going to cry.

The next day, the bells ring loudly and continue to ring in mourning for Susana's death. The bells attract a circus, and soon the town is in the middle of a celebration that continues even after the bells stop. Media Luna, though, is locked in silence and mourning.

Father Rentería goes to fight one of the last rebellions against the government. Don Pedro's man is going to fight with him. Don Pedro sits in front of Media Luna. He no longer sleeps. He pines for Susana.

Abundio Martínez comes to buy liquor. His wife has died. She just bore a son. The priest was off fighting the revolution, so she did not get last rites. He begins drinking the liquor as he walks off, and he finds himself heading, not back toward his house, but toward Media Luna.

Abundio comes up the road, stumbling and blind drunk. He asks for money to help bury his wife, but he can't seem to make himself understood. He appears to be threatening, and Damiana screams and calls for help.

Men come up the road to take Abundio away. He does not know what is happening. As he walks away with the men, he excuses himself to go to the side of the road and vomit. He explains to them that he is drunk. They wait for him to come back and drag him off.

Don Pedro watches the men retreat in the distance. He feels himself dying a little bit at a time. He loses everything. He remembers Susana, and he remembers her leaving. He can't get the image out of his mind.



Don Pedro thinks that in a while, Abundio will come back to try to get from don Pedro in death what he couldn't get in life. Damiana comes to help don Pedro in to dinner. Don Pedro rises and leans against her, heading into the house. Then he collapses. Don Pedro is dead.

Pedro Páramo, pages 109 - 124 Analysis

In Susana's last moments on earth, she rejects the Catholic priest and all things spiritual. The priest describes her body decaying in the earth, turning to dust and worms, but Susana does not care. This is all part of the physical world and physical life. She does not flinch at anything bodily. However, when the priest tells Susana that she will soon be with God, subject to his judgment, she sends him away. This is the realm of the spiritual, and Susana rejects the spiritual.

Don Pedro has now lost Susana permanently. Everything that he has done, all the pain he has caused people, has given him nothing. Don Pedro's hopes are now permanently destroyed. He causes the bells to ring without cease to express his sorrow, but no one else shares it. The people of the town barely know who Susana is. She has spent all her time in her bed, in her internal sorrow.

Like Susana, don Pedro also has spent his time in his internal sorrow. He has not loved the town, only Susana. In this way, he has separated himself from the people. Therefore, in his final sorrow, he is alone. The town does not mourn for him. Instead, the town celebrates while don Pedro sinks into misery.

Don Pedro does not learn anything from his experiences. Even after Susana is lost to him, he does not have the ability to look outside his secret desire for her. He does not even acknowledge Abundio when the drunk, senseless man comes to beg money to bury his dead wife. At the same time, don Pedro is aware that the dead are haunting him. Only in this way, at this late date, does don Pedro acknowledge that his actions have consequences. However, he is mired in his unfulfilled desires, and he cannot reconnect with the world around him. He dies unchanged.



Characters

Pedro Páramo

Pedro Páramo is a landowner in the small town of Comala. When he is a young man, Pedro falls in love with Susana, a young girl who lives in the town. She moves away with her family, and don Pedro harbors a secret desire for her all his life. Only Susana occupies his thoughts, and don Pedro seems dead to everything else in the world around him. Don Pedro does not live in the world. Instead, he lives only for an ephemeral hope, something that is always out of reach.

Because of don Pedro's love for Susana, he turns all of his energy toward acquiring everything he can acquire. He wants to give Susana the whole world, while don Pedro himself wants only Susana. Because he is obsessed with his secret love, don Pedro cannot enjoy the world or connect with others. He ruthlessly takes everything he wants and kills anyone who gets in his way.

Don Pedro's character is divided. Internally, he is a lover, obsessed with Susana and always dreaming of her. Externally, and from other people's points of view, don Pedro is a merciless, ruthless man. Essentially, he both owns and rules the town of Comala, and he controls the lives of all the people in the little community. Yet, he is not concerned with the community or part of the community. He is only concerned with something far away, with Susana. In this way, don Pedro is a parallel to the priest, who is meant to save the community but is only concerned with unattainable grace in the afterlife.

Juan Preciado

Juan is don Pedro's son by his first wife. On her deathbed, Juan's mother begs Juan to find his father, but her motives seemed mixed. She seems to feel ambiguous about don Pedro and about Comala. At once, she tells Juan not to ask don Pedro for anything and to make him pay.

When Juan arrives at Comala, the city is deserted, and he sees only ghosts. He finds out that don Pedro is dead, and the ghosts in the town tell him bits and pieces of stories that surround don Pedro. Juan dies and is buried in the town. As he lies beneath the earth, he hears the stories of the other dead people buried around him, who talk to him or to themselves.

Juan's trip to Comala is a trip into the land of the dead. As he travels toward it, he travels ever downward into a horrible, still heat, as if he were traveling down into hell. This is not hell, though, but a kind of purgatory, where people wander as lost souls, traveling over again the ways of their lives. The dead don't know they're dead. They have hoped for something beyond death, but they find nothing but their lives.



Juan, too, hopes for something beyond his reach. He hopes to find a father, and he never even gets to glimpse don Pedro. For Juan, the hope that lives in don Pedro is eternally lost.

Father Rentería

Father Rentería lives in perpetual guilt. The priest brings Miguel Páramo to his father after the boy's mother dies in childbirth. Miguel becomes don Pedro's only recognized child, and don Pedro raises him. In his ruthless father's shadow, Miguel grows to be a reckless, self-centered man, caring for nothing and no one. Don Pedro at least loves the absent Susana, but Miguel seems entirely focused on himself. The priest feels responsible for this monster, who eventually kills Father Rentería's brother and rapes his niece.

The priest takes don Pedro's money to pardon Miguel after the boy dies. Mired in sin, the priest seems unable to mete out justice for his parishioners or help those in need of salvation. Eventually, Father Rentería runs off to fight in the revolution, leaving the town without any hope of salvation.

Susana San Juan

Susana is don Pedro's childhood sweetheart who has moved away from their hometown. He harbors love and desire for her throughout his entire life. When she moves back after being widowed, don Pedro marries her, but Susana is completely overcome and sick with grief over her dead husband. She eventually dies.

Susana finds fulfillment in sensuality. She connects with the physical and bodily world and rejects the spiritual world. Even on her deathbed, she sends away the priest, who represents the spiritual.

Miguel Páramo

Miguel is don Pedro's only acknowledged son. His mother died in childbirth, and the priest brought Miguel to don Pedro. Miguel becomes a rapist and a murderer. However, don Pedro loves him and pays for the priest to pardon Miguel and send him to heaven after Miguel's death.

Eduviges Dyada

Eduviges Dyada owns a boarding house in Comala. She puts up Juan Preciado, and she hears and sees the souls of the dead. Juan later learns that she, too, is dead.



Abundio Martínez

Abundio, or his ghost, is the man Juan Preciado first meets on the road to Comala. Abundio was don Pedro's son. He later went deaf. Then, his wife died. When Abundio went to beg don Pedro for money to bury his wife, Abundio was so drunk that he looked like he was threatening don Pedro. Don Pedro's men killed Abundio.

Dolores Preciado

Dolores is Juan Preciado's mother. Don Pedro marries Dolores as he owes her family money and wants to erase the debt, but Dolores believes he cares for her. Dolores later leaves with her son Juan and will not go back until don Pedro sends for her, but he never does. On her deathbed, Dolores begs Juan to go find don Pedro and make him pay.

Inocencio Osorio

Osorio is a mystic who tells fortunes. He tells Juan's mother that she should not lie with a man on her wedding night, because the moon is wrong.

Damiana Cisneros

Damiana works at the Media Luna ranch and takes care of Juan when he is a baby.

Toribio Aldrete

Don Pedro's men hang Toribio, because don Pedro wants to take back Toribio's land.

Fulgor Sedano

Fulgor is don Pedro's legal administrator. Fulgor does dirty deeds to help don Pedro hold on to his position and possessions.

Donis and His Sister

Donis and his sister are the two living people Juan meets in Comala. They live together in sin.



Dorotea

Dorotea has a delusion that she has a child, and she carries a bundle around with her everywhere. Don Miguel uses Dorotea to find women for him. Dorotea dies after finding Juan's body and is buried with him, where she tells him her story.

El Tilcuate

El Tilcuate is a mercenary who don Pedro instructs to fight for him on whatever side of the revolution looks successful.

Justina Díaz

Justina is Susana's servant.

Bartolomé San Juan

Bartolomé is Susana's father, a miner who does not want his daughter to marry don Pedro.

Florencio

Throughout the time she is with don Pedro, Susana pines for Florencio, her dead husband.



Objects/Places

Comala

Comala is the town where Juan Preciado's mother came from and where don Pedro owns most of the land. The town is now deserted, full of souls wandering in purgatory.

The Road to Comala

The road to Comala rises and falls, but as it approaches the town, it goes lower and lower, indicating that entering Comala is like descending to an underworld.

Media Luna

Media Luna is Pedro Páramo's estate.

Contla

Contla is a town nearby to Comala, where Miguel Páramo's lover lives. Miguel dies riding his horse to Contla.

Black Bows

Don Pedro's house has two black bows over the door, in mourning for both his parents' deaths.

Eduviges's House

Eduviges takes in boarders at her house, which is also a repository for all the things left behind by those who have left the town. In a room in her house, don Pedro's men hung Toribio to get his land.

El Coronado

El Coronado is Miguel Páramo's horse. After Miguel's death, the horse's ghost wanders the town.



Juan and Dorotea's Grave

After Juan dies of fright, he shares a grave with Dorotea, where Juan hears the voices of other bodies buried around him. Even in death, he continues to hear the voices of the dead.

Andromeda Mines

Susana's father returns to Comala, because he wants to work the Andromeda mines.

Rain

Falling rain is a symbol of sorrow throughout the novel. Rain falls while young don Pedro pines for Susana; rain falls while the dead lay restless in their graves. The rain falls over everyone, as sorrow and pain bind all people together. Ironically, this is also the rain that falls on the fields and allows the crops to grow. Perhaps, this means there can be no life without sorrow.

The Sky

The sky is a symbol of hope. Like the rain, the sky spreads over everyone, and offers dreams as well as hope. The sky, though, is too far away to reach. Hope is impossible. The sky gives rain, and so hope gives sorrow.



Themes

Hope and Dreams

In Rulfo's novel, hope and dreams drive the characters. Don Pedro makes Susana into his one hope. After she moves away, he puts all of his energy into bringing her back as his wife. She is distant and unattainable, and his desire for her drives him away from everything else in life, making him into a cruel and ruthless man.

Juan Preciado puts his hope into finding don Pedro, who was also the hope of Juan's mother, Dolores. Juan's quest after his hope leads him into purgatory and death, and he never leaves Comala. He sees only the aftermath don Pedro has left behind, and Juan never sees don Pedro's inner existence.

Hope is symbolized by the sky, and the things the characters hope for are like the sky, too far away to touch or attain. Hope seems to result in only pain and unfulfilled longing. It destroys don Pedro, Dolores, and Juan. Even the people who wait and hope for don Pedro to die, expecting to get his land and possessions, end up destroyed, living in the ruined town of Comala.

Hope is also tied to the afterlife. The characters hope for salvation after death. Again, this is not the here and now. Their existence is bound up in something beyond this world. Again, this hope is unattainable, and the characters end up walking in purgatory. No one's sins are forgiven.

Death

When Juan travels into Comala, he is traveling into a land of the dead. The road to Comala travels downward, as if into the bowels of the earth, and the town itself is airless and seething with heat. Once Juan enters Comala, everyone he meets is dead. He listens to the stories of the dead throughout the novel, and everything he learns about his father comes from the dead.

Death in the novel is not an ending, but it does result in stagnation. The dead who wander through Comala do not seem to know that they are dead. They repeat the actions of their lives, much as don Pedro, as he knows he is dying, cannot change from the path of his lifetime. This seems to indicate that people cannot change, and that even in death, there is nothing greater for people to attain than what they already have.

Father Rentería describes to Susana on her deathbed three different possibilities of death. First, he describes the body rotting in the ground. Then, he describes heaven, and he describes hell. These are three choices. Susana seems content with the idea of rotting in the ground, and she sends him away when he mentions being judged by God. Susana is rejecting the idea of anything beyond the physical. Death, in the novel, simply seems to be a continuation of life.



When Juan dies, he finds his body resting in a grave along with Dorotea. They discuss the status of their souls. Dorotea believes her soul must be lost somewhere, wandering, and she is happy to be rid of it. She is now only the physical body, the decaying body that the priest describes to Susana. The grave seems to be a place of contentment, when the body is finally released from the grip of the spiritual, of the soul.

Salvation and Redemption

The characters in Comala are all Catholic. They live in a state of sin, and most of them seek redemption and ultimate salvation after death. As the priest, Father Rentería is responsible for the health of their souls and for their salvation. However, the souls end up wandering the town in purgatory after death. No one finds salvation.

The two characters who notably do not seek salvation of the soul are don Pedro and Susana. Don Pedro seeks, not salvation, but only Susana. Susana seeks, not salvation, but the sensual joy she found with her husband. These become a kind of salvation for the two characters, but for them, as for the sinners, salvation is out of reach.

The idea of salvation is bound up with the idea of sin. Father Rentería believes that he can give salvation with a few words, because he is a priest. He can forgive sins and open the door of heaven. However, he only gives salvation to the people who can afford to buy it, people like don Pedro. That means the well-meaning sinners end up in purgatory while Miguel, the villainous son of don Pedro, ends up with salvation.

Susana says that life is sin. Sin fills the lives of all the people in Comala. They cannot escape sin, because all of life is sin. The story of Donis and his sister is an example. Donis's sister pleads with the bishop for salvation, but he cannot give it because she continues to sin. Still, she feels she has no choice. Life has left only her brother for her, and she cannot change, much as even don Pedro on his deathbed, after he has lost Susana, cannot change. Dorotea, too, is forced into sin because she is poor and needs to eat. Her sin, though, cannot be forgiven. There is no salvation and no redemption. Life is sin.



Style

Point of View

The novel is told in a mix of first person and third person, from the points of view of many different narrators. Because of this, the reader experiences the story from different perspectives, learns secrets, and enters the minds of diverse characters. It makes the novel feel surreal and disjointed, but it also provides a broad picture of Comala and of don Pedro's life.

The first major narrator is Juan, who begins the story. Juan tells the story as an outsider coming to Comala, so he gives the reader a view of the wreckage that don Pedro leaves behind in the town. Juan tells the story to Dorotea as they lie in their joint grave, and Juan hears the stories of ghosts haunting Comala and the dead lying in the ground. As a narrator, Juan gives the reader a picture of the town itself and don Pedro's affect on the world around him.

The second major narrator is don Pedro himself. When don Pedro acts as first-person narrator, the reader is able to glimpse his inner self, and only then does the reader see that don Pedro's entire mind and heart is obsessed with his lost love, Susana. When viewed from outside, from the point of view of narrators like Fulgor, don Pedro seems to be only a ruthless, acquisitive man. Don Pedro, though, is not acquisitive for himself. He only wants to acquire things for his love, Susana.

Susana herself also acts as a narrator, and Susana's point of view provides the reader with a glimpse of the power of the physical. Susana rejoices in the power of the ocean. She rejoices in her own body. She rejoices in her sexual relationship with her husband. All of this gives the reader an alternative to a spiritual life always yearning for something unattainable beyond the grave. The alternative is a physical life, delighting in the here and now.

Setting

The setting of the novel is Comala, a small town in Mexico. Comala is set low in the ground, and the road falls downward into the town. The town is stifling with airless heat, and people say that natives who go to hell always return for a blanket. Because of these characteristics, traveling to Comala is traveling to the land of the dead, especially now, since the deserted and destroyed town is mostly populated with the dead.

Another major element of the setting is the land itself. The people are intrinsically tied to the land. It gives them food and sustains them. Don Pedro owns all of the land, so he symbolically owns all of the people. He takes the sustenance to himself.

The rain and the sky play major symbolic roles in the novel. The rain indicates sorrow, acting as an objective correlative to the characters' emotions. When young Pedro pines



for his love Susana, the rain drips down into the urn and flows over into the ground. When Susana lies thrashing on her deathbed, the rain thrashes against the ground and the leaves. The rain falling on the ground unsettles the buried corpses, and then they tell their stories. The rain, though, also feeds the crops, and therefore sorrow is necessary to life.

The sky acts as a symbol of hope, something far away and unattainable. Looking to the sky, though, means looking away from the world around you, much as don Pedro, when pining for his lost Susana, turns away from the world of Comala, ultimately destroying the town.

Language and Meaning

The language Rulfo uses is simple and brief, often breaking into fragmentary sentences that reflect the thought processes of the current narrator. However, the language is tied to those things most important to the people of Comala. The plants and land sustain their bodies, and Catholicism sustains their souls.

Rulfo's language, when it depicts Catholic ceremonies such as confessions and funerals, evokes all of the tradition and ritual of the Catholic Church. In turn, this language of tradition and ritual reminds the reader how remote from everyday existence spiritual salvation is for the impoverished people of Comala.

The language that depicts nature is often poetic and more complex. The rain does not simply fall; it roils the ground. In this way, the rain reflects the sorrow and churning emotions of the characters.

The novel is full of dialogue and stories within stories. Juan tells the story of meeting Eduviges, and in that story, Eduviges tells the story of Dolores begging Eduviges to take her place on her wedding night. It is a story within a story, evoking oral storytelling traditions while emphasizing the intertwined web of the characters' lives.

Structure

Pedro Páramo is a short novel, but its structure is complex. There are no chapters, but the novel is loosely divided into short sections. It begins as a story told by a first person narrator, Juan Preciado, in search of his father after his mother's death. Juan Preciado, however, finds himself descending into a land of the dead. He does not find his father there. Instead, Juan finds the stories of many characters living in the town. The dead tell him their own stories and stories about the town, so Juan learns about all of the aftermath and consequences surrounding don Pedro. As don Pedro's son, Juan himself is part of those consequences, a fitting narrator and audience for these stories within stories.

During the first part of the novel, the story of Juan Preciado is intertwined with the story of don Pedro's youth. This story is told first person, from don Pedro's point of view, and

the reader learns of young Pedro's love for Susana, who has moved away. The reader also begins to see don Pedro grow into an acquisitive man.

Approximately halfway through the novel, Juan Preciado dies. His death puts his narration into a context; Juan is telling the story from his grave. This solidifies the reader's impression that Comala is a dead place, destroyed by don Pedro. Even Juan, who escaped don Pedro as a baby, is pulled in and destroyed. Still, from the grave, Juan hears the stories that surround don Pedro's life.

The second half of the novel follows don Pedro as he tries to find his lost love, Susana. He finds her body, but her mind is gone. Susana is part of another place. Don Pedro, whose life has been devoted to Susana, falls into disarray as Susana suffers and dies. As don Pedro sinks into his eventual death, Mexico also falls into disarray, rampant with unfocused revolutionaries. In the end of the novel, Susana is dead. Don Pedro is dead. Comala itself is dead, destroyed by unattained dreams.



Quotes

"I came to Comala because I had been told that my father, a man named Pedro Páramo, lived there." —page 3

"They say that when people from there die and go to hell, they come back for a blanket." —page 6

"I was thinking of you, Susana. Of the green hills. Of when we used to fly kits in the windy season. We could hear the sounds of life from the town below; we were high above on the hill, playing out string to the wind. 'Help me Susana.' And soft hands would tighten on mine. 'Let out more string.'" —page 12

"There is wind and sun, and there are clouds. High above, blue sky, and beyond that there may be songs; perhaps sweeter voices. . . . In a word, hope. There is hope for us, hope to ease our sorrows." —page 25

"Who did the boy think he was to speak to him like that? Not even his father, don Lucas Páramo, had dared do that. So the very first thing, this kid, who had never stepped foot on the Media Luna or done a lick of work, was talking to him as if he were a hired hand. How about that!" —page 35

"'But oh, I'm so happy. So happy! Thank you, God, for giving me don Pedro.' And then she added. 'Even if later he does get tired of me.'" —page 39

"The town is filled with echoes. It's like they were trapped behind the walls, or beneath the cobblestones. When you walk you fill like someone's behind you, stepping in your footsteps. You hear rustlings. And people laughing. Laughter that sounds used up. And voices worn away by the years. Sounds like that. But I think the day will come when those sounds fade away." —page 41

"I told you that at the very beginning. I came to find Pedro Páramo, who they say was my father. Hope brought me here." —page 60

"Hope? You pay dear for that. My illusions made me live longer than I should have. And that was the price I paid to find my son, who in a manner of speaking was just one more illusion. Because I never had a son." —page 60

"And while he listened to 'I have sinned,' his head slumped forward as if he could no longer hold it up. Then came the dizziness, the confusion, the slipping away as if in syrupy water, the whirling lights; the brilliance of the dying day was splintering into shards. And there was the taste of blood on his tongue. The 'I have sinned' grew louder, was repeated again and again: 'for now and forever more,' 'for now and forever more,' 'for now . . .'" —page 75



"Oh God! You are not in Your heaven! I asked You to protect him. To look after him. I asked that of You. But all You care about is souls. And what I want is his body." —page 100

"'I only believe in hell,' Susana said. And closed her eyes." —page 110

"I know that within a few hours Abundio will come with his bloody hands to ask for the help I refused him. But I won't have hands to cover my eyes, to block him out. I will have to hear him, listen until his voice fades with the day, until his voice dies." —page 124



Topics for Discussion

The most powerful people in the town of Comala are don Pedro, who owns the land, and Father Rentería, who cares for the people's souls. Compare the ways don Pedro and the priest both fail the townspeople who depend on them.

What does the story of Dolores's marriage to don Pedro tell the reader about the status of women in the novel?

Why does the story of don Pedro begin from the point of view of Juan Preciado?

When the reader first meets don Pedro, he is an unnamed first-person narrator. Why doesn't the author introduce don Pedro by name when the reader first meets him?

Should Father Rentería have denied a pardon to Miguel? Should he have granted a pardon to Eduviges?

Does don Pedro's love for Susana make him a sympathetic character?

Why does Susana send away the priest on her deathbed?

Why doesn't don Pedro give Abundio money to bury his wife?