

Time and death concepts in juan rulfo's pedro paramo

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Comala's Cycle

Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* is remarkable for its nonlinear narrative. The novel is characterized by its multiple characters whose voices constantly switch back and forth, flashbacks, and shifts in time that continually disrupt the linearity of the narrative. When the narrator Juan Preciado arrives at the town of Comala in the hope of meeting his father, Pedro Paramo, he is bombarded by the memories of the town that are shared with the remaining townspeople, the living, and the dead. The reader is faced with the challenge of identifying voices and the sequence of events, along with death infusing all of Juan's interactions. Comala is a literal ghost town, defined by the lost hopes and suffering of its citizens. Time and memories are consistently unsettled, fragmented, and shaped by the past with the way it still lives within the present, searching for resolution.

The theme of death and time is represented when Pedro never recovers from the loss of Susanna San Juan and lives in a state of purgatory. "Susanna San Juan was buried, and few people in Comala even realized it [...] Don Pedro spoke to no one. He never left his room. He swore to wreak vengeance on Comala" (116). Pedro's tragedy is that he is never able to overcome her loss; he cannot function without her and decides to punish the town for his own suffering. Purgatory is key to the way the novel treats the idea of time and death. After Susanna dies, Pedro moves into a state of purgatory. Damiano Cisneros encapsulates this sense of purgatory when she describes Comala, "This town is filled with echoes. It's like they were trapped behind the walls, or beneath the cobblestones. When you walk you feel 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" (41). Damiano's description of the "echoes" of the town convey how the typical transition from life to death has been disrupted by the sinning residents of Comala and the need for atonement has resulted in so many ghostly presences in the town due to Father Rentaria losing his power after accepting a bribe from Pedro Paramo. The father has sinned himself, resulting in his inability to offer forgiveness. Damiano looks forward to a time "when those sounds fade away," but it remains unclear when that time might arrive.

The ambivalent way in which time and death are treated in the novel is conveyed at the moment of Juan's death. "There was no air; only the dead, still night fired by the dog dogs of August. Not a breath. I had to suck in the same air I exhaled, cupping it in my hands before it escaped. I felt it, in and out, less each time...until it was so thin it slipped through my fingers forever. I mean, forever" (57). Juan's death is inevitably a confusing and unsettling moment because reason for his death is unclear. In his description of almost suffocating because of being in Comala, it is as if the town itself, is no longer a livable and breathable place, and it has deprived him of his own life. Juan could have been a ghost all throughout the duration of his narrative. In the repetition of his breath, "in and out, less each time," Juan's suffocation also reflects the ways in which the ghosts are forced to repeat the past over and over until their sins are atoned for. Until the cycle of suffering and sin is

broken, everyone is trapped in a state of suffering and repetition, which, evokes the idea of Comala being purgatory itself.

The novel ends with Pedro Paramo's death scene. " He fell to the ground with a thud, and lay there, collapsed like a pile of rocks" (124). Just before his death, Pedro fears " the nights that filled the darkness with phantoms. That locked him in with his ghosts. That was his fear" (124). In this final image, the reader senses that Pedro is trapped, like all the other ghosts in the cycle of suffering that defines the novel. Pedro has physically died, but his soul is still in purgatory, even though he has become aware of his need for redemption. In this unsettling and at times confusing novel, Rulfo emphasizes that time and death are forces that we cannot fully control or even fully understand.