

# The motif of water in juan rulfo's pedro paramo

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## **Pedro Paramo: The Illusive Man**

Juan Rulfo's novel Pedro Paramo takes place in Comala where a man named Juan Preciado visits the town in hopes of finding Pedro, his rich father. He soon learns from the ghost residents that Comala, once a prospering land full of dreams, is now a dried up land where people's illusions are as dead as the people there. As the residents begin to tell Juan the story of Comala we begin to see that as the hope decreases in the town so does the loss of water and its use in the book. The motif of water is therefore being used as representation of Pedro's, change from an attitude of hope to one of desperation to illustrate how illusions eventually lead to this concept of disappointment.

In the beginning of the novel water is seen as a positive force because it is associated with the satisfaction and joy of Pedro's life. When we are first introduced to Comala we see it as a prospering and beautiful place ruled by the rich father of Pedro Paramo, don Lucas. The first time we encounter Pedro Paramo is when he is remembering the happy moments of his relationship with Susana. However, right before this we are given a description of rain that are "spattering the ground with gleaming drops that dulled as they sank into the earth"(9). This vivid and positive but at the same time destructive description foreshadows how the characters especially Pedro will move from a state of illusion to one of disillusion since the rains are first pictured as "gleaming" and this wonderful thing but this illusion is soon destroyed once they sink into the earth which makes them disappear. This disillusion state however hasn't happen yet and the imagery of water is

still connected to a sense of beauty and happiness since the narrator continues to describe the water as “[spreading] an iridescent sheen” and as being “sparkling” (9). Rulfo uses this bright and fluorescent imagery to show how Pedro's life is still in this illusive state of happiness and joy. Right after this description we are reassured that the water imagery mirrors Pedro's life and emotions because the author mentions how Pedro was thinking about Susana and her “aquamarine eyes”(9) which is another instance where the author relates Pedro's happiness, in this case his love for Susanna, with that of water imagery. Pedro Páramo's happiness is clearly represented by the water imagery and his soon to be disappointment is also beginning to be shown in it even though he has not yet experienced events that are going to lead him to his state of disappointment.

Furthermore, water starts to become very dark and gloomy in the eyes of the reader and Pedro because it begins to symbolize the loss and the destructive influence of Pedro Páramo. The positive phase of the water imagery first comes to an end when Pedro is thinking of the day that Susana left. Pedro is seen listening and looking at the “raindrops [that] were threading down like tears”(11) while he was thinking about Susana. The fact that the raindrops are described as tears and are seen going down makes water seem very sad and since Pedro is the one viewing them like this they reflect the overwhelming feelings that Pedro has because of his loss. This sadness is the first event that we see Pedro become disillusioned and therefore sets the stage for future disappointment and sadness in his life. This grief that is shown in water sets the stage for Pedro's father don Lucas' death and Pedro's rise to power which is introduced by the water motif. Rulfo tells of

their being an “endless dripping” and of “the urn [overflowing], spilling water onto the wet earth”(19) once Pedro's father don Lucas dies. This overflow and falling of water give a negative connotation to water and mimics the spilling of blood which foreshadows the killings that will follow because Pedro has finally risen to power. This includes Pedro's ordered execution of the people who attended the wedding where his father was killed. In addition, the fact that this is after the grief of his loss of Susana shows how he is and will eventually respond negatively to his disappointment because he will try to achieve his illusion with his newly gained power. However, this gain of power does not last long and will soon begin to diminish as Pedro nears death.

Eventually, the diminishing and eventual disappearance of water begins to underline Pedro's decreased influence and the loss of hope for change. This diminishing effect is first seen when the sound of rain is described as “deaden”(64) while in a conversation that involves Susana talking about Pedro. The fact that the sound of rain is described as “deaden” reflects how Pedro's power has become less intense especially in terms of his control of Susana because of her rejection of him. Losing control will eventually begin to bring disappointment to Pedro's life because Susana is his love and mostly his only happiness in life. Later, water is seen to have disappeared “but the wind remained” and at “night...it moaned without ceasing”(67). Water has now vanished but wind has taken its place since it's the only thing that “remained” and it is always moaning at night which reflecting how Pedro's grief is getting to him and how his hope for Susana love and acceptance is vanishing just like his own power since moaning is seen as an

expression for mental or physical pain. Pedro's power and hope is eventually destroyed when he is killed and he "collapsed like a pile of rocks" (90). Pedro no longer has any power since he is now dead and no longer has the hope to love because Susana has died also which is why he collapses like a pile of rocks with no trace of water or hydration. The pile of rocks symbolizes a lack of water and therefore the lack of hope and this concept of disillusion because he never achieved this illusion that he was wishing for which was the love of Susana.

Pedro's illusion of happiness and love came to an end just as water ceased to exist because of the great loss he suffered in both power and love. The losses throughout his life led to his downfall because they triggered his hate and selfishness. Rulfo successfully shows the tragic consequences of a human character based on illusion and although this is more prominent in Pedro it is shown in all other characters of the book with many motifs including water. Rulfo uses this concept to also successfully critique how society in general likes to fill themselves with illusions that only end up disappointing them and sucking up their lives just like how Pedro wasted his life trying to achieve this false hope of love with Susana but ended up being killed by his own son and letting the town go into a complete drought. The loss of water is a reflection of loss of hope and therefore a gain of disappointment because water is closely tied to the emotions and power of Pedro since as Pedro became more destructive with his power the water became more violent but as it disappeared so did the water and his hopes of Susana's love with it.