# Pedro Páramo

## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JUAN RULFO

Mexican writer Juan Rulfo was born in rural Jalisco, just across the state border from Comala, and raised in the state capital of Guadalajara. His family were conservative landowners who suffered during the Mexican Revolution and Cristero War. These events, which marked him for life, form the historical backdrop to his work. In fact, Rulfo's father was murdered in a dispute over land during this period. Rulfo moved to Mexico City after secondary school and briefly attended the National Military Academy, but he ended up working as a government clerk instead. He spent his evenings and weekends reading and attending literature classes at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). He also co-founded and published many stories in the literary magazine *Pan*. From 1946-1952, he worked as a traveling salesman for the Goodrich tire company, which allowed him to revisit the rural settings of his childhood that ultimately dominated his work. He finished both *The Burning Plain and Other Stories* (1953) and *Pedro Páramo* (1955) during a fellowship at the Centro Mexicano de Escritores. After releasing his two principal works just two years apart, Rulfo published virtually nothing and stayed out of the spotlight for the rest of his life. He won the inaugural Xavier Villaurrutia Award for *Pedro Páramo* in 1955 and the National Prize for Arts and Sciences in Linguistics and Literature in 1970, among many other awards. In addition to writing fragments of further novels and a number of screenplays, Rulfo split the rest of his life between government service in the protection of indigenous groups and various literary organizations, like the Mexican Academy of Letters. Rulfo has had a remarkable impact on Latin American literature, especially given how little work he produced during his lifetime. However he remains less known in the rest of the world, in part because his work—written in the rural dialects of poor farmers—is so difficult to faithfully translate.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Although the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920 and the Cristero Rebellion of 1926-1929 appear mainly in the background of *Pedro Páramo*, they are both pivotal events in the history of modern Mexico. The Revolution broke out after the tyrannical president Porfirio Díaz claimed to win another term in the fraudulent election of 1910. A revolt broke out in protest and ousted him a year later. His opponent Francisco Madero replaced him but met a similar fate two years later, as did his successor, the general Victoriano Huerta. From 1914-1915, Mexico fell into a bloody civil war between three group: the Zapatistas, the Villistas, and Carrancistas (the Carrancistas were most conservative group, who eventually won). To maintain the other groups' support, Carranza ensured that some radical reforms were included in the Mexican Constitution of 1917. But small-scale conflicts continued throughout the country, even after the moment generally considered the end of the Revolution, the election of Álvaro Obregón to the presidency in 1920. The government faced widespread resistance as it tried to consolidate its power over the following decades. In the central-western part of Mexico where *Pedro Páramo* is set, the Catholic Church's vehement opposition to the separation of church and state mandated in the 1917 Constitution led many religious groups to rebel. From 1927-29, they organized what is now known as the Cristero War (named after their battle cry, "*¡Viva Cristo Rey!*" or "Long live Christ the King!"). Many of their leaders were priests, and in *Pedro Páramo*, the priest Father Rentería leaves Comala to join this rebellion. The rebellion ended in 1929 after the government agreed to some of the Cristeros' demands. When church bells started ringing again in 1929, people across Mexico celebrated. This is almost certainly the inspiration for the episode that indirectly spells Comala's demise in *Pedro Páramo*: after Susana San Juan's death, Pedro Páramo has the church bells in Comala ring for several days, but the townspeople interpret this as good news (likely the end of the war) and celebrate instead.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Rulfo's other major work is the collection *The Burning Plain and Other Stories* (1953). His other novel from the 1950s, *The Golden Cockerel*, was not published until 1980. He reportedly destroyed the manuscript for another novel, and he left behind fragments of two others. He was also a prolific photographer and wrote several screenplays for the prominent film director Emilio Fernández. Although Rulfo did not invent the genre, *Pedro Páramo* is frequently credited with launching Latin American magical realism to international recognition, as it directly inspired the most famous magic realist novel, Colombian novelist Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967). García Márquez read *Pedro Páramo* over and over again—to the point of memorizing it—while writing his own masterpiece. Other important works of Latin American magical realism include Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits* (1982), Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of This World* (1949), and Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* (1989), among many others. William Faulkner was one of the most important influences on Juan Rulfo's writing; *Pedro Páramo* is often compared to Faulkner's *Absalom! Absalom!* (1936), in part because they share nonlinear narrative structures and lengthy

meditations on family and paternity. Other important novels set during the Mexican Revolution include Mariano Azuela's *The Underdogs* (1920), Carlos Fuentes's *The Death of Artemio Cruz* (1962), and Jorge Ibargüengoitia's *The Lightning of August* (1965). Finally, Juan Rulfo was a close friend to the Guatemalan writer Augusto Monterroso, who is best remembered for his short stories, collected in volumes like *Complete Works and Other Stories* (1959).

## KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Pedro Páramo*
- **When Written:** 1947-1954
- **Where Written:** Largely on the road as a traveling salesman (1947-1952), at the Centro Mexicano de Escritores in Mexico City (1952-1954)
- **When Published:** 1955
- **Literary Period:** Twentieth-Century Mexican Literature, Latin American Boom
- **Genre:** Latin American Postmodernism, Magical Realism, Mexican Historical Fiction, Mexican Revolutionary NNovel
- **Setting:** Comala, a fictionalized version of the real town of the same name in the state of Colima, Mexico.
- **Climax:** Juan Preciado's death, Susana San Juan's death, Pedro Páramo's death
- **Antagonist:** Pedro Páramo, Miguel Páramo, the Catholic Church, Abundio Martínez, the Mexican Revolution
- **Point of View:** First Person (Juan Preciado, Pedro Páramo, Susana San Juan) and Third Person

## EXTRA CREDIT

**Fictional Life for Real Ghosts.** The deceased protagonists of *Pedro Páramo* took their names from actual dead people—Juan Rulfo reportedly developed his characters by walking around cemeteries and selecting names and surnames from the gravestones he encountered.

**Multiple Titles.** Juan Rulfo changed this novel's title several times before finally punishing it as *Pedro Páramo*. He originally titled it *A Star Next to the Moon*, then changed it to *The Deserts of Earth*, and later decided to call it *The Murmurs*, which refers to the echoes of the past that populate the novel and scare Juan Preciado to death in its middle section. Rulfo ultimately had to change the title to *Pedro Páramo*, in part to avoid confusion with another novel published that year. This has profoundly shaped the way generations of readers have interpreted the novel by turning Pedro Páramo into its central character.

## PLOT SUMMARY

*Pedro Páramo* tells the story of Comala, a small town in rural Mexico, through 68 short fragments that frequently jump between different plots, moments, and narrators. At least initially, the novel can be divided into two main stories. In the first, Juan Preciado narrates his journey to Comala after his beloved mother's death in an attempt to find his long-lost father, Pedro Páramo. But instead of the lush, fertile town of his mother Dolores's memories, he finds Comala abandoned, dried up, and full of ghosts. In the second story, set in the distant past and narrated mostly in the third person, the destitute farmer Pedro Páramo manipulates and terrorizes the people of Comala until he seizes nearly absolute power over the town.

At the beginning of the novel, Dolores Preciado tells her son to visit Comala, find his father Pedro Páramo, and "make him pay [...] for all those years he put us out of his mind." Juan meets the burro driver Abundio Martínez on the scorching desert road to Comala, which is practically abandoned and lies "at the very mouth of hell." Abundio reports that Pedro Páramo is his father, too, and has been dead for years. When Juan arrives in Comala, the town seems empty, but there are voices and strange beings everywhere. A ghostly woman sends him to Doña Eduviges Dyada, an old friend of his mother's, who offers him a room in the back of her empty, half-destroyed house.

In fragments six through eight, the novel switches to the unrecognizable, lush Comala of the distant past. After a heavy **rainstorm**, young Pedro Páramo fantasizes about Susana, the girl he loves, and runs errands for his family. Back in the abandoned Comala of the present, Eduviges tells Juan Preciado about his mother's unhappy marriage to Pedro, which barely lasted a year. Later, they hear the ghost of Miguel Páramo's horse running around Comala eternally, consumed with guilt over Miguel's death. Back in the past, young Pedro's family worries that he won't work hard enough to pay off their debts, and then he learns that his father, don Lucas Páramo, has died.

Sections 13-16 recount the funeral of Miguel Páramo, Pedro's malicious son, from the perspective of local priest Father Rentería. Father Rentería refuses to bless Miguel, who killed his brother and raped his niece Ana, until Pedro Páramo brings him a fistful of gold coins. Father Rentería needs the money to survive and keep running the church, so he performs the blessings but is tormented with guilt. He regrets refusing to bless Eduviges Dyada after her suicide; she was generous and pure, but penniless.

The novel briefly returns to the present, where Juan Preciado cannot sleep because the ghost of Toribio Aldrete keeps shrieking in his room. A woman named Damiana Cisneros explains what's happening and invites Juan to stay with her. The novel then flashes back to Pedro Páramo, still a young man, plotting to wipe out his debts. First, he sends his henchman Fulgor Sedano to arrange his marriage with Dolores Preciado, who owns most of the debts he owes. When she accepts, these debts disappear, and he gets all her land. Then, Pedro sends

Fulgor to falsely accuse his neighbor Toribio Aldrete of falsifying land claims. They kill him a few days later, and Pedro takes his land.

Fragments 24-36 return to Juan Preciado, who hears a number of disconcerting voices and echoes during his first night in Comala. He follows Damiana Cisneros until she mysteriously disappears, and he then hears a farmer and young woman recount the Páramos victimizing them. An unnamed woman takes Juan to a dilapidated house, where he sleeps fitfully, unable to tell his dreams from reality. A moody man named Donis and Donis's sister, who is also his wife, speculate about what he's doing in Comala.

The next day, Donis's sister tells Juan that she has locked herself inside for years because she is terrified of the town's ghosts. Juan rests all day, but the voices—including his mother's—return at nightfall. Soon, Donis's sister appears to melt into mud, and Juan starts to suffocate from fear and the stifling August heat. He loses consciousness, then finds himself dead and buried in a grave alongside a poor beggar woman named Dorotea. She explains that he died of fright, and he blames "the murmuring" for killing him. He tells Dorotea that he came to Comala in hopes of finding Pedro Páramo, and she tells him that hope is deadly—she, too, spent her whole life blinded by hope, looking for a son who never existed.

Fragments 37-42 intertwine various moments of death and mourning. Before his death, Miguel Páramo hires Dorotea to bring him women, and Dorotea explains that she gave up on life when Father Rentería told her that God would never forgive her. When Miguel dies, Pedro remembers his father's death but does not mourn. Meanwhile, Father Rentería is consumed with guilt. He remembers convincing Pedro to care for Miguel after his mother died in childbirth. (Pedro fathered countless children in town but refused to recognize the others.) Father Rentería visits the neighboring town of Contla to make a confession, but Contla's priest says his sins are unforgiveable. He later tells Dorotea the same thing.

The novel reintroduces Susana San Juan, Pedro's childhood love, whom Juan and Dorotea overhear murmuring in a nearby grave, reminiscing about her mother's death. Dorotea tells Juan that Susana was Pedro's last wife, and Pedro was so devastated by her death that he shut down all of Comala, eventually leading to its ruin. (The last third of the book retells this story in depth.)

In fragments 43-46, Susana and her father, Bartolomé, return to Comala from the remote mountains where they lived for many years. Pedro reveals that he never stopped loving her and wanted to own all of Comala so that he could give her anything she ever wanted. When the Mexican Revolution made it too dangerous to keep mining in the mountains, he persuaded her and Bartolomé to move to Comala, knowing that Susana would stay but Bartolomé would inevitably return to his mine. When he does, Pedro has him killed.

Some time later, Susana is married to Pedro, and her caregiver, Justina Díaz, finds her stuck in bed, as usual, haunted by dreams and hallucinations. When Justina reports that Bartolomé has died, Susana is actually relieved. She remembers once finding a skeleton in his mine. In another scene, Father Rentería (or his ghost) visits Susana to console her after the death of her first husband, Florencio.

Meanwhile, the Mexican Revolution is starting, and rebels kill Fulgor Sedano near Comala. Pedro doesn't care. He's mostly worried about Susana, who is always stuck in bed with her seemingly traumatic visions. Actually, she's reliving memories of freedom: she reminisces about swimming in the ocean and being with Florencio, the only man she's truly loved. Pedro bribes the rebels with money and reinforcements, even getting his own henchman, El Tilcuate, put in charge. (He eventually gets killed, but not until many years later, when Comala is already on the verge of ruin.)

On the eve of Susana's death, everyone seems to know what's coming. Even two old ladies named Angeles and Fausta, who have never met her, figure it out when they see the light out in her window. Father Rentería visits Susana with the communion, but she kicks him out. She wants to die alone, in peace. When she does, the church bells ring for days to commemorate her. But the townspeople throw a wild party because they think the bells are announcing some good news. Pedro Páramo is furious—so furious that he decides to shut Comala down and let everyone die. He sits down in his chair and bitterly resolves never to get up. He spends the rest of his life remembering Susana's death and murmuring to himself as Comala slowly falls into ruin.

In fragment 67, the narrative suddenly returns to the burro driver Abundio Martínez, whose wife has just died after a lengthy illness. He sold everything to try and help her, so now he can't even afford to give her a funeral. Worst of all, Father Rentería ran away to fight in the Cristero Wars, so Abundio's wife didn't get her last rights and won't get into heaven. Devastated, Abundio buys liquor and starts wandering around Comala.

On the outskirts of town, Abundio runs into Damiana Cisneros and Pedro Páramo—the father who abandoned him. He's convinced the Devil sent them (although Damiana says the same thing about him). Drunk and delirious, Abundio attacks them with a knife, killing Damiana and leaving Pedro barely alive. The novel's last fragment, though, tells a different story. Damiana's still alive, and Pedro gets up from his chair, thinks of Susana, and realizes he's dying before "collaps[ing] like a pile of rocks."

## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Juan Preciado** – Juan Preciado is one of the novel's three main protagonists, along with Pedro Páramo and Susana San Juan. His narrative voice dominates the first part of the novel, until his death around halfway through. *Pedro Páramo* begins with Juan Preciado explaining that he came to Comala to fulfill his mother Dolores Preciado's dying wish: that he track down his father, Pedro Páramo, and take revenge on him by claiming his rightful inheritance. But when he arrives in Comala, he learns that the town has long since been abandoned and Pedro Páramo has long since died. He spends the next quarter of the novel meeting the ghosts of various people who lived and died there, learning about the town's history from these ghosts, and finally taking shelter with Donis's sister and getting caught up in vivid dreams. Just when he's planning to leave Comala, the murmurs of the town's endless ghosts overwhelm him and frighten him to death. He spends the rest of the book as one of these ghosts, buried in a grave with Dorotea, listening in on other dead people's conversations. At the beginning of the novel, Juan Preciado looks like an archetypal male protagonist: he is an estranged son seeking to prove himself by journeying into the underworld and confronting his father. Even his last name, which means "valuable" or "prized," makes it clear that he's the chosen one. But Juan's epic journey soon turns on its head when he dies without fulfilling his mission and instead cedes his portion of the narrative to the voices of Comala's forgotten ghosts. His narrative gives way to that of Susana San Juan, whose last name fittingly links her with Juan's first name. In transforming from hero into antihero, Juan Preciado undertakes a journey that Rulfo truly believes to be universal: the transformation from purposefulness to meaninglessness and from hope to despair.

**Pedro Páramo** – Pedro Páramo is one of the three protagonists of the novel along with Juan Preciado (Pedro's son) and Susana San Juan (Pedro's childhood sweetheart). He can alternately be viewed as a villainous embodiment of pure evil, a godlike paternal figure, or an unlikely protagonist in the novel that's named after him and largely structured around Juan Preciado's search for him. When Pedro's father, Lucas Páramo, is brutally and senselessly killed at a friend's wedding, the young Pedro seeks revenge by murdering everyone who attended the event. Then, he takes control of his father's Media Luna Ranch and sets out to accumulate money, power, land, and women in Comala by any means necessary. He marries Dolores Preciado to cancel his family's debts and steal her land, orders his henchman Fulgor Sedano to kill innocent farmers like Toribio Aldrete over phony lawsuits, and even bribes militia leaders to protect his interests during the Mexican Revolution. Eventually, Comala literally becomes Pedro's family and personal property: he not only owns everything in town, but also fathers basically all the children born there (although he recognizes none of them except Miguel). But he is still not satisfied: he remains fixated on Susana San Juan, whom he desperately wants to marry. She agrees but turns out to be trapped in her own mind, haunted by some past trauma and unable to communicate with him. Pedro is devastated: he was fundamentally wrong to think that true love could be bought and sold. After Susana's death, he spends the rest of his life sitting in his chair, dead inside and frozen in place like a rock, watching Comala die before him. He dies two slightly different deaths in the novel's last two fragments: in one, Pedro's illegitimate son Abundio Martínez kills him in a desperate rage, and in the other, Pedro simply "collapse[s] like a pile of rocks." This refers to his name, which is significant: Pedro (Peter in English) comes from the word for "rock," and a *páramo* is a moor or barren plain. It's no coincidence that Pedro turns Comala's fertile valley into an arid wasteland by the end of the novel and himself turns into stone.

**Susana San Juan** – Susana San Juan is one of the novel's central characters along with Pedro Páramo (her second husband) and Juan Preciado (one of Pedro's many illegitimate sons). Her return to Comala and marriage to Pedro Páramo are the most significant plotline in the book's second half. Susana is born and raised in Comala, where she and Pedro are childhood friends. But her mother dies when she is young, and she follows her father, Bartolomé, to the Andromeda mine in the mountains. It's unclear whether Bartolomé is really her father at all, or whether their relationship is sexual as well as familial. In adulthood, Susana marries a man named Florencio, and she never falls out of love with him, even though he dies young. She returns to Bartolomé at the Andromeda mine, but when armed conflict breaks out in the area around the beginning of the Mexican Revolution (1911), they return to Comala, and she insists on marrying Pedro in order to get away from Bartolomé. She lives out the rest of her life locked inside her room and her imagination. Bedridden, she constantly relives both pleasant and traumatic memories. Once she dies, her ghost does the same thing in her grave, while the ghosts of Dorotea and Juan Preciado listen to her from a distance and try to reconstruct her story. Because Susana is so lost in her own mind, she and Pedro never establish communication during their marriage; indeed, Susana only ever talks directly to Justina, her dear friend and longtime maid. Susana and Pedro represent opposite principles. She is associated with **water**, and he is associated with stone; she is dynamic and spontaneous, while he develops elaborate plots to control others; she is emotional, and he is unfeeling. The circumstances of her last days represent the way beauty, creativity, and freedom of thought are fundamentally indestructible but are often stifled and stunted by power, order, and hierarchy (especially patriarchy). Pedro's attempts to win Susana's heart through bribery and coercion are doomed to fail, which shows that the human love and freedom that Pedro destroys have an infinitely greater value than the gold and property he gains in the process.

**Dolores Preciado (Juan's Mother)** – Dolores is Juan Preciado's mother, who dies in the novel's opening paragraph. On her deathbed, she urges Juan return to her hometown and his

birthplace, Comala, and claim his rightful inheritance from his father, Pedro Páramo. Throughout her life, she frequently told Juan about her fond memories of Comala, which was lush and fertile in her youth. Juan is astonished, then, to find that the town has since been turned into a barren wasteland. In Comala, Juan finally learns his mother's life story: she married Pedro Páramo out of naivety—he just wanted her family's land—and then left Comala forever to escape Pedro's abuse. The voice of her ghost briefly reappears in later parts of the novel, but she is not fully able to make contact with Juan, even after he dies in Comala. As a result, other maternal figures—Eduviges Dyada, Damiana Cisneros, Donis's sister, and Dorotea—take over for her, and the city of Comala itself becomes his family and point of origin. It's no coincidence that these women's names all start with (or prominently feature) the letter "D," just like Dolores's. Juan's journey to Comala is therefore in large part a quest to symbolically reunite with his deceased mother, both by literally finding her ghost (if she returns upon her death) and by better understanding her life story.

**Abundio Martínez (The Burro Driver)** – Abundio is an *arriero* (burro or donkey driver) and illegitimate son of Pedro Páramo who appears twice in the novel, once near the very beginning and once near the very end. At the beginning, Abundio is the first person Juan Preciado meets on the way to Comala. Abundio gives him some essential background information: Comala is abandoned and "sits on the coals of the earth, at the very mouth of hell," and Pedro Páramo has been dead for years. Eduviges Dyada later tells Juan that Abundio is deaf, but this did not appear to be the case when Juan met him. Abundio is, however, clearly *dead*—Juan meets Abundio's ghost, not the man himself. At the end of the book, agonizing over the death of his beloved wife Refugio, Abundio buys alcohol from Inés and Gamaliel Villalpando. He then wanders to the Media Luna Ranch, where he begs Pedro Páramo for money for Refugio's funeral and gets in a bloody confrontation with both Pedro and Damiana Cisneros (who's taking care of Pedro). Abundio appears to kill both Pedro and Damiana, but there are many contradictory ways to interpret this passage—for instance, Damiana may or may not survive, and Pedro appears to die a totally unrelated death in the novel's next and last fragment. Despite appearing very little in the novel, Abundio is an incredibly important character: he not only slays the novel's principal villain and guides Juan into the underworld of Comala, but he also serves as a character foil for both Juan and Pedro. Like Juan, Abundio is Pedro's illegitimate son, seeking a kind of inheritance or recognition from the father who abandoned him. After his wife's death, Abundio kills Pedro out of despair and fury: he loves his wife so much that he cannot bear the fact that Pedro, who is incapable of genuine love, has ruined everything in Comala and denied him the means to give his wife a decent burial.

**Eduviges Dyada** – Eduviges is an old friend of Dolores Preciado and her ghost takes in Juan Preciado when he arrives in Comala. In her life, Eduviges is generous and loving. Several men in Comala (like Miguel Páramo) ask her to bear their sons, and she obliges, but then they refuse to recognize these children. Devastated, Eduviges commits suicide. In death, she goes on "wandering like a lost soul" in Comala, hoping that someone will remember or pray for her. When Juan visits, he realizes that his mother never told him about Eduviges despite their long friendship. This is further proof that Eduviges has been forgotten and edited out of history. She tells Juan that she could have been his mother, because she secretly took his mother's place with his father, Pedro Páramo, on his parents' wedding night. This makes it clear that she is a kind of symbolic, surrogate figure for his mother.

**Miguel Páramo** – Miguel is Pedro Páramo's malicious, criminal son, and he is the only of Pedro's countless illegitimate children whom he actually treats as his own. This was never Pedro's intent; Miguel's mother dies in childbirth, and Father Rentería refuses to raise Miguel in the Church, so Pedro makes Damiana Cisneros, who works for him, take care of the boy. Once Miguel comes of age, he is just as manipulative, evil, and misogynistic as his father. He rapes numerous women, including Father Rentería's niece Ana, and murders others, including Ana's father. He's remorseless, and his Pedro denies Miguel's crimes. Fulgor Sedano even complains that Miguel arrogantly leaves his horse saddled up and waiting outside the Media Luna Ranch. Ultimately, Miguel dies when riding this same horse to his girlfriend's home in the neighboring town of Contla, but he just sees that everything has turned to smoke and doesn't even realize that he's died until he gets back to Comala and talks with Eduviges Dyada. His death creates a moral crisis for Father Rentería, who knows that it is immoral to pray for Miguel to go to heaven but gets a healthy bribe from Pedro to do so. For Pedro, Miguel's death creates no such crisis: he suspects that he is being punished for his sins but does not feel remorse. Whether it's the product of genetics or the result of his turbulent childhood, Miguel's wickedness and total lack of moral sense shows that Pedro Páramo's evil is contagious.

**Lucas Páramo** – Lucas is Pedro Páramo's father, who lives and dies deep in debt, despite his honesty and dedication to his Media Luna Ranch. He worries that Pedro is too lazy and dishonest to keep the Media Luna alive. Don Lucas dies in Pedro's youth, when someone shoots and kills him by mistake at a wedding. Furious and unsure who to blame, Pedro retaliates by killing all the wedding's attendees, marking the beginning of his long reign of terror in Comala.

**Father Rentería** – Father Rentería is Comala's priest, who faces a grave moral dilemma—and chooses wrongly—after Miguel Páramo's death. Father Rentería not only understands that Miguel was a vicious criminal; he also personally suffered from the man's crimes: Miguel killed Rentería's brother, and when Miguel visited Rentería's niece Ana under the pretext of

issuing her an apology, he raped her instead. But when Pedro Páramo gives Father Rentería a fistful of gold coins, he obliges and says last rites for Miguel. He is consumed with guilt because he refused to pardon morally pure people who could not afford these rites, like Eduviges Dyada, whose only sin was committing suicide out of despair. Father Rentería visits neighboring Contla to confess his own sins, but Contla's priest tells him they are unpardonable. In fact, Father Rentería has consistently condoned and enabled Pedro's underhanded tactics—like marrying Dolores Preciado just to erase his debts to her—and helped Pedro accumulate all the land and wealth in Comala. He tells Contla's priest that it's "God's will," but Contla's priest calls out his blatant lie. On one level, Father Rentería's abuse of power is a metaphor for how the Catholic Church facilitated colonialism and supported the concentration of land and power in Mexico and throughout Latin America. But it also shows how no one is immune to corruption: while Pedro simply has no moral conscience whatsoever, Rentería does Pedro's bidding *in spite of* his clear moral conscience. At the end of the novel, Father Rentería leaves Comala to fight in the Cristero War. Beyond reinforcing the sense that the Church exists to serve the powerful rather than the virtuous, this action also leaves the town without a priest. As a result, anyone who dies in Comala (like Abundio Martínez's wife, Refugio) has to forego their final rites and, possibly, lose their access to heaven. In other words, Father Rentería leaves Comala forsaken: when he abandons the town, so does God.

**Ana** – Ana is Father Rentería's niece. After Miguel Páramo kills Ana's father, he visits her under the pretext of apologizing. But instead of issuing her an apology, he climbs through her window and brutally rapes her. When she recounts these events in detail to Father Rentería, though, he questions her experience in order to soothe his own conscience. Because of her suffering at Miguel's hands, Ana comes to embody both the violence of the Paramo family's patriarchy and the profound guilt that Father Rentería feels for constantly enabling and defending the Páramos.

**Fulgor Sedano** – Pedro Páramo's right-hand man, Fulgor runs the Media Luna Ranch and does Pedro's dirty work for much of the book. Fulgor initially works for Pedro's father, don Lucas Páramo, to whom he is fiercely loyal. But when don Lucas dies and Pedro takes over control of the Media Luna Ranch, Fulgor is initially put off by Pedro's arrogance and disregard for morality. However, he still does what Pedro asks: he delivers a false lawsuit to Toribio Aldrete, kills him, and arranges Pedro's marriage to Dolores Preciado. Later on, he also kills Bartolomé San Juan at Pedro's behest, even though Pedro continues talking down to him as though he were a child. Although he worries that Miguel Páramo is corrupt and lazy, Fulgor never processes that he felt the same exact way about Pedro before going to work for him. Accordingly, not only does Fulgor get totally corrupted by Pedro's lawlessness, but he also lacks the self-awareness necessary to understand what is happening to him. Despite all the evil he commits, Fulgor is an ambivalent and deferential man: he does Pedro's bidding despite recognizing that he is a morally corrupt, violent madman. When Fulgor dies in the early stages of the Mexican Revolution, Pedro doesn't even mourn his death.

**Bartolomé San Juan** – Bartolomé is Susana San Juan's father. After Susana's mother dies, Bartolomé takes the young Susana from Comala to the Andromeda mine in a remote area in the surrounding mountains. When violence breaks out in the area, he returns to Comala with Susana, reluctantly accepting the house that Pedro Páramo offers them. While Bartolomé resists Pedro's request for Susana's hand in marriage, Susana insists on leaving Bartolomé to go with Pedro. She hints that Bartolomé may not be her real father and might have sexually abused her in the past. After Susana leaves, like many of the novel's other characters, he suddenly foresees the conditions of his own death: he realizes that he must return to the Andromeda mine to die. When he does, Pedro sends Fulgor Sedano to kill him. Bartolomé's ghost visits Susana, who actually celebrates his death. She recalls a particularly traumatic moment when Bartolomé lowered her into the Andromeda mine, and she found a man's skeleton at the bottom, in the same spot where he eventually died. Another example of how the past and present intermingle in *Pedro Páramo*, this episode suggests that Bartolomé was somehow dead and alive at the same time.

**Damiana Cisneros** – Damiana is a woman in Comala who works faithfully for Pedro Páramo throughout her life. She briefly has an affair for him, works in the kitchen at the Media Luna Ranch, and raises his son Miguel (and, briefly, one of his other illegitimate sons, Juan Preciado). She approaches Juan when he is staying in Eduviges Dyada's back room and offers to bring him to the Media Luna, but then she abruptly disappears when he asks if she is dead or alive, leaving the question unanswered. At the very end of the book, she is helping care for Pedro when Abundio Martínez confronts and stabs them both. That her downfall occurs while protecting Pedro suggests that she's being punished for selling out her conscience to work for him. Indeed, her relationship to Pedro exemplifies the multiple ways he oppresses Comala's women, and her meeting with Juan Preciado shows how the dead and the living become indistinguishable in Comala.

**Toribio Aldrete** – Toribio is Pedro Páramo's first unsuspecting victim, a landowner whose property borders the Media Luna Ranch. When Toribio starts putting up fences around his land, Pedro Páramo falsely accuses him of misrepresenting his property boundaries. Toribio sees this as a pathetic joke, but Pedro sends Fulgor Sedano to kill him and then presumably takes over Toribio's land. When Juan Preciado spends his first night in Comala in Eduviges Dyada's house, he hears the echo of Toribio Aldrete screaming in his final moments, asking for "a

hanged man's right to a last word." The fact that Toribio doesn't get one attests to Pedro Páramo's limitless capacity for evil.

**Damasio ("El Tilcuate")** – Damascio is a local man whom Pedro Páramo hires to lead a militia in Comala and protect his interests by fighting for various armed groups during the Mexican Revolution and Cristero War. Damasio's nickname, "El Tilcuate," refers to a notoriously vicious kind of black snake. His militia continually switches sides during the conflict, which reflects the way that, despite their varying ideals, the different groups that participated in the Mexican Revolution were motivated by money, power, and self-interest more than ideology or values. El Tilcuate eventually dies in the conflict, but Pedro Páramo hardly cares.

**Dorotea** – Dorotea is a destitute beggar woman who lives her life in Comala, searching for the son she falsely imagines she had (but who never really existed). Later, Miguel Páramo starts paying her to seduce local women for him in exchange for food at the Media Luna Ranch. It is heavily implied that she eventually commits suicide out of despair. However, her principal role in the novel is as the fourth and final symbolic maternal figure to Juan Preciado, who in turn represents the son she always sought after. After they die, they are buried together in the same grave, Dorotea in Juan's arms. Throughout the second half of the novel, their ghosts converse in this grave and listen to the murmurs of other dead people, especially Susana San Juan. In her life, Dorotea is invisible and powerless, almost entirely erased from the story of Comala (to the point that Susana's death scene leaves her out, even though she tells Juan she was present for it). But in death, Dorotea finally gets to speak her part and reclaim the voice she was denied.

**Donis** – Donis is one of the two naked people living in an abandoned house in Comala whom Juan Preciado meets in the middle of the novel, shortly before his death. Donis is matter-of-fact and unsentimental; while Donis's sister (who is also his wife) cares for Juan, he spends most of his time out and about in Comala, looking for a lost calf. He disappears one night while looking for the calf: apparently, he uses Juan's arrival as an excuse to abandon his sister and Comala forever. But he soon shows up to find Juan dead in the town's central plaza. A kind of inverted Adam and Eve story, Donis's incestuous relationship with his sister is evidence of the moral depravity that befalls Comala due to Pedro Páramo's rule.

**Donis's Sister/Wife** – She is a nameless woman who lives with Donis, who is both her brother and her husband, in an abandoned house in Comala. Juan Preciado encounters Donis and his sister almost at random after meeting Damiana Cisneros and wandering off in search of a road out of Comala. Although she and Donis initially worry about Juan's motives, Donis's sister takes care of Juan for virtually all of his time in Comala, although this takes up a comparatively small portion of the novel itself (since he spends most of it sleeping). In this sense, she is the third of the four characters who act as symbolic substitutes for Juan's mother, Dolores, in the novel (along with Eduviges Dyada, Damiana Cisneros, and Dorotea). Tortured by her incestuous relationship with Donis, Donis's sister is convinced that her face is covered with purple marks that represent her sin. Out of shame and fear, she never leaves the house. But Juan doesn't see these purple marks or understand why she hasn't just left Comala. Symbolically, she and Donis represent a kind of distorted Adam and Eve—but instead of living in innocence in the Garden of Even, they're living totally alone in the wasteland of Comala, imprisoned by their own sin. The fact that Pedro Páramo fathers virtually everyone in Comala suggests that Donis and his sister might actually be related because they are both his children. This means that, in turn, Juan is also their brother—and when he sleeps with Donis's sister, he commits the same incest that initially repelled him. Arguably, this is Juan's ultimate sin and the one that leads to his death. But Donis's sister dies first: she melts into mud, reuniting with the earth and presumably becoming a ghost like the rest of Comala's residents.

**Angeles** – Angeles is an elderly woman who, along with her friend Fausta, sees Susana San Juan's light go off in the distance on the night of her death. Fausta and Angeles were busy decorating Comala's church for Christmas, which adds to the symbolism of their names (*angeles* means "angels" in Spanish).

**Fausta** – Along with Angeles, Fausta is one of the two elderly women who sees Susana San Juan's light go off in the distance while decorating Comala's church for Christmas. Unlike Angeles, whose name represents goodness and light (*angeles* in Spanish means "angels"), Fausta's name is associated with corruption and immorality. Her name indirectly refers to Doctor Faustus, the titular character of Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, who sells his soul to the devil in exchange for limitless knowledge. This connection to the corrupt Doctor Faustus may be a commentary on Pedro Páramo and/or Susana—while Pedro chooses wealth and power above morality (like Faustus chasing after forbidden knowledge), Susana agrees to live with the devilish Pedro Páramo (like Faustus selling his soul to the devil).

**Justina Díaz** – Justina is Susana San Juan's maid and dear friend, who takes care of her from infancy to the days leading up to her death. Justina is unfailingly loyal, even though Susana occasionally mistreats her (for instance, by yelling at her during her bouts of insanity). And when Susana and Pedro are married, Justina is the only person Susana will talk to.

**Gerardo Trujillo** – Gerardo Trujillo is the Páramo family's lawyer, who helps Pedro forge legal documents in order to snatch up land in Comala. Along with the rest of the town's middle class, Gerardo nearly leaves Comala during the Mexican Revolution. But Trujillo is forced to stay in town when Pedro Páramo refuses to cover his family's debts to him. He feels

humiliated and underappreciated, but he has no power to make Pedro act fairly.

**Inés Villalpando** – Inés is the owner of a small local store in Comala, who appears at the very beginning and very end of the book. At the beginning, she extends credit to the destitute Páramo family so that they can replace their broken mill. At the end, she sells alcohol to the Abundio Martínez, heartbroken and grieving his wife's death, shortly before he kills Pedro Páramo. Whereas she starts out in a position of power over Pedro Páramo but uses it to help empower Pedro's family, she ends up in the same conditions as she started, watching Comala deteriorate because Pedro uses his own power to take as much of the town's wealth as possible for himself. Nevertheless, Inés Villalpando is able to pass her store on to her son, Gamaliel, which illustrates the usual pattern of inheritance that Pedro Páramo otherwise disrupts in Comala.

**Contla's Priest** – He is the priest in the town of Contla, which neighbors Comala. After accepting a bribe and pardoning Miguel Páramo's soul even though he knows it's immoral to do so, Father Rentería visits Contla's priest to ask for advice and confess his own sins. Contla's priest tells him that his actions have been unpardonable and points out that Pedro Páramo's evil has poisoned all the land in the valley—to the point of making everything that grows there bitter. Because he genuinely upholds the Church's moral teachings, Contla's is a character foil for Father Rentería, highlighting his willingness to compromise the moral doctrines he is supposed to be upholding in order to serve his self-interest.

### MINOR CHARACTERS

**Pedro Páramo's Mother** – Pedro Páramo's mother appears briefly in the earliest flashback scenes of Pedro's life. She dies around the same time as her husband, don Lucas, before Pedro comes of age.

**Pedro Páramo's Grandmother** – She appears in the earliest scenes of Pedro Páramo's life, shelling corn and milling chocolate at the family's house. She later mourns her dead husband and tells Pedro about the importance of hard, honest work.

**Florencio** – Florencio was Susana San Juan's first husband, whom she remembers fondly. He dies long before she returns to Comala to live with Pedro.

**Gamaliel Villalpando** – Gamaliel is Inés Villalpando's son, who inherits her store and appears briefly at the end of the novel. When Abundio Martínez visits the store to buy alcohol, Gamaliel is snoozing on the counter.

## TERMS

Cristero War – The Cristero War was a series of military conflicts in central-western Mexico from 1926-1929 (including the state of Colima, where Comala is located, and its neighboring state of Jalisco, where Juan Rulfo was born and raised). The war began with protests against the Mexican Constitution of 1917, which officially declared the nation secular and sought to curb the Catholic Church's influence on politics and civic life. Eventually, these protests led to increasingly organized rebellions, which were often led by clergymen. In *Pedro Páramo*, the priest **Father Rentería** runs away from Comala to join the Cristero War.

Don/Doña – In Spanish, *don* (used for men) and *doña* (used for women) are honorific terms similar to the English titles Mr. and Mrs. or Sir and Madam.

Rebozo – A rebozo is a long woven cloth garment often worn by Mexican women and traditional associated with Mexican national identity.

## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

### DEATH, HOPE, AND DESPAIR

*Pedro Páramo* interweaves multiple stories set in the small Mexican town of Comala. In one, Pedro Páramo gradually amasses power until he owns the whole town and fathers everyone born there. In a second story, Pedro's childhood sweetheart, Susana San Juan, returns to Comala to marry him but lives out her final days bedridden and locked in her room. Many years later, in the novel's main frame story, Juan Preciado visits Comala after his dying mother, Dolores, asks him to track down his father, Pedro Páramo. Although he's initially hopeful, Juan finds Comala full of its former residents' ghosts, wandering endlessly in a kind of purgatory, without any hope for salvation. Eventually, Juan himself dies and becomes one of these ghosts. In *Pedro Páramo*, hope is a futile form of self-deception that ultimately leads to despair: it gives people a false sense of meaning, when in reality life and death are meaningless. Accordingly, for Juan Rulfo, human beings are stuck in a tragic dilemma with no right answer. They can strive for the impossible, despite the inevitability of failure and death, or they can accept the universe's meaninglessness and moral disorder.

The novel's characters fall into despair because their hopes—which represent the sense of meaning and purpose they feel in life—are inevitably dashed. This is particularly true of Rulfo's three protagonists. Juan Preciado goes to Comala because he "build[s] a world around a hope centered on the

man called Pedro Páramo." But Pedro is dead and Juan cannot claim his inheritance, so this world gets totally destroyed and he ends up with nothing to live for. Similarly, Pedro lives in a fantasy world, amassing land and power to try and woo Susana. When they finally marry, Susana appears to be incapacitated by some unexplained trauma. But privately, she is dreaming of a freedom she knows she will never achieve. Both Pedro and Susana live in service of a single hope—Pedro wants a blissful marriage with Susana, and Susana wants to live on her own terms. Pedro and Susana fail to achieve their conflicting hopes for reasons outside their control. Susana cuts herself off from the world until she dies, which dashes Pedro's hopes and leads him to do the same. He lives out his days sitting in his chair, frozen in despair. Ultimately, Juan, Pedro, and Susana's worlds all come crashing down when they realize that their fundamental hopes are unfulfillable.

Having long ago undergone the same process, the people of Comala live in a kind of permanent despair that illustrates the dangers of false hope. For instance, Eduviges Dyada spent her whole life trying to marry and mother children for the men of Comala, but all of them turned their backs on her, and she committed suicide out of despair. In the afterlife, she wanders around Comala endlessly with other lost souls who both recognize that they need prayers if they want to make it to heaven and harbor no illusions about ever getting there. If Juan, Pedro, and Susana's failures show that hope is a short-lived illusion that inevitably leads to disappointment, then the wandering lost souls of Comala's townspeople show that this disappointment is permanent and torturous.

Rulfo specifically implies that hope is futile because death is meaningless and random: it has no moral purpose in the universe. While the novel's characters try to give meaning to death, just like they give meaning to life through hope, this always fails. For instance, Dolores Preciado dies without avenging Pedro Páramo's theft of her property. And though Juan visits Comala to avenge it for her, he achieves nothing except his own death. He tries to restore the moral order of the universe, only to discover that there is no such order.

More frequently, the novel's characters try to make death meaningful through religion. But Comala's priest, Father Rentería, saves the souls of immoral people who pay him—like the murderer and rapist Miguel Páramo—instead of morally pure and well-meaning people like Eduviges and Dorotea, who have no money. Rentería promises that the afterlife will make up for the injustices these women experience, meaning that death will redeem life and restore the moral order of the universe. But ultimately, it doesn't: the evil make it to heaven and the benevolent get stuck in the purgatory of Comala, "sits [...] at the very mouth of hell." Dorotea and Eduviges die randomly, inexplicably, and meaninglessly. Feeling cheated and devastated, their spirits wander Comala eternally in despair. In fact, many characters die specifically *because* of despair—Juan, Pedro, Susana, Eduviges, and Dorotea all give up on life when their hopes are dashed and then die shortly thereafter. Juan even reports sighing and sadness as his mother's cause of death. False hope leads the novel's characters to disappointment, meaningless, and death, but the alternative is no better: eschewing hope from the start would mean accepting the meaninglessness of life and accomplishing nothing. (This would leave people like Pedro Páramo, who sits paralyzed in his chair for years, or the lost souls who wander Comala eternally.)

After dying, Juan Preciado tells Dorotea that "hope brought me here." She responds, "Hope? You pay dear for that." Here, "hope" is not the common Spanish word *esperanza*, but rather the more literary *ilusión*, which refers to an impossible, false hope based on misperception and misjudgment. In a sense, Rulfo sees all hope as *ilusión*: all human beings die with their goals at least partially unfulfilled. Death does not provide a meaningful closure to life, like in (most) literature and movies; rather, it just happens, leaving people's hopes unfulfilled and their life projects incomplete. The only way to live without risking disappointment is to accept this fact—and yet life without hope is stagnant and pointless. Rulfo thus suggests that everyone is doomed live out the same tragic pattern of hope, failure, and accepting despair.

## POWER AND MORALITY

In one of *Pedro Páramo*'s multiple intertwined plots, the title character rises from relative obscurity, as the son of indebted farmer Lucas Páramo, to own and fully control absolutely everything in his hometown of Comala. Rulfo's depiction of Pedro Páramo is in part a critique of the unequal, semi-feudal social structure that defined the rural Mexican society where he grew up. But it is also a critique of power in general: Rulfo shows that manipulation and ruthlessness offer a surer path to power than honesty and hard work. Not only does power attract morally corrupt people, but it also corrupts the people and institutions that possess it. When power gets increasingly centralized and directed to the goals of the self-interested people who wield it, Rulfo suggests, society accelerates toward moral decay.

Pedro Páramo's life shows how self-interested people ultimately gain power and twist it for their own purposes. Pedro's cruelty first becomes apparent when he marries Dolores Preciado just to get out of the massive debt his family owes her and steal her family's land. Pedro convinces Dolores that he is in love with her and asks her to marry him as soon as possible. (Actually, he sends his henchman Fulgor Sedano to make the arrangements, which shows how little he cares about Dolores.) Pedro's willingness to manipulate Dolores's feelings for personal gain is the first sign of his ruthlessness and thirst for power—and his sinister plot works out exactly as planned.

With Dolores's land now under his control—and Dolores living far away in Colima, with her sister and son Juan—Pedro Páramo sets about stealing the rest of the land in Comala. Rather than finding ways to legally buy up land, he uses the law as a tool for manipulation: he has Fulgor file a sham lawsuit accusing Toribio Aldrete of mismarking his land. When Toribio complains, Pedro tells Fulgor that, "from now on, we're the law." He sends Fulgor to kill Toribio, then takes Toribio's land once and for all. Using tactics like these, he gradually takes control of all of Comala. This shows how Pedro's total disregard for morality and the humanity of others is ultimately his greatest asset in gaining power—and, disturbingly, this suggests that power rewards the most cruel and ruthless people, not the most deserving rulers. In a particularly telling episode, a group of revolutionaries kills Fulgor and then threatens to take Pedro's land and redistribute it to the people of Comala. Rather than fight back, Pedro decides to buy out the militia: he promises them a huge sum of money (even though he never fully pays them) and sends one of his own men, El Tilcuate, to usurp control of the rebel group. The rebels stop threatening Comala and instead become Pedro's private standing army. In fact, they do not care who is funding them—they are more interested in fighting than standing up for any principles. This suggests that, to Rulfo, even the supposedly idealistic Mexican Revolution was not really about impassioned citizens seeking to pass democratic reforms, but actually about self-interested people like Pedro Páramo looking for another chance to grab power.

Pedro Páramo doesn't just scam the honest, morally upstanding residents of Comala out of their land and money—he also morally corrupts many of them (and the town itself) in the process. As a result, his unscrupulous corruption spreads like a disease. For example, Pedro bribes Comala's local priest, Father Rentería, into doing his bidding. Despite his powerful moral conscience, Father Rentería agrees to bless Pedro's wicked son Miguel after his death in exchange for payment—even though Miguel killed Father Rentería's brother and raped his niece Ana. Tormented by his decisions, Father Rentería visits the priest in the nearby town of Contla, who tells Rentería that he has turned the Church into an evil institution and lost his own moral way. While Rentería *knows* what is morally right, in other words, Pedro Páramo convinces him to put his self-interest first. Rentería isn't blind to morality: he willingly ignores it because he stands to profit, and he realizes what he's doing every step of the way. Eventually, Rentería joins the Cristero Rebellions—an informal war led by clergy against the new government that wants limit the Catholic Church's power. This further shows that, although it believes itself to be protecting justice and morality, the Church is really just a self-interested institution that does not practice the moral laws it preaches.

In fact, Pedro becomes the ultimate victim of his own immorality: after he accumulates all the imaginable wealth in Comala, he manipulates his childhood sweetheart, Susana San Juan, into marrying him. Tormented by trauma, Susana spends all her time locked in her room, and after she dies, Pedro realizes that he never truly got to live the life he wanted with her. He spends his remaining days sitting in his chair, totally empty inside, waiting for death. In other words, his wickedness took away the only thing that truly could have made his life valuable. In the process, he also totally corrupts Comala, turning it into the ghost town that Juan Preciado encounters at the beginning of the novel. When Susana dies and Pedro gives up on life, he leaves everyone in town landless and destitute, and the town transforms from a lush, fertile center of agriculture into an arid desert where nothing grows. Pedro quite literally destroys the beauty and abundance he wanted to possess in the first place.

Pedro Páramo's immorality even transcends the earth: it ensures that evildoers like his son Miguel are rewarded in the afterlife and the good remain in Comala forever, stuck in purgatory, cursed as ghosts. In a sense, for Rulfo, not even God truly upholds morality and fairness—rather, the whole universe is one big political machine, and yet living a morally and emotionally satisfying life requires staying as far as possible from power's clutches.

## HISTORY, MEMORY, AND NARRATIVE

In *Pedro Páramo*, Juan Preciado goes to his birthplace, the small Mexican town of Comala, to make sense of his past. He wants to find his father, Pedro Páramo, and honor the memory of his recently deceased mother, Dolores. But when Juan arrives, he realizes how little he really understands about the town. It's no longer the beautiful green valley his mother remembered, but a barren wasteland located "at the very mouth of hell," full of ghosts. These ghosts roam Comala forever, stuck in a kind of eternal purgatory. They represent the chapters left out of the town's history, and they give Juan a completely new perspective on his own past. However, they do not fill in all the gaps, since it is impossible to ever perfectly recall and comprehend the past. Rather, Rulfo uses Juan's journey to show how certain voices are always left out of the stories we tell about the past, which has profound consequences because these stories allow the past to live on in the present through myth, memory, and the written word. Accordingly, Rulfo shows that truly honoring the dead requires seeking out and telling the stories of people who have been ignored, forgotten, and erased from history.

The ghosts Juan Preciado meets in Comala represent these forgotten people, who are left out of official versions of history. When Juan Preciado arrives in Comala to learn about his mother's past, the first person he sees "disappear[s] as if she had never existed." Like many of the town's other ghostly residents, this woman is discernible but actively fading out of the story. Depicting the dead in this way allows Rulfo to show

how they are erased from stories over time, whether through forgetting or willful revision. Throughout the book, Juan hears the murmurs and echoes that these disappearing people leave behind. These traces of the past represent stories and knowledge about Comala that are gradually fading into obscurity and will soon be lost forever.

Curiously, even though Dolores constantly reminisced about her childhood in Comala, she never told Juan about most of the people whom he ultimately meets there. For instance, Eduviges Dyada claims that she was Dolores's best friend—but Juan says he's never heard of her. This suggests that one reason many souls end up staying in Comala eternally is that they are forgotten. In fact, almost none of the people Juan meets appear in the portions of the novel dealing with Pedro Páramo: their presence is practically erased from the history of the town, and their perspectives are totally forgotten. Indeed, by reading the two halves of the novel together, readers can see how the version of Comala's story told in the flashbacks actively erases the stories of the people Juan meets in the present. In other words, Rulfo clearly shows that there is no neutral way to narrate the past, as many stories about history emphasize powerful people (like Pedro Páramo) while rendering everyone else (like the rest of Comala) invisible.

However, the novel's structure and narrative voice show how the past can live on in the present. The novel's 68 nonlinear fragments frequently switch among different voices and eras. At first, Juan and Pedro narrate their respective plotlines. But Juan's story largely gets overtaken by the voices of Comala's ghosts, whom he overhears. Similarly, Pedro's story quickly shifts to the third person and refocuses on other characters like Fulgor Sedano and Father Rentería. Throughout the novel, voices from the past and the present intermingle, and Comala's ghostly residents live in a kind of timeless present as they constantly relive the events of their lives. As a result, it can be difficult to tell the past from the present, and that's the point: Comala's past is also its present, just as the past always lives on through memories; stories; and the emotional, institutional, and social marks that it leaves.

The novel's narrative voice also expands or compresses time to show how memory is a living story about the past, not an absolute, objective set of facts about it. For instance, Rulfo spends whole paragraphs on single moments, like descriptions of the **rain** or characters' introspection. Conversely, he expresses entire decades in even less space, like when the militia leader El Tilcuate tells Pedro that he is supporting a number of different leaders: Carranza (1913–1915), Obregón (1920), and Father Rentería's Cristeros (1926–1929). Rulfo uses this technique to illustrate how memory (or history) actually works: it mixes the distant and recent past, personal experience and information learned from others. History is a living body of information that continues to exist, echo, and transform in the present.

If human beings use narratives to keep the past alive, Rulfo suggests that truly doing justice to the past—honoring the dead, understanding the world as history has shaped it, and redeeming historical injustices—requires recovering forgotten voices. Juan eventually realizes that Comala's ghostly people are condemned to obscurity precisely because nobody is actively keeping their memories alive. Dorotea tells Juan that she is condemned to Comala until others remember her in their prayers: they can save her and help her move on simply by remembering her. This symbolizes storytelling's redemptive power, as a means of giving a voice to those who have been forgotten to history. But Juan Preciado also gets redemption for himself by digging into the past. He never meets his father or reclaims his property, but he does figure out what happened to Comala after his mother left and return to the place that created him, even if it costs him his life. He fills in the gaps in his understanding of Comala and himself.

On a broader level, the novel itself constitutes Juan Preciado's attempt to tell Comala's story so that its history is not forgotten. The novel gives Comala a kind of mythical second life after its abandonment. It also memorializes the traditional society and culture of Juan Rulfo's native rural Mexico and the landmark event of the Mexican Revolution.

## LOVE AND PATRIARCHY

From its opening lines, *Pedro Páramo* invokes the classical association between identity and paternity: Juan Preciado seeks out his estranged father, Pedro Páramo, in order to cope with his mother Dolores's death and claim the property that is his birthright. But Pedro Páramo is dead, and everyone in Comala is also Pedro's descendant, giving them an equal claim to Pedro's land. Juan learns that Pedro exercised absolute power over all the women and property in Comala—but then destroyed the town precisely by becoming its patriarch. Through his misogynist, possessive, patriarchal view of love and family, Pedro also erodes his own capacity to give, receive, or recognize genuine love. As a large-scale version of a traditional nuclear family structure, the town of Comala shows how patriarchal social and family structures, in which men possess and control women and property, are both profoundly violent and fundamentally self-undermining. Whereas Pedro Páramo treats his numerous wives, mistresses, and children like objects, other characters show that a different kind of love is possible: one that's genuine, selfless, and predicated on equality.

Pedro Páramo becomes Comala's patriarch by controlling land and women. Pedro spends much of his time cheating the townspeople out of their land—for instance, by suing and killing Toribio Aldrete. But, more insidiously, he also manipulates all the town's women into sleeping with him. He hopes that this will ingratiate them to him and ensure that all the children born in Comala are his. He turns the town into an extended family,

with himself as the all-powerful patriarch. But Pedro also refuses to recognize almost all of these children as legitimate heirs, which lets him avoid materially providing for them. Pedro forms his family in order to possess and control people—not for love, companionship, or posterity. But ironically, despite building up an enormous family, vast estate, and mythical legacy, he dies alone, without an heir. By taking patriarchy to an extreme—compulsively accumulating and controlling women, children, and property—Pedro shows the incoherency in the argument conventionally used to defend it: that men need absolute power over their families in order to protect them and pass an estate to their children. In reality, Pedro terrorizes and plunders his family rather than protecting and securing property for it.

Pedro's possessive concept of love also profoundly injures the women in his life. His cruelty shows how control and ownership are incompatible with genuine love. This is clearest in his relationship with Susana San Juan, the only woman he thinks he truly loves. First, Pedro ruthlessly exploits and oppresses Susana to convince her to marry him. First, he treats her as property and tries to trade her father Bartolomé a house in exchange for her. Bartolomé refuses, so Pedro kills him, leaving Susana with no option but to marry Pedro. In fact, she was willing to do so anyway, but only to get away from Bartolomé, who also mistreats (and possibly sexually abuses) her. Because they conceptualize love as control and possession rather than a reciprocal agreement based on genuine feeling, both Pedro and Bartolomé terrorize Susana, then still expect her to love them back. Traumatized, Susana locks herself inside and spends her life writhing around in bed, daydreaming about freedom and reminiscing about her first husband, Florencio.

But Rulfo doesn't play into harmful stereotypes about women by portraying Susana's behavior as crazy or frivolous—rather, he shows that Susana's fantasies are actually how she finds freedom from Pedro. Her favorite memory is **swimming** in the sea—first with Florencio, and then alone, which represents a vision of absolute freedom from male control. This shows that she can envision both love and freedom, but she understands that they are impossible to achieve with Pedro. In contrast, after Susana's death, Pedro lives out the rest of his days sitting on his chair, physically and emotionally frozen in place, fixated on the fact that he never got to live out the marital bliss he envisioned with Susana. While Susana responds to Pedro's control by shrinking into the only domain where she can truly be free—her fantasies—Pedro loses the ability to feel any sense of freedom at all, because his sense of love depends on depriving others of their freedom.

Despite the novel's general pessimism about love, some of its characters do offer a competing vision of love based on equality, respect, and consent, which offers a counterpoint to Pedro Páramo's patriarchal mindset. The clearest example of this mindset is the other protagonist, Juan Preciado, who goes to Comala to fulfill his mother's last wishes and make sense of the memories she used to recount to him. His journey is a pilgrimage in honor of the mother he loved, and he carries a photo of her in his pocket, against his heart, which symbolizes this love. The marginalized, maternal figures Juan Preciado meets in Comala—from Eduviges Dyada and Donis's sister to the beggar Dorotea—care for him selflessly. Even after Pedro Páramo has left them invisible and destitute in Comala, much like Susana, they are still capable of love, while he is not. Finally, Pedro's death also symbolizes genuine love defeating patriarchal cruelty. The burro driver Abundio Martínez—one of Pedro's numerous sons—stabs him to death in a fit of rage and grief over the death of his wife, whose terminal medical condition Abundio worked tirelessly to cure. Abundio's love for his wife, in other words, drives him to take revenge for his father's cruelty.

Rather than reinforcing the archetype that one's paternity defines one's identity, Rulfo instead undermines it. Pedro Páramo's vicious rise to power depends upon possessing land and women, and the cruelty he inflicts on both illustrates that the possessive love normalized under the patriarchal model of family is not real love at all. Pedro's downfall at the hands of his illegitimate sons—Abundio Martínez, who kills him, and Juan Preciado, who retakes the story of Comala from him—represents a victory for a more egalitarian view of love.

## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

### RAIN AND WATER

In the novel, rain represents the freedom, abundance, and harmony that Pedro Páramo gradually destroys as he turns the town's land from a means of sustaining life into a source of profit and power. Pedro's first memory, the earliest moment in the novel chronologically, begins with a long description of "water dripping from the roof tiles" after a rainstorm. Rulfo uses the contrast between the barren Comala of Juan Preciado's present and the abundant rain of Pedro Páramo's past in order to mark the jump between their two timelines.

For Comala itself, rain turns from a source of nourishment into an ominous and foreboding force, until it suddenly stops forever, giving way to the harsh winds and eternal drought that make Comala a barren wasteland. In Pedro Páramo and Dolores Preciado's memories, everything grows in Comala because of the constant rain and the fertile soil. But as Pedro takes control of the town, the rain (like the land it nourishes) becomes a source of oppression, not abundance: on one rainy day, all the townspeople are busy irrigating Pedro's fields, so

nobody buys anything at the market. Now, the rain impoverishes the vendors and oppresses the workers—like Comala itself, it's doing Pedro Páramo's bidding.

Just as rain symbolizes how Pedro corrupted and controlled Comala, it also represents how he robbed his wife Susana of her freedom. But the rain has additional symbolic significance when connected to Susana, as it symbolizes the richness of her emotional life. In his memories, Pedro daydreams about Susana while it rains, and after they marry, it rains in every scene focused on Susana. Just as rain makes soil fertile rather than dry and barren, the rain represents the richness of Susana's emotional life in contrast to Pedro Páramo's bleak, barren, power-focused worldview, which deprives love and beauty of their true value. In one memorable scene, Susana remembers the happiest moment of her life: swimming in the ocean, which represents the freedom she had before being with Pedro, but also fact that he can never take away her freedom of thought and her inner emotional world.

## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Grove Press edition of *Pedro Páramo* published in 1994.

### Fragments 1-12, Pages 3-24 Quotes

❝ I came to Comala because I had been told that my father, a man named Pedro Páramo, lived there. It was my mother who told me. And I had promised her that after she died I would go see him. I squeezed her hands as a sign I would do it. She was near death, and I would have promised her anything. "Don't fail to go see him," she had insisted. "Some call him one thing, some another. I'm sure he will want to know you." At the time all I could do was tell her I would do what she asked, and from promising so often I kept repeating the promise even after I had pulled my hands free of her death grip.
Still earlier she had told me: "Don't ask him for anything. Just what's ours. What he should have given me but never did… Make him pay, son, for all those years he put us out of his mind."

**Related Characters:** Dolores Preciado (Juan's Mother), Juan Preciado (speaker), Pedro Páramo

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 3

**Explanation and Analysis**

In the opening lines of *Pedro Páramo*, Juan Preciado recounts his fateful arrival in Comala at the behest of his dying mother. Although it soon takes a series of wildly different turns, the novel initially looks like a straightforward version of a classic story: a son's quest to learn about his past and reunite with his estranged father. And while Juan is certainly interested in doing these things, there are already telling clues that his quest is not as ordinary as it seems. For instance, he admits that he "would have promised [his mother] anything" on her deathbed, which means that he initially isn't even planning to go to Comala.

Further, Dolores Preciado's pleas are confusing and contradictory: she presents Juan's quest as one of revenge by asking him to reclaim "what's ours" and "make [his father] pay" but also suggests that he will be able to joyfully reunite with a loving father who surely "will want to know [him]." In other words, the opening paragraph already shows the deep contradictions in Juan's relationship to Pedro, who at once appears as a loving but absent father and as the vicious thief he eventually turns out to be. Dolores asks Juan to seek out a special relationship with his father—after all, the conventional wisdom goes that the bond between a father and son is somehow sacred, both personally and because it is the pathway for the inheritance of property. However, Pedro has innumerable illegitimate children, all of whom could claim the same kind of special relationship and right to his property that Juan is assuming. So ultimately, by means of his journey to Comala, Juan has to invert his assumptions about the meaning of paternity, and the reader has to abandon the notion that Juan is a traditional epic hero.

Another important feature of the novel's opening paragraph is that it immediately references the book's central theme: death. Like virtually all the people who die in this book, Dolores passes away without any clear explanation: the reader never learns what kills her, why she dies at this moment rather than any other, or even where she and Juan are. And yet, even though her death is meaningless, she also seems to know it is her time to go and strives to give her death meaning through her last act on earth—telling Juan to visit Comala. This converts his journey into a way of honoring her memory and giving meaning to her death, too, but these goals—like Juan's hope of meeting Pedro Páramo—soon turn out to be futile illusions.

I had expected to see the town of my mother's memories, of her nostalgia—nostalgia laced with sighs. She had lived her lifetime sighing about Comala, about going back. But she never had. Now I had come in her place. I was seeing things through her eyes, as she had seen them. She had given me her eyes to see. *Just as you pass the gate of Los Colimotes there's a beautiful view of a green plain tinged with the yellow of ripe corn. From there you can see Comala, turning the earth white, and lighting it at night.* Her voice was secret, muffled, as if she were talking to herself… Mother.

**Related Characters:** Juan Preciado (speaker), Dolores Preciado (Juan's Mother)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 4

**Explanation and Analysis**

As he approaches Comala, Juan Preciado realizes that it does not at all resemble the town his mother always reminisced about. She spoke of a fertile farming town, whose crops stood out against the surrounding valley. But Juan is marching into a barren desert, towards a depressing little town that looks abandoned.

The gap between Dolores Preciado's memories and Juan Preciado's initial impressions of Comala demonstrate how Pedro Páramo's tyrannical rule destroys the town: through his maniacal greed, he privatizes all the land for personal gain, impoverishes all the people who live there, and strips Comala of the abundance that Dolores remembers.

Dolores's memories are also significant because they entirely form Juan's initial picture of Comala and root Dolores in her past. For characters like Dolores Preciado and Susana San Juan, memory becomes both a way of holding onto the goodness in the past and a means of denying the disappointments of the present. Indeed, this passage is the first of countless times when Comala flatly disappoints Juan, delivering far less than he expects of it—later, he learns that his father Pedro Páramo isn't even alive anymore, and his parents' backstory is even more gruesome and traumatizing than he had anticipated.

"It's hot here," I said.

"You might say. But this is nothing," my companion replied. "Try to take it easy. You'll feel it even more when we get to Comala. That town sits on the coals of the earth, at the very mouth of hell. They say that when people from there die and go to hell, they come back for a blanket."

"Do you know Pedro Páramo?" I asked.

I felt I could ask because I had seen a glimmer of goodwill in his eyes.

"Who is he?" I pressed him.

"Living bile," was his reply.

And he lowered his stick against the burros for no reason at all, because they had been far ahead of us, guided by the descending trail.

**Related Characters:** Abundio Martínez (The Burro Driver), Juan Preciado (speaker), Pedro Páramo

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 6

**Explanation and Analysis**

On his way to Comala, Juan Preciado runs into the burro driver Abundio Martínez, who guides him to the town and briefly explains how it's been abandoned over the last several years. Their conversation is prescient and fateful: much of what Abundio says here as metaphor later turns out to have some semblance of literal truth. For instance, not only is Comala unbearably hot, but the town also can be seen as purgatory, sitting at the nexus between the earth and the afterlife, or "the very mouth of hell." This is because its residents are ghosts who wander the town eternally, waiting for prayers from the living to absolve them of their sins. (It's also possible to view Comala as a kind of living hell, especially since some of the dead never seem to get out, or even as heaven, as Dorotea briefly suggests later in the book.)

Similarly, it's no coincidence that Abundio calls Pedro Páramo "living bile," or that he hits his burros as they descend towards the underworld of Comala. At the end of the book, after he seemingly kills Pedro—who is his father, too—Abundio vomits bile. This suggests that he is symbolically purifying himself of his relationship to Pedro, vomiting out the "living bile" Abundio has inherited from him.

Throughout the book, Fulgor Sedano randomly cracks his whip in situations where Pedro threatens Fulgor's masculinity. While it's impossible to definitively say that Abundio hits his burros for the same reason, the resemblance is clear: as he thinks about his vile father,

Pedro, Abundio senselessly lashes out against his burros to prove that he's capable of using physical force—the only currency Pedro ever understood or respected. These are just a few examples of the book's endless web of detailed references and mirror images, which generally fall into a chiastic (X-shaped, or A-B-B-A) structure: the book abandons and then returns to the imagery and thematic material that define these opening scenes.

> As I passed a street corner, I saw a woman wrapped in her rebozo; she disappeared as if she had never existed. I started forward again, peering into the doorless houses. Again the woman in the rebozo crossed in front of me.

**Related Characters:** Juan Preciado (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 8

**Explanation and Analysis**

Shortly after he arrives in Comala, Juan Preciado passes a ghostly woman in the streets. This is the reader's first indication that Comala is not merely abandoned, and there is something far more sinister at work. Wrapped up in her rebozo, the woman is invisible and therefore anonymous, like so many of the voices Juan soon starts hearing in Comala. She "disappeared as if she had never existed," which is not just the same as being a ghostly presence: she is a ghost actively fading out of existence, which reflects the way that the voices and identities of Comala's residents become fainter and fainter over time, until they fade away into the chorus of voices that murmur constantly and indistinctly in the background. This is a metaphor for the way certain people—those who are anonymous, powerless, and dead—gradually fade from history unless their stories continue to be retold. This applies to Comala as a whole, too, and all the other towns like it whose hardships during the Mexican Revolution are too easily forgotten. So even when he sees the woman fading away, Juan gives her a kind of second life by bringing her into the story he narrates. In turn, as he gathers more detail about the ghosts he meets and reconstructs the life stories of his mother and father, he preserves their memories through storytelling and gives form and definition to their existence.

> Water dripping from the roof tiles was forming a hole in the sand of the patio. Plink! plink! and then another plink! as drops struck a bobbing, dancing laurel leaf caught in a crack between the adobe bricks. The storm had passed. Now an intermittent breeze shook the branches of the pomegranate tree, loosing showers of heavy rain, spattering the ground with gleaming drops that dulled as they sank into the earth. The hens, still huddled on their roost, suddenly flapped their wings and strutted out to the patio, heads bobbing, pecking worms unearthed by the rain. As the clouds retreated the sun flashed on the rocks, spread an iridescent sheen, sucked water from the soil, shone on sparkling leaves stirred by the breeze.

**Related Characters:** Susana San Juan, Dolores Preciado (Juan's Mother), Pedro Páramo

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 11-12

**Explanation and Analysis**

In its sixth fragment, the novel abruptly shifts plotlines. From Juan Preciado's search for his father in abandoned post-Revolutionary Comala, it shifts back to Pedro Páramo's earliest memories, many decades before, when Comala was still green and flourishing with life.

Rulfo begins Pedro's first memory with this lengthy description of the water after a rainstorm, which does more than simply mark the transition between present and past through what the reader already knows about Comala. This passage also introduces the association between water and the life, freedom, and motion that Pedro extracts from Comala. From the "dancing laurel leaf" and shaking branches to the active hens and sun drying up the pooling water, the Comala of the past is dynamic and full of life, whereas the Comala of the present is stuck in time, like a desert where it never rains and nothing ever changes.

This passage is also a characteristic example of how Rulfo bends time through his descriptions. *Pedro Páramo* is, on the whole, an extraordinarily bare novel: entire decades can pass in paragraphs much shorter than this one, and Rulfo pares down his dialogue to just the absolute essentials. His characters' silences often speak as much as their words. And yet this paragraph, like many of his characters' introspective episodes, expands time rather than contracting it. Rulfo does this to freeze particular moments in time. For one, this shows how memory works: it's nonlinear and gives priority to specific moments, the importance of which even the person remembering does

not understand. In addition, this adds to the sense that Comala and its residents are stuck in an eternal present, where the past and the present are one and the same, and there is no conceivable future at all. In a sense, the entire novel is narrated through memory—in which one moment can have far more importance than several decades—because this is how people make sense of history and history continues to hang over the present.

❝ Hundreds of meters above the clouds, far, far above everything, you are hiding, Susana. Hiding in God's immensity, behind His Divine Providence where I cannot touch you or see you, and where my words cannot reach you.

**Related Characters:** Pedro Páramo (speaker), Susana San Juan

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 13

**Explanation and Analysis**

In his childhood, Pedro Páramo yearns for his sweetheart, Susana San Juan, who has left Comala and moved to the mountains with her father, Bartolomé. While this may seem like an irrelevant, one-off moment, it's actually essential to the novel's plot: when Susana unexpectedly resurfaces in the second half of the novel, it becomes clear that Pedro's obsession with her never actually faded. Rather, she is the fixed, eternal, and unchanging anchor of his existence: everything he does throughout his life is for Susana, and his desire for her is the only thing that brings meaning to his actions. This is why, when she dies without giving Pedro the blissful marriage he desires (they marry but never communicate), Pedro is so devastated that he freezes in place, unable to fathom anything else in the universe that would be worth his while.

But there's something counterintuitive and deeply meaningful about this passage, which may not be apparent at first: Pedro's talking about Susana as though she were dead and in heaven, but she's not. She's just moved away for several years. Later, when she *does* die, Pedro *does* fantasize about her being in heaven. But these two moments seem to be mixed together here: Pedro as a child yearning for the faraway Susana is also Pedro as an old widower wishing he could reunite with her in heaven. Rulfo suggests that the past and the present always mix together, both in memory and history. These flashbacks might even be Pedro's memories—perhaps as he recalls them while sitting frozen in his chair, waiting for death. They're not necessarily faithful renderings of the past, which are impossible to achieve, since all knowledge about the past is based in memory, whether directly or indirectly.

Just like Comala's people, then, Pedro's mind is stuck in an eternal present: he never truly changes, develops, or moves on, even as everything around him is constantly evolving. While Rulfo refuses to explicitly draw conclusions from Pedro's stasis, it's possible to view it as a comment on the stability of people's personalities over time, the way that people's unchanging values truly define them, or the way that history and memory portray people selectively, as defined by certain essential characteristics.

## Fragments 13-23, Pages 25-41 Quotes

❝ Shooting stars. One by one, the lights in Comala went out. Then the sky took over the night.
Father Renteria tossed and turned in his bed, unable to sleep. It's all my fault, he told himself. Everything that's happening. Because I'm afraid to offend the people who provide for me. It's true; I owe them my livelihood. I get nothing from the poor and God knows prayers don't fill a stomach. That's how it's been up to now. And we're seeing the consequences. All my fault. I have betrayed those who love me and who have put their faith in me and come to me to intercede on their behalf with God. What has their faith won them? Heaven? Or the purification of their souls?

**Related Characters:** Ana, Miguel Páramo, Father Rentería

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 30

**Explanation and Analysis**

After he betrays his conscience and religious vows at Miguel Páramo's funeral, Father Rentería is tortured by guilt. He has pardoned the wicked Miguel, who killed Father Rentería's brother and raped his beloved niece Ana without ever expressing true remorse. And he did it all over a few gold coins, the last thing a priest should be worried about. Meanwhile, he's let good people die without their last rites, simply because they couldn't afford them. Father Rentería justifies this by telling himself that he took the money out of necessity, to feed himself and maintain the church. In other words, rather than performing charity for Comala's people, like a priest is supposed to, Father Rentería thinks *he's* really the one who needs charity, even if it has to come from Pedro Páramo, who embodies absolute evil.

There are a number of ways to interpret Father Rentería's moral conflict. It can be taken as proof that he really doesn't care about morality, and just joined the Church because it gives him power and privilege. If this is true, then like Pedro Páramo—and perhaps all other people—Father Rentería's moral beliefs don't actually motivate his actions. Rather, they're retroactive excuses for doing whatever happens to be in his self-interest. This would suggest that Rulfo has a fundamentally bleak view of human nature, in which power rules all else and Pedro Páramo is the logical culmination of this principle.

Alternatively, it's possible to take Father Rentería at his word and view his dilemma as a clash between two values: on the one hand, he needs to uphold the Church's teachings, and on the other hand, he needs to make sure the parish survives in the first place. Because of his material needs, he's unable to totally fulfill his moral mission in Comala. He agrees to work with the wicked Pedro Páramo, thinking that it's worth it for the sake of the greater good. But he eventually becomes corrupted, too, and ends up doing the opposite of what he originally intended: spreading evil, not morality.

❝ "Tomorrow morning we'll begin to set our affairs in order. We'll begin with the Preciado women. You say it's them we owe the most?"
"Yes. And them we've paid the least. Your father always left the Preciados to the last. I understand that one of the girls, Matilde, went to live in the city. I don't know whether it was Guadalajara or Colima. And that Lola, that is, doña Dolores, has been left in charge of everything. You know, of don Enmedio's ranch. She's the one we have to pay."
"Then tomorrow I want you to go and ask for Lola's hand."
"What makes you think she'd have me? I'm an old man."
"You'll ask her for *me*. After all, she's not without her charms. Tell her I'm very much in love with her. Ask her if she likes the idea."

**Related Characters:** Fulgor Sedano, Pedro Páramo (speaker), Dolores Preciado (Juan's Mother)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 36

**Explanation and Analysis**

One of the most important reasons Juan Preciado goes to Comala is that he wants to understand where he came from: he wants to see the place and learn how his parents came together and eventually broke up. Although the novel never clarifies whether Juan *also* overhears the flashback scenes that fill in details from Pedro Páramo's past, this scene reveals the depressing reality about his parents' marriage. Pedro Páramo and Dolores Preciado didn't marry because they were in love or wanted to start a family. Rather, Pedro realized that marrying Dolores would be the easiest way to get himself out of debt. He managed to seize all her family's property too, which he saw as a bonus.

What's jarring about Pedro's plot is that he inverts the normal hierarchy between love and material property. Usually, people need money so they can sustain the things that make life worth living—like family, art, community, and especially love. People merge their properties when they marry and bequeath their assets to their children because they assume that, once they die, this will allow their loved ones to sustain themselves. In other words, most people view love as distinct from money and property, and they assume that money and property would be worth sacrificing for the sake of true love.

But for Pedro Páramo, it's exactly the opposite: not only does he care primarily about his family's debts, but in fact he manipulates Dolores precisely because he knows that she will value love above money. He even sends the Media Luna Ranch administrator, Fulgor Sedano, to do the dirty work he's unwilling to do himself—as though proposing marriage were beneath him. When he tells Fulgor to claim Pedro's "very much in love with" Dolores, he's using Dolores's morality against her: he's saying that, because he loves her and love matters more than property, she should give him all her property. In other words, he's not only rejecting the moral belief that people are more valuable than material objects, but he's actively undermining that morality all around him by making it clear that he has no respect for people. This forces others to adapt and, slowly but surely, leads to the total corruption and ruin of Comala.

## Fragments 24-36, Pages 41-61 Quotes

❝ 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.

**Related Characters:** Juan Preciado

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 41

**Explanation and Analysis**

Everywhere he goes in Comala, Juan Preciado hears echoes of the past. Anonymous, disembodied voices call out, seeking to share their stories. The speakers hope that this will lead someone to pray for them and help them trade the purgatory of Comala for heaven. Of course, their very anonymity suggests that they have already been forgotten. Therefore, their echoing voices are at once traces of their existence in the past, evidence of how this past constantly affects and underlies the present, and a last ditch effort to make a distinct mark on the universe so that they can be remembered.

These voices remind Juan Preciado and the reader that there are innumerable different versions of history, all of which are based in the memories and personal experiences of those who lived in the past. Wherever one story is told, countless others are left out. The vast majority of the people who have lived have been forgotten and therefore erased from the collective memory of humankind. In Comala, Juan hears these voices, condemned to be forgotten, but strives to recover the stories they are telling to whatever extent possible. Most of the echoes remain anonymous and indistinct: they are still audible, but they get lost in the collective story of Comala. But others are distinct enough to follow. Most notably, Juan Preciado successfully recovers the stories of his namesake, Susana San Juan, and the beggar woman Dorotea.

"Look at my face!"
It was an ordinary face.
"What is it you want me to see?"
"Don't you see my sin? Don't you see those purplish spots? Like impetigo? I'm covered with them. And that's only on the outside; inside, I'm a sea of mud."

**Related Characters:** Donis's Sister/Wife, Juan Preciado (speaker), Donis

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 51

**Explanation and Analysis**

In a perplexing section near the middle of the novel, Juan Preciado takes shelter with an incestuous, naked couple who live in complete isolation and appear to be the last living human beings in Comala. Juan drifts in and out of sleep for the day he spends with Donis and Donis's nameless sister, who is also his wife. In fact, this is the vast majority of the time Juan spends in Comala, even if it takes up a relatively little space in the novel.

This section is full of biblical references, and specifically it can be interpreted as an inverted allegory for the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Like Eve, Donis's sister carries the burden of sin, which is a clear metaphor for the original sin that leads to humanity's fall from grace—just as Comala falls from a lush vibrancy that resembles the Garden of Eden to the practically apocalyptic state in which Juan finds it. In this passage, Donis's sister explains that she refuses to go outside because she is completely convinced that her sin is manifesting itself physically in the form of purple splotches all over her face. She doesn't believe Juan when he denies that these splotches exist, and she insists that she's a filthy "sea of mud" inside, too. Even though it's not apparent to everyone else, she is so haunted by what she sees as her own moral failures that she's unable to go on with her life.

Donis and his sister are also a microcosm of the gender dynamics at work in this novel as a whole. Donis's sister has no name of her own—her identity depends entirely on her brother's—and yet takes full responsibility for the couple's sin, while Donis could not seem to care less. This is exactly what happens to all the women Pedro Páramo mistreats throughout his life: he simply ignores them and doesn't care, while they're left to deal with the consequences of his misbehavior. He steals Dolores Preciado's land, and she's forced to flee Comala; he gets innumerable women in Comala pregnant, but refuses to support them or their children even though he has all the resources in the world; and when he does agree to take in one child, his son Miguel, he forces Damiana Cisneros to raise him. Rulfo clearly suggests that one of patriarchy's most insidious tools is that it shifts labor, poverty, and a sense of moral responsibility onto women in the name of love and family. Donis's sister blames herself for a sin she has jointly committed with her brother, just as Eduviges Dyada commits suicide in despair when the men of Comala scorn her and Dolores Preciado has to raise Juan all alone after Pedro steals all her land. It's ultimately significant that Juan Preciado is unable to redeem this theft, but rather ends up ceding his narrative to women characters—Dorotea and Susana San Juan—who become the true heroes of the novel's second half.

"Yes, Dorotea. The murmuring killed me. I was trying to hold back my fear. But it kept building until I couldn't contain it any longer. And when I was face to face with the murmuring, the dam burst.
"I went to the plaza. You're right about that. I was drawn there by the sound of people; I thought there really were people. I wasn't in my right mind by then. I remember I got there by feeling my way along the walls as if I were walking with my hands. And the walls seemed to distill the voices, they seemed to be filtering through the cracks and crumbling mortar. I heard them. Human voices: not clear, but secretive voices that seemed to be whispering something to me as I passed, like a buzzing in my ears."

**Related Characters:** Juan Preciado (speaker), Dorotea

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 58-59

**Explanation and Analysis**

At the novel's halfway point, Juan Preciado dies abruptly and becomes just one more of Comala's innumerable ghosts. He knows his cause of death, but in a way it's unfathomable: he drowns in the other ghosts' murmuring voices, which essentially absorb him into their community. In the world of Rulfo's novel, this shows that the dead can still reach out into the world of the living, just as the past continues to affect the present through stories and memories.

The fact that ghosts can reach out from beyond the grave to snatch Juan Preciado's life is not the only striking thing about this passage. When he runs out into the plaza—the very center of Comala, the proverbial heart of its community—Juan encounters the accumulated voices of history, which represent the story of the town itself. By extension, this also represents his own identity and his relationship to Pedro Páramo. The voices represent the town's story because they are anonymous and indistinct: they blend together, and they literally come out of Comala's buildings. These murmuring voices are the stories people who have lived and died in Comala, so they are a kind of collective history of the town. Further, Juan came to Comala in search of his own origin story and has learned that he descends from Pedro Páramo—the man who owned everything in town. This means that, symbolically at least, the town itself is Juan's inheritance—its story as much as its physical land. Of course, this applies to all of Pedro Páramo's children collectively, but this doesn't make it any less true of Juan. (After all, much property is held as communal inheritance in Mexico, largely as a result of the Mexican Revolution that happens during the events of this novel.) In other words, when he hears the symphony of murmurs, Juan is listening to the history that defines his own identity and has made his own existence possible.

"Why did you come here?"
"I told you that at the very beginning. I came to find Pedro Páramo, who they say was my father. Hope brought me here."
"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."

**Related Characters:** Dorotea, Juan Preciado (speaker), Pedro Páramo

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 60

**Explanation and Analysis**

After he dies and finds himself buried in a grave with Dorotea, Juan Preciado realizes that his hope of finding his father, redeeming his mother's memory, and claiming his inheritance in Comala was an illusion. Dorotea's response captures the novel's overall message about the dangers of hope. One after another, all of Rulfo's characters design their lives around a single hope: Pedro Páramo wants to own everything in Comala to impress Susana and win her heart, Dorotea wants to find her imaginary son, Dolores Preciado wants to get her land back from Pedro, and Juan wants to track Pedro down in Comala. They all fail and fall into misery because their hopes are unrealistic.

In fact, the translation can't fully capture what he says here: he says that "*Me trajo la ilusión*," and Dorotea replies, "*¿La ilusión? Eso cuesta caro.*" There's no good English word for *ilusión*—"hope" is just a rough approximation, but *ilusión* really means both "hope" and "illusion." So when Dorotea talks about "illusions" in the following lines, it's the same word again: *ilusión*. This word implies a kind of hope that is false from the beginning because it is based in misperception or wishful thinking. It's not like (realistically) hoping that you locked the door before leaving the house, but more like (unrealistically) hoping that you'll stumble across a winning lottery ticket on the sidewalk, just because that's such an enticing possibility.

So if Juan and Dorotea's hope is really *ilusión*—wishful thinking, mistaken for reality—then they never had any chance of getting what they wanted, so they were simply

setting themselves up for failure. At the same time, Dorotea says something very revealing when she proclaims that "my illusions made me live longer than I should have." Again, she's talking about *ilusión*—the same thing Juan's talking about when he says that "Hope [*ilusión*] brought me here." Somehow, Dorotea's *ilusión* kept her alive, and yet she also regrets this. She continued to live only because she was driven by her hope, and yet when this hope turned out to be a mere illusion, she realized that her life wasn't worth living. Rulfo isn't only suggesting that people's hopes inevitably let them down: he's also saying that these hopes are what give meaning to their lives in the first place. So people end up in a tragic dilemma: they can hope and inevitably fall into disappointment when their hopes prove illusory, or they can just give up on life altogether.

## Fragments 37-46, Pages 61-85 Quotes

"We live in a land in which everything grows, thanks to God's providence; but everything that grows is bitter. That is our curse."
"You're right, Father. I've tried to grow grapes over in Comala. They don't bear. Only guavas and oranges: bitter oranges and bitter guavas. I've forgotten the taste of sweet fruit. Do you remember the China guavas we had in the seminary? The peaches? The tangerines that shed their skin at a touch? I brought seeds here. A few, just a small pouch. Afterward, I felt it would have been better to leave them where they were, since I only brought them here to die."
"And yet, Father, they say that the earth of Comala is good. What a shame the land is all in the hands of one man."

**Related Characters:** Contla's Priest, Father Rentería (speaker), Pedro Páramo

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 72

**Explanation and Analysis**

Plagued by guilt, Father Rentería visits the priest in neighboring Contla to confess his sins. But Contla's priest tells him that he's corrupted the Church beyond repair and, worse, contributed to the physical and spiritual corruption of Comala itself. Indeed, by consorting with Pedro Páramo, Father Rentería has helped spread a moral rot that has even reached Contla: now, the soil only produces bitter fruit. It's as though the earth itself has been corrupted by Pedro Páramo's wickedness, or is revolting against his tyranny. This passage offers the first clear sign that Pedro's monopoly on land and power in Comala is destroying the land itself. Of course, this process eventually culminates in Comala becoming the inhospitable desert that Juan Preciado encounters at the beginning of the book. This passage also shows that Father Rentería's moral compass continues to slip as he is tempted by power. While he calls the bitter fruit a "curse," Contla's priest points out that the problem is human, not supernatural—it's Pedro Páramo and the thugs (including Rentería) who defend him in exchange for cash.

I waited thirty years for you to return, Susana. I wanted to have it all. Not just part of it, but everything there was to have, to the point that there would be nothing left for us to want, no desire but your wishes. How many times did I ask your father to come back here to live, telling him I needed him. I even tried deceit.

**Related Characters:** Pedro Páramo (speaker), Dorotea, Juan Preciado, Bartolomé San Juan, Susana San Juan

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 82

**Explanation and Analysis**

After Juan Preciado dies and gets used to being dead and buried underground, he and Dorotea start hearing Susana San Juan telling her life story from a nearby grave. In turn, the flashback scenes start filling in other elements of this story, which becomes the main plot for the rest of the novel. When Susana and Bartolomé plan their return to Comala from the Andromeda mine, Pedro Páramo's relentless thirst for power finally starts to make sense. At the beginning of the book, he was daydreaming about flying kites with his best friend and crush, Susana. But he's never stopped thinking about her, and he's spent 30 years plotting to win her heart. This is why he swindled everyone in Comala out of their money and land: he "wanted to have it all" and be able to give Susana "everything there was to have."

In other words, Pedro loves Susana so much that he wants to *buy* her hand in marriage—and he doesn't see a hint of irony in this. For years, he manipulated women like Dolores Preciado into sleeping with him and giving him land and money by claiming to be in love with them. Now, it turns out that he was doing all this precisely *for the sake of love*. But over the years, by mixing love up with power and material possessions, he's lost the ability to see what's abundantly

clear to the reader: even if Pedro has all the money in the world, Susana will never love him, because he's a cruel tyrant who destroys all the beauty he tries to possess. In other words, although he thought that accumulating wealth would prove his love for Susana and get her to love him back, in reality, it's made him totally incapable of genuine love.

## Fragments 47-59, Pages 86-108 Quotes

"Hand me that, Susana!"
She picked up the skull in both hands, but when the light struck it fully, she dropped it.
"It's a dead man's skull," she said.
"You should find something else there beside it. Hand me whatever's there."
The skeleton broke into individual bones: the jawbone fell away as if it were sugar. She handed it up to him, piece afterpiece, down to the toes, which she handed him joint by joint. The skull had been first, the round ball that had disintegrated in her hands.
"Keep looking, Susana. For money. Round gold coins. Look everywhere, Susana."
And then she did not remember anything, until days later she came to in the ice: in the ice of her father's glare.

**Related Characters:** Susana San Juan, Bartolomé San Juan (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 91

### Explanation and Analysis

In this complex and deeply allegorical passage, Susana San Juan is reliving a particularly traumatic memory—possibly the memory that has left her permanently anxiety-ridden and stuck in bed. When she was living at the Andromeda mine with her father, Bartolomé, he asked her to go down inside and look for gold, but she found a man's skeleton instead. While there are many ways to interpret this passage, some of the most important considerations in it are its use of time, its incest symbolism, and its commentary on Mexican history.

First, this passage comments on the circular nature of time in *Pedro Páramo*. It's possible that the skeleton she finds in the mine is actually Bartolomé's. The reader already knows that Bartolomé dies in the mine, after Pedro Páramo sends Fulgor to kill him there. Similar to how Pedro imagined Susana in heaven in the passages describing his childhood, this passage suggests that Susana is pulling up her father's bones while he is right there, above her. She is both predicting and coming to terms with his death. So this passage again suggests that the past and present coexist because the past is the foundation for the present and memories of the past determine how people navigate the present.

It's also possible to read this passage as a complex allegory for incest and sexual abuse, which the novel repeatedly implies might have been the true nature of Susana and Bartolomé's relationship. Susana is palpably uncomfortable while Barotlomé barks orders at her, and she ends up reluctantly giving over pieces of the skeleton—parts of the human body—one by one. Then, she passes out and forgets what happens. It's possible that this is a memory of horrific sexual abuse, transformed into the setting of the mine in order to seem intelligible.

Finally, it's notable that Bartolomé constantly asks Susana to look for gold in this passage, but he's perfectly satisfied when she digs up bones instead. This is significant from a historical perspective: this passage is one reason that scholars have often read this book as a complex reckoning with Mexican national identity. As a modern nation, Mexico was arguably founded on turning bones into gold. The Spanish murdered and enslaved its indigenous population in order to profit—specifically, they made enslaved people extract as much gold and silver as possible from mines like La Andromeda, then exported it all to Spain. In Europe, these resources became the foundation of the modern global capitalist economy, which continues to operate on the same principle. Namely, workers in developing countries (like Mexico) do hard labor for very little pay, and the goods they produce and resources they extract largely flow to Europe and North America, where they are sold and traded for enormous profits. But these profits never benefit the people who actually extract the wealth and produce the goods, kind of how like everyone in Comala works tirelessly so that Pedro Páramo can sit around and watch his wealth constantly increase. It's no accident that Susana and Bartolomé are working in a mine, centuries after the Spanish left. In this sense, the cruelty of Pedro Páramo's rule in Comala is really an extension of the colonial plunder that lies at the heart of Mexican nationhood and was defined through the Mexican Revolution (the historical backdrop to this book).

"I went back. I would always go back. The sea bathes my ankles and retreats, it bathes my knees, my thighs; it puts its gentle arm around my waist, circles my breasts, embraces my throat, presses my shoulders. Then I sink into it, my whole body, I give myself to is pulsing strength, to is gentle possession, holding nothing back.
"'I love to swim in the sea,' I told him.
"But he didn't understand.
"And the next morning I was again in the sea, purifying myself. Giving myself to the waves."

**Related Characters:** Susana San Juan (speaker), Florencio

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 96

**Explanation and Analysis**

After she returns to Comala and marries Pedro Páramo, Susana San Juan spends the rest of her days in bed, sometimes sleeping and sometimes writhing around in fits of what appears to be agony or insanity. But in this passage, which Juan Preciado and Dorotea overhear from their grave nearby Susana's, it becomes clear that Susana might have actually been fixated on memories of joy and freedom.

In this memory, Susana remembers swimming in the ocean, first with Florencio (her first husband) and later totally alone. She feels a sexual kind of ecstasy when she swims—in fact, this is the only depiction of sex in the book that shows it as pleasurable. In all other cases, sex appears in the form of assault, something coercive men impose on reluctant women. In other words, this is the only passage in which sex is about pleasure, not power, and this reflects the principle of freedom and love that Susana's character represents. So when Pedro essentially incarcerates her in the Media Luna Ranch and tries to love her by possessing her, she refuses to let him coerce her into giving up her freedom. Instead, she fantasizes about the past, when she truly *was* free. Now, the only freedom she has is her freedom of thought, but she refuses to give it up, and it's enough to prevent Pedro from destroying her humanity.

In death, Susana continues to do the same thing as in life: she runs through her memories, repeating them so that she can hold onto the best moments of her life. This also allows her to claim her own voice, as the narrator of her own life, and prevent others from defining her story for her. So not only is there no difference between Susana's life and death, but there's also no difference between her past and her present (which just consists of reliving the past). Like Comala itself, she refuses to live in linear time and instead insists on defining herself through the glories of her past, not the humiliation of her present.

"What can I do for you?" Pedro Páramo repeated. "Like you see, we've taken up arms."
"And?"
"And nothing. That's it. Isn't that enough?"
"But why have you done it?"
"Well, because others have done the same. Didn't you know? Hang on a little till we get our instructions, and then we'll tell you why. For now we're just here."
"I know why," another said. "And if you want, I'll tell you why. We've rebelled against the government and against people like you because we're tired of putting up with you. Everyone in the government is a crook, and you and your kind are nothing but a bunch of lowdown bandits and slick thieves. And as for the governor himself, I won't say nothing, because what we have to say to him we'll say with bullets."
"How much do you need for your revolution?" Pedro Páramo asked. "Maybe I can help you."

**Related Characters:** Pedro Páramo (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 97

**Explanation and Analysis**

In 1910, Mexico fell into a political crisis that gradually gave way to large-scale armed conflict throughout the country. The Mexican Revolution was not a straightforward civil war with two sides: rather, numerous rebel groups with different leaders, political ideologies, and material interests started fighting in different regions of the country. The conflict was particularly bloody in the central-western part of Mexico, where Comala is located and Juan Rulfo grew up. This is the historical backdrop to *Pedro Páramo*, and yet the Revolution only appears sparingly in the novel. The novel is in many ways an attempt to cope with the legacy of the Mexican Revolution—namely, the way it changed power structures (or didn't) and the way it affected traditional rural communities like Comala.

In this passage, rebel leaders visit Comala after killing Fulgor Sedano. They wanted to send Pedro Páramo the message that he can't keep hoarding land and must redistribute it among the people. However, when Pedro offers them some money, men, and guns, they conveniently forget this mission and start working with him instead. Like when he bribes Father Rentería to perform last rites for his

son Miguel, Pedro wins the rebels' support with money, not ideology or morality.

Yet again, Rulfo shows that power outweighs morality: people easily sacrifice even their dearest moral beliefs when it is in their self-interest. But he's also suggesting that the Mexican Revolution might have been driven more by self-interested bands of mercenaries looking to make some money than the political ideologies that they claimed to support. In other words, politics and war are also fundamentally about self-interest, not lofty ideals. Pedro's ability to bribe the rebels is Rulfo's way of pointing out that, while the Mexican Revolution is often remembered as a progressive, redistributive project, it left the power in the hands of the same elite, conservative class that Pedro Páramo represents.

## Fragments 60-68, Pages 109-124 Quotes

"I... I saw doña Susanita die."
"What are you saying, Dorotea?"
"What I just told you."

**Related Characters:** Juan Preciado, Dorotea (speaker), Susana San Juan

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 115

### Explanation and Analysis

In these short lines, which form their own independent fragment of the novel, Dorotea insists that she was present in Susana's room at the Media Luna Ranch when she died. But the reader has just encountered this story, and Dorotea was nowhere to be found. This is the point: poor, powerless, and filled with delusions, Dorotea was constantly forgotten throughout her life, and the moment of Susana's death is no exception. Dorotea is in the room, but nobody notices her—not even the scene's omniscient narrator. But she wants Juan and the reader to know she was present: now, in death, she finally has the chance to speak her piece.

Dorotea forces the reader to recognize that the story they've just read about Susana's death really only shows one part of the truth, and the whole, objective truth is impossible to capture. Furthermore, because there is no perspective that can access it, there's no sense in speaking of an objective truth about the past at all. Rather, there are endless overlapping perspectives, and the truths we think of as objective—the stories told in history books and newspapers, for instance—are just a certain kind of subjective truth, one that attempts to get as holistic as possible a picture of the past. But such stories invariably leave certain perspectives out—in fact, they usually leave *most* people's perspectives out, and only capture part of the perspectives they do choose to include. In this novel, Rulfo compiles different perspectives on the same events and purposefully points out the contradictions among them in order to show that memory is the only way we can know about the past, but it is inevitably imperfect, and numerous people's perspectives are left out of all the stories we tell. His solution is simple: find and listen to more voices, especially the voices of people who, like Dorotea, have been willfully ignored or silenced.

People began arriving from other places, drawn by the endless pealing. They came from Contla, as if on a pilgrimage. And even farther. A circus showed up, who knows from where, with a whirligig and flying chairs. And musicians. First they came as if they were onlookers, but after a while they settled in and even played concerts. And so, little by little, the event turned into a fiesta. Comala was bustling with people, boisterous and noisy, just like the feast days when it was nearly impossible to move through the village.
The bells fell silent, but the fiesta continued. There was no way to convince people that this was an occasion for mourning. Nor was there any way to get them to leave. Just the opposite, more kept arriving.
[...]
Don Pedro spoke to no one. He never left his room. He swore to wreak vengeance on Comala:
"I will cross my arms and Comala will die of hunger."
And that was what happened.

**Related Characters:** Pedro Páramo (speaker), Susana San Juan

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 116-117

### Explanation and Analysis

After Susana San Juan's death, the church bells ring to commemorate her, but Comala's residents misinterpret this as a celebration. They throw a giant party, and Pedro starts to feel like they're celebrating Susana's death. Even though he knows they aren't, he doesn't really care: Pedro is uninterested in the townspeople's intentions. Rather, the fact that they are celebrating when he is mourning proves

that there is a limit to his power. He cannot control the townspeople's lives, no matter how much power he amasses or how hard he tries. And this affects him strongly because he's just lost Susana, the only person he truly cared about, who defied him in precisely the same way: she refused to bend to his will and thus prevented him from controlling her mind and soul. The townspeople's freedom remind Pedro of Susana's, and he seeks to punish them in order to prove his power to himself.

There are two related historical explanations for this fictional event. The first is the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, a festival traditionally held on December 8th—the same day as Susana's death—and celebrated with particular reverence in the town of San Juan de los Lagos, which is near Comala. (Susana's name is clearly a reference to the town, and the complex story of the miraculous Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos connects in many ways to Susana's role in the novel.) The second is the momentous day in 1929 when, after the end of the Cristero War, church bells started ringing throughout Mexico for the first time in three years. While this is not consistent with the novel's timeline, it's likely that this day of celebration at least partially inspired this event in the novel. Regardless, it's clear that Comala's townspeople have cause to celebrate, but Pedro Páramo absolutely cannot stand the thought of them defying him.

❝ "I need money to bury my wife," he said. "Can you help me?"
Damiana Cisneros prayed: "Deliver us, O God, from the snares of the Devil." And she thrust her hands toward Abundio, making the sign of the cross.
Abundio Martinez saw a frightened woman standing before him, making a cross; he shuddered. He was afraid that the Devil might have followed him there, and he looked back, expecting to see Satan in some terrible guise.

**Related Characters:** Damiana Cisneros, Abundio Martínez (The Burro Driver) (speaker), Pedro Páramo

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 121

**Explanation and Analysis**

In the novel's second-to-last fragment, the grieving Abundio Martínez gets drunk to cope with his beloved wife's death the night before. He has no money to pay for her funeral or burial, and Father Rentería has long since left Comala, so she never got the last rites that could guarantee her a place in heaven. In desperation, Abundio stumbles his way to the Media Luna Ranch, where he confronts Pedro Páramo—the father who abandoned him—and Damiana Cisneros, who is taking care of Pedro as he ages. Abundio pleads for money, believing that a good burial could save his wife's soul. But Damiana and Pedro ward him off. Shortly after this passage, he attacks them with a knife and appears to kill them both.

This scene indirectly weaves together the stories of Juan Preciado, Father Rentería, and Comala itself into one fateful moment. First, Abundio's plea for money is clearly analogous to Juan Preciado's plan to visit Comala in search of the inheritance he has been denied. Both are Pedro Páramo's sons, but both are left with nothing, while Pedro controls all the land in sight. When Abundio kills Pedro, he is symbolically getting revenge for himself as well as Juan Preciado and all of Pedro's other disinherited children—who comprise the entire population of Comala. This revenge in turn represents a conflict between two versions of love: Abundio's profound, selfless love for his wife, on the one hand, and Pedro's possessive and controlling vision of love, on the other. Pedro has disinherited Abundio because he views love the same way he views owning money or property. But all the people in Comala are his children, and Miguel, the only one he didn't disinherit, died long ago. So Pedro's greed ends up being totally pointless: he accumulates wealth and property, but can't do anything with it because he's essentially cut everyone out of his will.

Meanwhile, Abundio has already sold everything he owns to pay for his wife's medical treatment. The fact that Abundio needs money in order to save his wife's soul suggests that, even if his love for his wife is heroic, the world runs on the kind of soulless power that Pedro Páramo embodies. It also recalls Father Rentería's corruption: he saves Miguel Páramo, who is evil, unrepentant, and wealthy, but not benevolent people like Eduviges Dyada, who had no money. Abundio's wife risks becoming another Eduviges unless he finds a way to pay for a funeral. This makes it all the more clear that the Church uses its power over people's souls to reinforce power hierarchies, not promote equality.

When Damiana makes the sign of the cross, she's not just invoking God to protect her: she's also implicitly referencing the structure of the novel as a whole. The story crosses back to where it started: with Abundio Martínez, on the outskirts of town. It started with the death of Juan Preciado's mother and ends with the death of his father. And there are numerous small correspondences between what Abundio tells Juan Preciado in the novel's opening pages and what he does here, at its conclusion. At the beginning of the novel, he even mentioned that he once met Pedro Páramo at a "crossroads," and he's clearly talking

about the event that's now being described at the end.

> He tried to raise his hand to wipe the image clear, but it clung to his legs like a magnet. He tried to lift the other hand, but it slipped slowly down his side until it touched the floor, a crutch supporting his boneless shoulder.
> "This is death," he thought.
> [...]
> Pedro Páramo replied:
> "I'm coming along. I'm coming."
> He supported himself on Damiana Cisneros's arm and tried to walk. After a few steps he fell; inside, he was begging for help, but no words were audible. He fell to the ground with a thud, and lay there, collapsed like a pile of rocks.

**Related Characters:** Pedro Páramo (speaker), Damiana Cisneros

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 123-124

**Explanation and Analysis**

The novel's final lines narrate Pedro Páramo's death, but they do so in a way that is completely inconsistent with the fragment that directly preceded it. In that earlier story, Pedro's illegitimate son Abundio Martínez killed him and Damiana in a fit of rage and grief, after his wife Refugio died and Pedro refused to help him cover the funeral costs. But here, Pedro simply falls apart, piece by piece, until he becomes his namesake: "a pile of rocks." ("Pedro" and its English equivalent "Peter" come from the Latin and Greek words for "rock.") Ultimately, it's impossible to know how Pedro truly died—and Rulfo challenges the reader to identify if it's truly possible to say that one story is truer or more significant than the other.

Crucially, while the previous scene portrayed Pedro's death as a justified act of revenge, this version shows him die for no reason at all. This is similar to how Dolores Preciado dies at the beginning of the novel and Juan Preciado at its midpoint. In all these cases, the inevitable human desire to explain death runs up against the brute fact that death is a physical, not moral, phenomenon. Even if Pedro can tell he's dying, he also knows his death is totally meaningless (at least in this version of the story). However, his life already lost meaning long ago, with the death of his beloved Susana San Juan. Afterward, he was left with nothing to live for. So when he dies and metaphorically becomes a "pile of rocks," this is no different from the way he lived out his final days: sitting on his chair, fixated constantly on the moment of Susana's death. In a word, Pedro was *petrified*: frozen in place, eternally unchanging, like a rock.

## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

### FRAGMENTS 1-12, PAGES 3-24

*Fragment 1.* On her deathbed, Dolores Preciado speaks to her son, Juan. She begs him to visit Comala, Mexico—the town where his father, Pedro Páramo, lives—and claim the inheritance that Páramo has denied them. Juan, the narrator, repeatedly promises to go even though he doesn't actually want to. But eventually, he becomes absorbed in fantasies about Comala and decides to pay it a visit.

*In light of his mother's death, Juan Preciado's journey to Comala takes on a number of different, overlapping meanings. It becomes a way for Juan to honor his mother's memory, take revenge on her behalf, investigate his own personal history, build a relationship with his father to symbolically mend his broken family, and secure a future for himself through the inheritance the traditional family would ordinarily promise him. Nevertheless, Juan's sense of being caught up in visions and fantasies foreshadows both the way that all these goals turn out to be mere illusions and the way his experiences in Comala distort his sense of reality.*

*Fragment 2.* On a sweltering August day, Juan Preciado meets a burro driver along the road to Comala. Juan notes that the "sorry-looking" town in the distance does not live up to his mother's nostalgic stories. She always dreamed of returning to Comala but never did. Juan explains to the burro driver that he is visiting his father. The confused burro driver mentions that no outsider has come to Comala for years, but he also promises that the town's residents will be happy to have a visitor. He asks Juan for his father's name—Pedro Páramo—and then recalls that he met Páramo once at a crossroads a long time ago. He asked Páramo for directions to Comala and followed him there. The burro driver admits that he's actually Pedro Páramo's son, too.

*There is already a stark mismatch between Juan's hopes for Comala and the "sorry-looking" reality he encounters, as the town is nothing like in his mother's stories. The place's utter emptiness and isolation indirectly reflects Juan's own sense of despair, abandonment, and rootlessness after his mother's death. The Comala his mother so fondly recalled no longer exists outside of her memories, as it's since turned into the wasteland. Pedro Páramo's name and the novel's title both reflect this desolateness: the name* Pedro, *like its English equivalent* Peter, *comes from the Greek for "rock," while a* paramo *is a "barren wasteland."*

As they descend down the road, it gets hotter and hotter. The burro driver promises that it will be worse in Comala, which lies "at the very mouth of hell." Juan asks about Pedro Páramo, and the burro driver calls him "living bile." In his damp chest pocket, Juan carries an old photo of his mother that he found in her kitchen. The burro driver explains that Pedro Páramo owns everything in sight, all the way to a distant hill on the horizon called the Media Luna—but that Páramo hasn't shared any of it with his sons. When they approach Comala, Juan asks why the town looks abandoned. The burro driver affirms that nobody lives there—not even Pedro Páramo, who died several years ago.

*In placing Comala "at the very mouth of hell" and revealing that Pedro Páramo died years ago, Rulfo associates Juan's journey into Comala with the archetypal story of a hero's descent into with the underworld—like, for instance, the hero Odysseus's journey into the underworld in the* Odyssey, *or Dante's journey through hell in* Inferno. *It's also possible that Comala represents not hell but purgatory, which is filled with purifying fire according to Catholicism. After all, it soon becomes clear that the town's residents are waiting for spiritual redemption through others' prayers. Further complicating Comala's significance, one character in the novel even calls Comala her personal heaven. Rulfo also associates Comala with indigenous Mexican religious traditions, like the Aztec underworld of Mictlán. Indeed, the place name* Comala *derives from* comal, *a traditional griddle used to heat tortillas, which suggests a strong connection between the town and Mexican cultural identity. By combining Catholic and indigenous imagery about the underworld, Rulfo shows the complexity and hybridity of contemporary Mexican identity. Similarly, by depicting Pedro Páramo as a long-gone plunderer who has nevertheless left a mark on everything in sight and dispossessed the town's people, Ruflo points out how Mexican society is fundamentally built on ruthless conquest and genocide. Juan Preciado and the burro driver represent Mexicans trying to reclaim their birthright, like so many did through revolution and political struggle in the early 20th century.*

*Fragment 3.* It's late afternoon, and most villages would be full of children playing outside, but Comala is so empty that Juan can hear his own footsteps echoing off the abandoned buildings. He glimpses a woman wearing a rebozo, but like a ghost, she vanishes and then reappears inside one of the houses' empty doorways. Juan asks her where he might find doña Eduviges, and the woman points him to the house next to the bridge. The woman looks and sounds human, and even though Comala looks empty, it *seems* full of life. Even Juan's own mind is teeming with life—his mother had promised that he'd be able to hear her memories speaking there. He wishes he could tell her that his trip to Comala has been a wild goose chase. He finds the house nearest the bridge and a woman invites him inside.

*Like Comala itself, the ghostly woman Juan first glimpses seems to toe the line between existence and nonexistence. He sees her in the process of disappearing, so he hunts after the traces she leaves behind in an attempt to capture her voice and make sense of her. This is exactly what he's trying to do with Comala and his mother's memories of it: he wants to keep traces of the past alive through storytelling. It later turns out that the novel itself is doing a version of the same thing by capturing Juan's voice, communicating Rulfo's own memories of his childhood, and depicting a rural way of life that was beginning to disappear in early 20th century Mexico.*

Earlier, on his way out of Comala, the burro driver invites Juan to visit his home deep in the hills. He tells Juan to find doña Eduviges and says that his own name is Abundio.

*The novel's sudden jump back in time hints at the much more extreme narrative twists and turns that are to come. They are not just there for dramatic effect: Rulfo tells the story out of order because this allows him to show how Comala's past and present commingle.*

*Fragment 5*. Back in the present, doña Eduviges Dyada invites Juan inside her house, which initially looks empty. But Juan soon realizes that it is full of shadows and "bulky shapes." She explains that other people have filled her house with their belongings but never returned for them. She invites Juan to sleep in an empty room in the back of the house.

*Like the town, Eduviges Dyada's house seems both empty and full at the same time, and the shadows and "bulky shapes" inside seem a little otherworldly. Indeed, these things are not ordinary physical objects or people, but rather reflections of some other realms—the past and the dead.*

Doña Eduviges knows Juan's mother, Dolores. Actually, she explains, Dolores has just informed her of Juan's visit—so recently that Eduviges has not yet had time to set out a mattress for him. Juan points out that his mother died a week ago, and doña Eduviges says that this explains Dolores's weary voice. She remembers that, as girls, she and Dolores were best friends and promised to die together. Eduviges remembers Dolores as beautiful and lovable, and she looks forward to seeing her again—hopefully in heaven, which people can reach by dying at the right time. Eduviges apologizes for ranting but says that Juan is like her own son. Juan thinks Eduviges might be crazy, but he is too tired to care, and he falls asleep.

*It seems impossible that Eduvige could know about Juan's impending visit, somehow receive this information from Dolores herself, and not know of Dolores's death. This highlights that, in Comala, the living and the dead are able to coexist and communicate in an unusual way. Just like Dolores Preciado's memories of Comala barely resemble the town that Juan encounters, Eduviges has fond memories of Dolores, but Dolores seems to have forgotten about Eduviges. Perhaps this is why she remains in Comala, which is now populated by lost, forgotten souls.*

*Fragment 6*. The novel jumps back to the distant past. Just after a **rainstorm**, water drips off a roof and a pomegranate tree, and then the sun comes out. A mother yells at her young son (later revealed as Pedro) for taking too long in the bathroom. He is busy thinking about flying kites with his crush, Susana, in the hills above Comala. He leaves and tells his mother that he was just thinking, but Pedro's mother says he should make himself useful. Pedro's grandmother needs help shelling corn.

*The novel suddenly shifts to the distant past and takes the perspective of a young Pedro Páramo, the man who grows up to be Juan Preciado's father. Because this change is not explicitly marked, it may seem confusing or random. However, the stark difference between the rainy, lush Comala of the past (the one Dolores remembers) and the arid hellscape that Juan Preciado has just encountered in the last few fragments makes it clear that this scene happens in another time.*

*Fragment 7*. When he arrives, Pedro grandmother says that all the corn is shelled, but there is still chocolate to grind, and asks where he's been. Pedro says he was watching **the rain**, but she seems to know that he was thinking about Susana, who is in heaven now. His grandmother sends him to clean the mill, but the boy explains that it's broken and proposes they buy another. The family has been penniless since the boy's grandfather died, but his grandmother agrees to buy the new mill.

*As corn and chocolate are traditional indigenous Mexican ingredients, they unmistakably mark Comala as a typical rural town and suggest that its decay over the years also implies a decay in the traditional culture it represents. Crucially, Pedro's belief that Susana is in heaven here later indirectly introduces a major wrinkle into the novel's timeline—she was actually very much alive during the time period described in this scene, and by bringing up her death, Pedro is either seeing the future (she dies late in adulthood) or narrating this scene in retrospect, from some time late in his own adulthood. Either way, time is blurry in this novel and the distinctions between the past, present, and future often collapse.*

Pedro's grandmother sends him to buy the mill from doña Inés Villalpando and inform her that the family won't be able to pay its debts until the harvest in October. On his way, Pedro's mother asks him to buy some black taffeta cloth and aspirin. Pedro takes a peso from the flowerpot and runs outside, where people call his name: "Pedro!"

*This passage explicitly reveals that the little boy in these last three fragments is a young Pedro Páramo. Despite his apparent wealth and power as an adult, Pedro clearly grows up in a poor, struggling peasant family. This leads readers to question how Pedro not only dug himself out of poverty but rose to the point of owning all the land in sight—and whether this might have something to do with the town eventually being abandoned.*

*Fragment 8*. Pedro listens to **the rain** and falls asleep thinking about Susana. It's still dark when he wakes. Pedro's mother and Pedro's grandmother are finishing their prayers across the house. His mother asks him why he didn't join them to pray for his grandfather, and Pedro replies that he is sad. After she leaves, Pedro can hear his mother sobbing. The church bells mark the hours all night.

*This is the second time Rulfo has associated the rain with Susana, Pedro Páramo's crush, and this association will continue throughout the novel. The rain is also what literally makes Comala fertile and green during Pedro's childhood, so his love for Susana is also connected to the town's survival. By portraying Pedro's grandfather's death through the religious rituals his family carries out, Rulfo shows that the Church's job in Comala is to honor the dead and facilitate their transition into the afterlife.*

*Fragment 9*. Eduviges Dyada tells Juan Preciado that she could have been his mother, but Juan admits that he never heard of her until Abundio mentioned her name. Eduviges remembers that, in the past, Abundio used to send travelers to stay with her, and she'd pay him a small commission. But nobody visits Comala anymore. Abundio was the town's chatty mailman until, one day, someone set off fireworks next to his head. He went deaf and never spoke again. Juan points out that the Abundio he met definitely could hear, but Eduviges says Abundio is dead, so Juan must have met someone else.

*Again, Juan runs into strange contradictions that make the reader start doubting his grasp on reality. First, Eduviges seems to have played an important part in Dolores's life, and yet Juan knows nothing about her. In a sense, this shows that Juan is successfully reconnecting with hidden elements of his past, but also that his mother's stories were far from complete. Secondly, Juan certainly met a man named Abundio—who could hear and identified himself by this name—and yet Abundio is dead and was deaf. While it's possible that Eduviges is wrong, it seems equally possible that Juan met Abundio's ghost.*

The elderly, withered Eduviges tells Juan about Inocencio Osorio, a fortunetelling horse-tamer who used to give people vigorous massages while predicting their futures. He frequently burst out into frenetic trances and sometimes ended up naked afterwards. And he made so many conflicting predictions that he occasionally got one right. On Dolores and Pedro Páramo's wedding day, Osorio told Dolores that she could not have sex with Pedro because the moon was inauspicious. Dolores begged Eduviges to take her place, and Eduviges agreed, in part because she secretly had feelings for Pedro. But in bed that night, Pedro never made a move—he just fell asleep. Juan was born a year later, which is why Eduviges says that she was nearly his mother.

*Eduviges implies that the ironically named Inocencio Osorio abuses his reputation as a fortuneteller in order to sexually assault the village's women. But people trust his arbitrary and unreliable predictions anyway, which suggests that his power and influence don't have any real justification behind them. Pedro's total disinterest in Dolores—to the point that he doesn't even realize that it's actually Eduviges in bed with him on his wedding night—suggests that their marriage was founded on something other than love.*

Juan remembers his mother telling him about Comala's lush beauty, but Eduviges explains that Pedro's constant demands and nagging made Dolores miserable. She used to dream about escaping to live with her sister, and when she mentioned this to Pedro, he kicked her out. Pedro stayed bitter. Juan suddenly understands why his mother asked him to "make [Pedro] pay" for neglecting them for so many years. Juan starts telling Eduviges what happened next—he grew up in the city of Colima with his mother's sister, Gertrudis, who eventually kicked them out. Juan realizes that Eduviges isn't listening, and she asks him again if he is ready to rest.

*Dolores and Eduviges's opposing visions of the past show how stories—especially memories—often distort reality by carefully erasing certain facts, people, and events from the picture. In other words, Rulfo suggests that getting at the truth about the past means asking what a particular story is leaving out. By meeting Eduviges, who was erased from his mother's story, Juan gets a much clearer picture of his own origin story. On another note, in abusing and manipulating Dolores, Pedro shows that he puts power before love, and in kicking Dolores out of her house, Gertrudis suggests that Dolores's hope to find stability in Colima was also misplaced.*

*Fragment 10.* Pedro Páramo remembers Susana's death, her desire to leave Comala, and her affection for him. Pedro watches another man instead of working his job on the town's telegraph machine, but Pedro's grandmother reminds him that he has to be patient and learn in order to find success. He says patience isn't for him, and she replies that this doesn't bode well for his future.

*Pedro's visions of Susana's death again suggest that he is combining different moments in time. His reluctance to work for his family's sake foretells his cruelty in the rest of his life. His work at the telegraph and dream of leaving Comala also show how traditions are being uprooted and social norms changed in the world around him. Ironically, however, he ends up staying in Comala forever, to the point of owning the whole town—just like his unconsummated love for Susana, his dreams of going elsewhere prove unfulfillable.*

*Fragment 11.* Back in the present, Juan hears something, and Eduviges explains that the sound is Miguel Páramo's horse, which constantly wanders the area, tormented by remorse, looking for its owner. She remembers the night Miguel died. He used to visit a girl in a nearby town called Contla every evening, but one day, his horse galloped by and then Miguel came to visit Eduviges—whom he used to sleep with before meeting the other girl. He told her that, when he went to Contla that day, the town was completely gone and replaced by a cloud of smoke. Eduviges told Miguel that he wasn't crazy—rather, it sounded like he was dead. He admitted that he jumped a stone fence his father (Pedro) put up. Eduviges offered her condolences and best wishes for the afterlife.

*Miguel seems to have manipulated women just like his father, which raises the disturbing question of whether Pedro passed down his wickedness to his sons—and, if so, what this means for Juan himself. Eduviges's conversation with the dead Miguel offers the first unequivocal sign in the novel that the living and the dead can communicate. Much like Dolores Preciado at the beginning of the novel, Miguel seems to die randomly and unpredictably, without any clear explanation or logic. Yet nobody seems to question it—not even Miguel himself, who scarcely realizes he's dead. The fence that kills Miguel also symbolizes Pedro's desire to define and close off his own land.*

Eduviges recalls that Pedro, Miguel's father, sent a messenger for her the next morning. The messenger explained that Miguel's horse returned home all alone, grief-stricken, and started running around at random. Eduviges asks Juan if he knows what a dead man's moan sounds like—he doesn't, and she says he should count himself lucky.

*Despite the apparent meaninglessness of Miguel's death, his horse is devastated and blames itself: somehow, the horse seems to maintain the moral sense that many people (like Pedro and Miguel) have lost in this novel. Tragically, like the mourning ghosts in Comala, the horse's grief is eternal. This suggests that while life is only temporary, death is permanent, and that death is fundamentally about reckoning with life.*

*Fragment 12*. Pedro Páramo hears **dripping water** and footsteps, followed by an unfamiliar voice, crying and asking him to get up. It is Pedro's mother, wailing because Pedro's father has just died. Although it is before dawn, his mother is enveloped in a divine light. She says that Pedro's father was killed, and Pedro asks if the same people killed her, too.

*The novel is punctuated by yet another death—or possibly two, if Pedro's mother is also dead. These early tragedies might help explain how Pedro later mistreats Dolores and becomes such a notorious figure. With his grandfather and now his father gone, Pedro Páramo becomes his family's patriarch.*

## FRAGMENTS 13-23, PAGES 25-41

*Fragment 13*. On the sunny day of Miguel Páramo's funeral, Father Rentería refuses to bless Miguel because he lived an evil life. Carefully avoiding Pedro, the priest sprinkles holy water on Miguel's body and asks God to take mercy on him. As the congregants carry Miguel's body out into the streets, Pedro approaches Father Rentería and admits that he has heard the rumors: Miguel murdered Father Rentería's brother and raped his niece Ana. But he asks for his son to be forgiven—and offers a few gold coins as an incentive before leaving the church with two henchmen. Father Rentería offers the coins on the altar and prays that God do whatever is appropriate, then goes to a private part of the church and cries.

*Father Rentería's moral conflict about Miguel Páramo's death shows how power corrupts. Father Rentería knowingly chooses his own self-interest not only above the moral principles that he is supposed to uphold personally and in the community. And more than this, he knowingly puts his self-interest above his love for and loyalty to his own family. This suggests that* understanding *the corrupting effects of power isn't enough to prevent this corruption from taking root. Of course, Rulfo is also pointing out how political power corrupts religious institutions the Catholic Church more broadly: even though they are supposed to defend morality and justice, priests just become glorified politicians, lending their services to people who offer them wealth and power. (The Cristero Wars of 1926-1929, which come up near the end of the book, are a clear example of this tendency.)*

*Fragment 14*. That same evening, Father Rentería tells Ana that Miguel is dead and buried. She admits that she is not sure that he was the one who raped her: it was too dark to see his attacker's face, but he did identify himself as Miguel Páramo. He came to her window asking for forgiveness, then came inside her room and climbed on top of her. Afraid for her life, Ana froze. She does not remember anything until the next morning, when she was surprised to wake up alive. She did not recognize Miguel's voice, but she does know that he killed her father and is now "in the deepest pit of hell." Father Rentería is not so sure—the community is praying for Miguel. But he thanks God for taking Miguel, even if to heaven.

*Listening to Ana recount her rape in detail, Father Rentería is too ashamed to admit that he helped pray for Miguel's salvation. He even tries to discredit Ana by looking for holes in her story and trying to suggest that her rapist might not have been Miguel—even though there is really no doubt that it was him. Accordingly, even though he cares for her, Father Rentería ignores and discredits Ana in order to make himself feel better about his decision to help pardon Miguel. This behavior echoes Miguel's manipulativeness: he claims to be making amends in order to win Ana's trust but then takes advantage of this trust to assault her. In both cases, the men's actions contradict their stated intentions. They actually make the harm they commit worse by showing that they view making amends as another way to manipulate people, rather than a meaningful way to atone for their crimes.*

*Fragment 15.* A woman reports that Miguel's horse has been galloping down the path to Contla, twisted around in an agonizing position, as though it were trying to kill itself. The news reaches Pedro Páramo's Media Luna ranch, where the workers are sore from carrying and burying Miguel. Later, they hear that Miguel's ghost is still visiting his old girlfriend in Contla, and they wonder if Pedro will try to discipline him. The sky is full of shooting stars, and they worry that this means Miguel has made it to heaven.

*Miguel's horse is a foil for Father Rentería, who is also haunted by guilt over Miguel's death. Like Miguel, Father Rentería managed to escape Comala and pass the afterlife somewhere else, even despite his wickedness. Miguel's ghost has not managed to leave yet, but rather continues to do exactly what he did in life, which proves that there really is no clear distinction between the living and the dead in the world of Comala.*

*Fragment 16.* Father Rentería watches the same shooting stars that night. He feels unbearably guilty for compromising his principles in order to satisfy Pedro Páramo. Because he depends on the townspeople for his livelihood, he betrays the truly faithful in order to please the powerful.

*To Father Rentería, the sky full of shooting stars seems to be a kind of message from God, pointing out his sinfulness and Miguel's ascension to heaven. Father Rentería is really forced to choose between surviving and sustaining the church, on the one hand, and maintaining his principles but risking his wellbeing and the church's survival, on the other. This does not mean that he is right to abuse his power, but rather that acting morally demands a self-sacrifice he is unwilling to make.*

Father Rentería remembers Eduviges Dyada, who lived nobly and generously, giving the town's men the sons they wanted. But when they refused to recognize or care for their sons, Eduviges committed suicide in despair. Rentería told Eduviges's sister, María, that Eduviges would be damned for killing herself, even despite her lifetime of benevolent deeds. He told the destitute María she could only save her sister's soul if she found the money to pay for prayers and masses. It would have been so easy for him to pardon and pray for her, as he did for the wicked Miguel Páramo. Father Rentería recites the names of saints to fall asleep, but realizes that this is sacrilegious. Guilt overwhelms him as he watches the shooting stars in the night sky.

*Father Rentería's unwillingness to pardon Eduviges underlines the way his greed turns the Catholic Church into an evil institution that perpetuates inequality rather than a benevolent one that fights it. His regret still cannot undo his crimes. By reciting saints' names as a way of counting sheep, Father Rentería shows how he empties the Church of its real meaning and values. This passage also clarifies that Eduviges really is dead when Juan Preciado meets her and explains why she seems to have been completely forgotten. Tragically, she seems to be stuck in Comala because her old friends and benefactors—including Dolores Preciado—have not fulfilled their half of the bargain by praying for her. This suggests that goodness (and faith in others' goodness) is fundamentally unrealistic and self-undermining: hope inevitably leads to disappointment.*

*Fragment 17.* Back in the present, Eduviges Dyada tells Juan Preciado that he is lucky and then abruptly walks out of his room. Juan struggles to sleep. In the middle of the night, a despondent cry wakes him up, pleading for death. The town then falls into a silence so unfathomably deep that it feels like another dimension. The voice soon cries out again, demanding "a hanged man's right to a last word."

*The strange cry in the night, like the ghostly figures who populate Comala, seems to be an echo from the past. It demands "a last word," or the chance to tell its story and thereby get the redemption it was formerly denied.*

A woman enters Juan's room, introduces herself, and invites him to stay with her at the Media Luna ranch. Juan remembers his mother once mentioning her name: Damiana Cisneros. She cared for him as an infant. Juan agrees to go with her—after all, the bloodcurdling scream keeps interrupting his sleep. Damiana recalls that the Media Luna ranch hand Toribio Aldrete was hanged in this very room and then locked inside. Juan says that Eduviges let him in, saying it was her only free room. Damiana laments that Eduviges keeps "wandering like a lost soul."

*Unlike Eduviges, Damiana is a familiar figure to Juan, although her role as Juan's childhood caretaker makes it clear that, like Eduviges, she is a foil for the mother he has lost. If Juan makes it to the Media Luna ranch, where Pedro Páramo used to live, it's possible that he will be able to directly confront his father. When Damiana says that Eduviges is "wandering like a lost soul," she means it literally: as the flashback Father Rentería has revealed, Eduviges is dead and her soul is stuck in Comala, unable to move on, perhaps because Father Rentería denied her the prayers she needed to get to heaven. It is easy to see Comala as representing purgatory—in which sinners await redemption and hope to eventually make it to heaven. Nevertheless, Comala's people have largely given up this hope.*

*Fragment 18.* The savvy ranch administrator Fulgor Sedano remembers filing a lawsuit accusing Toribio Aldrete of "falsifying boundaries." He had a drink with Toribio, who mocked the absurd accusation. And then he rented the corner room from Eduviges and brought Toribio there. Toribio kept mocking Fulgor's boss until he finally gave into his terror.

*This scene is set in the same corner room where Eduviges lets Juan Preciado stay, which shows that Rulfo is not arranging the novel's fragments randomly: rather, he uses specific characters, settings, and events to bridge the present and the past. This shows how experience and memory intermingle in Comala: like Toribio Aldrete's screams, the past leaves a mark on the present. And just like Comala's inhabitants fixate on the experiences of their lives, the past constantly recurs in this novel.*

*Fragment 19.* Some time before killing Toribio, Fulgor visits Pedro Páramo's house. He knocks on the door with his whip and sees a new black bow hanging on top of an old, faded one by the front door. He thinks back to his first visit, two weeks ago. (Before that, he hadn't seen the young Pedro since his birth.) On this first visit, Fulgor planned to put Pedro in his place and got offended when he insisted on being called "don" Pedro. After all, Pedro never even went to the Media Luna ranch.

*Much like Father Rentería after Miguel's death, Fulgor is thrust into an awkward position when he starts working for the pretentious Pedro Páramo rather than his father, Lucas. Pedro seems to believe that, in addition to the ranch itself, he has also inherited the honor and respect that his father commanded. Ironically, then, he takes the principle of inheritance for granted even though he denies it to many of his own children (like Juan Preciado and Abundio Martínez).*

During this earlier visit, Fulgor explained that Pedro's family is in trouble: they have lots of unpayable debts and have already sold virtually everything they own. Pedro asked who they owe, and Fulgor read off several names. Fulgor suggested that someone was willing to buy family's land, but Pedro accused Fulgor of being that *someone*.

*What Pedro* has *inherited are his father's debts: it's now up to him to turn around his family's legacy. There seems to be little hope of doing so through conventional business methods, but Pedro clearly has something else in mind. His hostility towards Fulgor shows that he would view losing the ranch as an unacceptable insult to his character, which in turn implies that he is deeply invested in holding and maintaining power in Comala.*

Fulgor explained that the Páramos owe their greatest debts to the Preciado family, and specifically to Dolores. Pedro asked Fulgor to propose marriage to Dolores on his behalf and organize the ceremony with Father Rentería. Fulgor also asked about Toribio Aldrete, who had been trying to mark out his property with fences, but Pedro asked him to focus on Dolores for now—to tell her that he loves her, maybe "because of her eyes" or something like that.

*Pedro's plot to wipe out his debts by marrying the person who owns them finally reveals the mystery of Juan Preciado's origin story and explains Pedro and Dolores's unhappy marriage. Pedro's willingness to blatantly lie about loving her in order to settle some debts shows that he puts wealth and power above love and human connection, which has no value in his eyes. Indeed, the fact that he sends Fulgor to do his bidding and can't come up with a better explanation for loving her than "because of her eyes" shows that he is unconstrained by ordinary morality and views Dolores as so beneath him as to not even deserve his consideration. He treats her as a pawn in his personal game, not as a human being deserving of respect.*

*Fragment 20.* During his second trip to visit Pedro, two weeks after the first, Fulgor wonders how Pedro got so crafty. In fact, Pedro's father don Lucas always thought of his son as unreliable and a failure—he wouldn't help with the ranch and even dropped out of the seminary. Don Lucas cared enough about the ranch to keep adding to it and ultimately stay around and ask Miguel for help, rather than simply leaving and moving on.

*Fulgor and don Lucas saw Pedro's disinterest in honest work as a sign that he was lazy, unintelligent, and unambitious. But it's not the* work *part that Pedro detests, so much as the* honest *part. He views manipulation and theft as easier paths to power than playing by the rules, and only time will tell if he's right.*

*Fragment 21.* Fulgor charms Dolores into believing that Pedro loves her. He says that Pedro was just secretive about his feelings because don Lucas didn't think he deserved a wife as beautiful as Dolores. Fulgor asks if Dolores is willing to marry Pedro in two days, but she asks for at least a week—she needs to prepare and, she is ashamed to admit, she's on her period. He says that none of this matters, since marriage is just about love, and he rejects her plea for one more week. As he leaves, Fulgor reminds himself to have the judge give Pedro and Dolores joint ownership over all their property. At home, Dolores is ecstatic about the upcoming marriage.

*Fulgor easily manipulates Dolores into accepting Pedro's proposal, and she does not have the slightest suspicion of what is about to happen to her. In a way, this reflects the dangers of a society in which women's power, status, and survival is entirely derivative of men's: for a young woman like Dolores living in a small town like Comala, marrying well is the most important goal in her foreseeable future. But her naïve hopes for the future will inevitably lead her to disappointment.*

*Fragment 22.* Fulgor reports to Pedro that Dolores will marry him. To perform the service, Father Rentería wants 60 pesos. He also pointed out that Pedro never attends church. Pedro asks Fulgor why he didn't ask Dolores for this money and calls him "a baby" for not wanting to manipulate her. (Fulgor is 55, more than twice Pedro's age.) Pedro orders Fulgor to go threaten Toribio Aldrete—to say that he measured his land wrong and put his fences on the Media Luna ranch's property. Fulgor points out that Toribio's fences are actually in the right place, but Pedro insists that, "from now on, we're the law." He tells Fulgor to send thugs to Toribio with a fake legal complaint.

*Pedro Páramo has corrupted Fulgor just as he corrupted Father Rentería. He also corrupts the law itself, as both an idea and an institution. Like the Church and his father's estate, Pedro sees "the law" as just another instrument that can be manipulated to his own ends. Given the book's broader historical context, Rulfo seems to be suggesting that the government institutions created during and after the Mexican Revolution did not actually democratize the country, but rather just used the language of democracy to consolidate elite control over land and resources.*

*Fragment 23.* On another visit, Fulgor plays with his whip again and looks at the black bows while waiting for someone to open the door. Inside, he explains that he's settled things with Toribio Aldrete, and Pedro says that the Fregosos are next—after his honeymoon.

*The reader already knows that Pedro ends up successfully controlling all of Comala, and here it becomes clear that he plans to keep using the underhanded and manipulative tactics he used against Toribio Aldrete to terrorize the rest of the town into submission.*

## FRAGMENTS 24-36, PAGES 41-61

*Fragment 24.* Back in the present, Damiana Cisneros tells Juan Preciado that Comala is full of strange echoes—of laughter and old voices, parties and howling dogs, and even her older sister Sixtina, who died young. Juan asks whether his mother told Damiana that he was visiting. But Damiana does not even know that Dolores is dead, so she asks what happened. Juan says that his mother must have died of sadness, of too many sighs. Damiana says she has not heard anything from Dolores. Suddenly, Juan realizes that Damiana might not be dead at all, so he excitedly asks if she is alive. But she has already disappeared—Juan hears only the echo of his own voice calling out her name.

*The echoes that fill Comala represent the voices of people who, like Eduviges, have been erased from history even though they still have pressing and important things to say. Accordingly, the echoes show these voices attempting to speak and bring their experiences to bear on the official narrative about the past. When Juan's voice echoes away at the end of this fragment, then, this represents more than just his uncertainty about whether Damiana is really dead or alive. It also shows that Juan himself is becoming one of Comala's forgotten residents: his voice echoes out into the abyss without anyone to hear it.*

*Fragment 25.* Juan calls out to a man, but his own voice echoes back. He hears two women talking about him—they think he's Filoteo Aréchiga, and they want to avoid him, but then they realize he isn't following them. They comment that Filoteo helps Pedro seduce women and decide to go home anyway, just in case.

*The novel's next four fragments are examples of the echoes that Juan Preciado hears throughout Comala. While Filoteo Aréchiga does not play a major role in the novel's plot, his existence reflects the great number of characters who are erased from any conceivable story about Comala. Dolores Preciado's memories erased characters like Eduviges. Official histories about Pedro Páramo's oppressive rule inevitably erase many of the people who actually participated in Comala's downfall and the historical transformations that accompanied it. And even this novel must erase certain echoes and voices that do not fit into the narratives about Juan Preciado, Pedro Páramo, and Susana San Juan. So these passages point out the limits of Rulfo's own narrative, which can only capture a small part of the whole truth about Comala.*

*Fragment 26.* Late at night, there are voices: a farmer, Galileo, promises that they will be able to pay at harvest time, and someone else insists that Pedro Páramo actually owns the land the farmer is working. Galileo says he's never even met Pedro Páramo. But the other man—his brother-in-law—insists that Galileo definitely sold the land, and don Fulgor will be visiting him soon. He tells Galileo to "rest in peace," just in case he doesn't survive, and he won't be coming to dinner because he doesn't want to be with Galileo on his final night.

*Galileo's debts are similar to the girls running from Filoteo in the last fragment. Both show how Pedro's seemingly absolute power in Comala and willingness to exercise that power arbitrarily and illegally force the rest of the town to live in terror. In this case, Galileo finds his land title stolen by complicated maneuvers in a legal system he does not fully understand—a system that Pedro Páramo has distorted to his own advantage. When the anonymous voice tells Galileo to "rest in peace," this is clearly an indirect threat: Fulgor is coming to kill him (just like Toribio Aldrete).*

*Fragment 27.* Someone tells a girl named Chona that the mules are ready for them to run away together in the morning, but Chona asks to stay at home with her dying father. Chona's lover comments that she said the same thing last year, and he doesn't want to wait any longer, but Chona promises that they can be together as soon as her father passes. Her lover threatens to leave her for Juliana. And not only is Chona fine with him seeing Juliana, but in fact she says that she never wants to see him ever again.

*In this fragment, the speaker's identity is purposely kept secret in order to reflect the way that Comala's dead residents are all trying to speak out about their experiences to anyone who will listen. Although the voices speak of difficult personal experiences, it's difficult to identify their speakers, contextualize their stories, or do anything to resolve their pain. In this passage, Chona's lover tries to manipulate and threaten her into giving him what he wants, at the expense of her own father and wellbeing. In other words, the speaker distorts love by turning it into a tool for personal gain. It's not clear whether the speaker is Pedro Páramo himself, his son Miguel, or perhaps one of the other people in Comala who has observed and adopted Pedro's cruel strategies for selfishly manipulating women. Nevertheless, it's clear that this passage shows the lasting mark that Pedro Páramo's misogyny leaves on Comala.*

*Fragment 28.* High voices sing from far away: "My sweetheart gave me a lace-bordered / handkerchief to dry my tears…"

*These singing voices are unidentifiable, except for that they're clearly female. They could easily be talking about Chona's story or Dolores's, for instance. But because they are anonymous, they reveal that most of the women Pedro hurt in Comala* also *remain anonymous. Their song suggests that a man is hurting or leaving them, and giving them "a lace-bordered / handkerchief" as a kind of replacement for genuine sympathy or care. This reflects Pedro Páramo's manipulative vision of love and relationships, which is based on power, not genuine care.*

*Fragment 29.* Juan Preciado watches ox-drawn carts passing through town, and a voice mentions that these carts come through with grain in the mornings, but the weather tends to change suddenly in Comala. But it is night, and Juan hears empty carts leaving town. He considers leaving Comala, going out the way he came, and then a woman stops him and asks why he is in town. He explains that he's looking for his father, and the woman invites him into a half-collapsed house, where a naked man (Donis) and woman (Donis's wife) report that he was "moaning and butting his head against [their] door." Juan says that he is tired and wants to sleep—the three people say that they have been sleeping and invite him to join them.

*The ox-carts are a metaphor for Juan's own journey: they come to Comala full of grain, like Juan came full of hope, and they are leaving empty, which shows Juan that he might want to cut his losses and move on. The strange house where he ends up is a symbolic substitute for the Media Luna ranch, where Damiana Cisneros was supposed to take him before disappearing. But if Juan was really "moaning and butting his head against [a] door" without realizing it, then this suggests that he is no longer fully in control of his actions, and his perceptions are unreliable. The core elements of his self are starting to fall apart, and he is starting to dissolve into Comala. He might even be turning into another of its ghosts.*

*Fragment 30.* Juan realizes in the morning that he has been hearing words without sound, like in a dream. The man (Donis) and woman (Donis's wife) staying in the house speculate about who he is and wonder if he might have lost his way, like the people they met who were searching for something called "Los Confines." The man asks to go back to sleep, and the woman says he asked her to wake him up, but the man insists on going back to sleep anyway. Juan thinks this is a dream.

*Juan's perceptions continue to fail him as reality becomes indistinguishable from dreams and illusions. It is worth remembering the very first page of the novel, when Juan said that his "head began to swim with dreams and [his] imagination took flight." This should cause readers to question their grasp on reality so far in the novel. Could everything in Comala be one giant hallucination? Could Juan himself be delusional, lying, or dead? And if his experiences in Comala are echoes of the past or illusions invented by his own mind, does this make them any less real?*

When Juan starts to wake up, the voices come back and start talking about him again. The woman (Donis's wife) points out that Juan is tossing and turning, like she did once, when the man (Donis) did something to her. But the man just wants to go back to sleep. Meanwhile, the woman comments that dawn is breaking and hypothesizes that Juan is a criminal who will bring them trouble. As Juan starts to see the light and wake up, the woman starts speculating that he must be a murderer, and she decides to go elsewhere. She gets out of bed and passes the half-sleeping Juan.

*The man and woman's paranoid speculation about Juan suggests that they, too, are living in a world of delusions and paranoia. Their cynical attitude contrasts with the cautious hope that many of the book's other characters seem to feel—but all those other characters suffered one tragedy or another, so perhaps these anonymous people have a more realistic view of the world.*

When Juan wakes up, he has some coffee and asks the woman (Donis's wife) how to get out of Comala. She points him to several roads and asks where he is going—he wants to head for Sayula, and she comments that she's heard it's busy, not empty like Comala. Juan asks about her husband (Donis). She clarifies that he's actually her brother, and she comments that he said he was going to search for a lost calf.

*The anonymous woman and her brother are noteworthy because they seem to be living, breathing humans—unlike the rest of the beings Juan has encountered so far. For instance, they eat, drink, and sleep. But ghostly characters like Eduviges Dyada simply fade in and out of existence, with none of these ordinary human needs or interests. But if there are so many roads out of Comala, readers are bound to wonder, why do this woman and her brother stay there? After all, Juan is ready to leave, presumably because he has given up on his quest to find Pedro Páramo and has already learned about his mother's rocky relationship with him.*

The woman says she's always lived in Comala, so Juan asks if she knew his mother, Dolores. The woman comments that Donis might, but she's been locked up for years. She's afraid of people seeing her face—there's nothing noteworthy about it, but she's convinced that it's covered with purple spots that reveal her sin. Inside, she says, she's "a sea of mud." Juan says that there's nobody around to see her, but she says that a few people—like Dorotea—still live in the town. It's just that they lock themselves inside at night to avoid the ghosts. People are even tired of praying for them.

*Donis's unnamed sister is a third maternal figure in Comala, following Eduviges and Damiana, and proceeding Dorotea. It's no coincidence that their names all start with or prominently feature a "D"—Juan Preciado's mother was named Dolores. Donis and his sister are also a clear reference to Adam and Eve, only in a totally distorted, inverted form, perhaps after the fall of man. They live naked and all alone in Comala, which used to be lush and fertile like the mythical Garden of Eden, but is now an arid wasteland. Instead of a state of purity and harmony with God and nature, they live in a kind of state of permanent sin, for which they cannot possibly atone. Donis's sister (like Eve) seems to carry the full burden of this sin, whereas Donis seems indifferent to it. They have given up on salvation for themselves and the ghosts that surround them. Their lives are meaningless and full of despair.*

Donis's sister admits that the townspeople are also ashamed of their own sins. When she confessed her relationship with her brother, the Bishop told her that her sin was unpardonable: she and Donis had to separate, even if there was nobody else around. Then, the Bishop left Comala, abandoning the townspeople to permanently suffer the consequences of their sin.

*Later events in the novel suggest that the Bishop Donis's sister is talking about is probably Father Rentería. This calls into question whether his criticism of her sins is truly legitimate, given that he lived a sinful life of servitude to Pedro Páramo and betrayed the message of the Church. Donis's sister clarifies that her relationship with her really is incestuous. There is an important question lingering under the surface: are they brother and sister because (like almost everyone else in Comala) they are both children of Pedro Páramo? Does this mean that Juan is their brother, too?*

The door opens, and Donis returns to report that he followed the calf all day but did not catch it, so he will have to go looking for it again that night. Juan says that he knows that the couple are brother and sister, but Donis objects to him getting too involved in their business. Juan says he wants to get going, but Donis suggests he wait until the morning, since the roads are so run down.

*If Donis and his sister are a kind of anti-Adam and Eve, then their lost calf might represent the biblical story of the golden calf, an idol that the Hebrews worshipped in place of God. Accordingly, Donis's search for the lost calf suggests that he is sinfully chasing after an alternative to God.*

*Fragment 31.* Juan watches the nightfall through the hole in the house's roof, and Donis and Donis's sister go outside. Then, a wrinkled, elderly woman comes into the house. Not realizing that Juan is awake, she takes sheets from a trunk under the bed. Juan looks at her, and she offers him some tea for his nerves. He recognizes her but does not reveal who she is. Her husband appears and asks Juan if he is sick, and Juan comments on the town's ghosts and voices. The man tells his wife that they should leave, because Juan "talks like a mystic." The woman wants to let Juan sleep on the bed, but her husband says Juan is a swindler who just wants attention, like an old colleague from the Media Luna ranch.

*Although the elderly woman is familiar to Juan, she remains totally anonymous to the reader, who is forced to speculate about what and whom she resembles. Just as Juan strives to uncover his mother's memories and the story of Comala's past but finds them just barely out of reach, to the reader, a total picture of Juan's experience is now inaccessible, too. In caring for him, the woman is clearly yet another maternal figure, but her husband—much like Juan's real father, Pedro Páramo—rejects Juan. He works under the same assumptions about human nature as Pedro: that everyone just wants to get ahead in the world, even if it means deceiving and hurting others. In fact, by connecting Juan to the Media Luna, he even suggests that Juan might have visibly inherited Pedro Páramo's evil blood.*

*Fragment 32.* Night turns back into afternoon, and Juan feels himself in the city with doña Eduviges and the burro driver, and then sleeping next to Donis's sister on a smelly, makeshift bed. Surprised that Juan is awake, she reports that Donis left again to search for the calf, and may not return—she suspects he has seen an opportunity to go forever and leave her with Juan. Juan tells her that it'll be fine and then eats the tortillas and small piece of beef that the woman has left out for him. She got the food from her sister, the elderly woman who visited during the day, in exchange for the sheets.

*In this scene, time starts moving in reverse: Pedro Páramo and Juan Preciado's stories are juxtaposed, and the voices of the past continue to intervene in the present. Not only does the past influence the present in a broad, historical sense, but individuals actually experience traces of the past constantly in their lives. If Donis's departure really means that Juan is now stuck in Comala, then this suggests that Donis was self-interestedly manipulating Juan the night before. Donis said it was too dangerous to leave Comala at night and encouraged Juan to wait until morning—but then Donis himself left at night. He seems to have taken Pedro Páramo's vicious principles of deception and competition to heart.*

*Fragment 33.* Juan asks, "Don't you hear me," and his mother's voice replies, asking where he is. He says he's in Comala, but she laments that she doesn't see him.

*Juan's mother's voice finally makes it to Comala, and yet her experience of the place still does not match up with what Juan sees. Of course, it's also completely possible that Juan is just imagining or dreaming about his mother's voice.*

*Fragment 34.* After eating, Juan tells Donis's sister that he will sleep in another corner of the room. But she says that she's sure Donis has left forever, and she asks Juan to join her in bed, which he does.

*Juan replaces Donis, who has managed to escape Comala, so it seems that now Juan might be stuck there (despite his desire to leave). As a maternal figure who cares for Juan, Donis's sister also indirectly represents Juan's own mother, and if she is Pedro Páramo's daughter, then she is Juan's sister, too. So in a sense, Juan is now committing the same symbolic incest that initially frightened him.*

*Fragment 35.* At night, Donis's sister's body seems to crumble apart like soil, mixing with her sweat to form mud. Unable to breathe, Juan gets up and goes outside, but the August heat is oppressive. He still can't breathe, until he loses his breath *forever*. He remembers clouds encircling and absorbing him and nothing more afterward.

*Donis's sister dissolves back into the earth, echoing her earlier claim to be a "sea of mud" on the inside. Just like incest breaks down the usual structure of family, which is the basis of social organization, her melting breaks down the physical structure of her body. Juan undergoes a similar transformation, as the novel implies that he is dying, too. Suddenly and inexplicably, he becomes another of Comala's faceless victims. Like Donis's sister melts into the earth and loses her individuality, Juan melts into Comala, perhaps destined to become another anonymous echo, awaiting an improbable salvation. But Comala also represents his own origin story, so it would also be reasonable to interpret this passage as saying that his past is killing him. This would mean he is being swallowed up by history, turning from a living, breathing man into a static, disembodied story.*

*Fragment 36.* Dorotea addresses Juan Preciado, saying his name out loud for the first time in the novel. She says that she and Donis saw him in the town's plaza, looking frightened to death, and then buried him. Juan replies that "the murmuring killed" him, and then his mother's voice intercedes with a nostalgic description of Comala. He says he followed voices to the plaza, where they seemed to be coming out of the walls. As he walked on, chasing after these voices, he began feeling cold and terrified, although he thought that someone would save him. (Dorotea and Donis did not find him until the morning.) He felt the voices surrounding and attacking him, asking for prayers. But then his soul froze and he died.

*The narrator's identity as Juan—Dolores Preciado and Pedro Páramo's son—has been clearly defined throughout the novel. However, it's not until this passage—the moment of his death—that his first name actually gets revealed in the book. This is significant: it shows that his complex, important story could have been easily forgotten or left unattributed. The same is true of all the stories told by Comala's departed souls. Rulfo implies that this happens to most people: they never get mentioned in stories about the people, places, and events that they knew intimately, or that defined their lives. Through anonymity and forgetting, they lose ownership over their stories. It's also important that Juan dies in the plaza at the very center of town, while hearing a chorus of anonymous voices from the town's former residents. This suggests that he's killed by the collective weight of Comala's forgotten history. (This is what he calls "the murmuring.") He discovers that the story he is trying to uncover is just one of countless similar stories in Comala. And so it turns out that he belongs there, with the rest of its forgotten residents.*

Dorotea asks why Juan didn't stay home, and he explains that he came for Pedro Páramo, motivated by hope. Dorotea replies that hope is deadly dangerous: she came looking for a son she never had, convinced that someone was hiding him from her. But now, she understands that this all resulted from her dreams: a good one that convinced her she had a son, and a bad one in which angels in heaven told her that she had a whore's womb and no son at all. By the time she had this dream, she was already old and Comala's residents were already leaving.

*Dorotea's bleak message about hope essentially captures Rulfo's suspicion of it throughout this novel. All of Dorotea's hopes turn out to be false—which is also the case for Juan, Pedro, and most everyone else in the novel. In fact, Rulfo uses the Spanish word* ilusión *here, which means both "hope" and "illusion." This makes it totally clear that Dorotea sees hope as a delusional form of self-deception that ultimately leads to long-term disappointment and regret. Dorotea's story about her imaginary son resembles the Mexican folk tale* of La Llorona, *the ghost of a woman who wanders the world endlessly, looking for the souls of her children, whom she drowned. While Dorotea does not exactly fit the narrative, there are many variations on the story, and the overall message is the same: La Llorona's hope to reunite her family turns out to be a delusion, and she cannot bear to live with the despair of reality.*

Although everybody else was leaving, Dorotea decided to stay in Comala and wait to die. She tells Juan that she was buried together with him, between his arms. She says it is **raining**—Juan hears a sound like footsteps up above them—and Dorotea tells Juan not to worry, since they will be stuck there in the ground together for the foreseeable future.

*Dorotea and Juan become one another's symbolic family: he replaces the son she spent her life searching for, and she replaces the dear mother whose memory he has been chasing in Comala. The rain overhead is significant: remember that Comala is now totally dry and infertile, but the scenes from the past generally include rain, which in part reflects the way Comala was lush and full of life. This could mean that Juan and Dorotea's death somehow redeems Comala, undoing the evil that Pedro Páramo unleashed upon the town. Or it could specifically refer to the fact that Susana San Juan, who is often associated with rain throughout the novel, is buried nearby.*

## FRAGMENTS 37-46, PAGES 61-85

*Fragment 37.* Back in the past, a mockingbird sings in the distance during a **rainstorm**, which Fulgor Sedano takes as a sign that things will grow well in Comala that year. Fulgor sends 200 men out of Media Luna and towards the hills on horseback.

*The rain again symbolizes the abundance and fertility of Comala in the past—this time, Fulgor makes it explicit. And the hundreds of horsemen reveal that Pedro's power has grown significantly in Comala by this point in his life.*

Miguel Páramo passes by Fulgor and reports that he's been "milking" some woman, then heads inside to Damiana Cisneros, who works in the kitchen. He asks Damiana if she knows Dorotea—Damiana says that Dorotea is outside, singing to her rebozo, which she has bundled up like the baby she has lost. Miguel goes outside to make a "proposition" to Dorotea, and when he returns, he asks Damiana to serve Dorotea the same food he gets.

*Miguel has clearly inherited his father's misogyny, as he talks about women as though they were animals. For the first time, Dorotea appears in a scene from the past. Miguel's "proposition" is clearly that she will help find women for him in exchange for food. While she is clearly aiding and abetting and evil man, just like many of the other sinful characters in this novel, Dorotea is acting out of necessity.*

Meanwhile, Fulgor Sedano notes that the ranch is short on grain and starts to worry about Miguel's irresponsible behavior. In fact, someone's just accused him of murder, and he's left his stallion at the ranch's front gate, still saddled up. Despite Fulgor's warnings, Pedro isn't taking Miguel's misbehavior seriously. Even when Fulgor told him about the woman who visited Media Luna in tears because Miguel killed her husband, Pedro said it wasn't a problem because "those people don't really count." To get his mind off this drama, Fulgor looks out at **the rain** again.

*History seems to be repeating itself: Fulgor worries about Miguel almost exactly the same way as he worried about young Pedro when don Lucas was still running the ranch. Now that Pedro is in charge, he's corrupted Fulgor, so his own immorality no longer seems like much of an issue. More starkly than anything else, Pedro's belief that "those people don't really count" shows how his obsession with power blinds him to other people's humanity. This contrasts with the way Juan Preciado treats the people he encounters in Comala: even when they are powerless and forgotten, he listens to their stories and recognizes their humanity.*

*Fragment 38.* Back in the present, Juan Preciado remembers his mother telling him about the smell of **rain** and beautiful sky in Comala. He tells Dorotea that it is strange that he came to Comala instead of his mother, who was supposed to die there. And he remarks that he also "never saw the sky." Dorotea replies that she stopped noticing the sky years before, after she gave up hope of reaching heaven. Father Rentería told her that her sins would keep her out of heaven, and without hoping for heaven, she had no reason to live. Juan asks what happened to her soul, and she guesses that it's waiting for prayers, remorseful and spiteful. In fact, her soul tried to convince her not to commit suicide, but she was eager to let it go.

*Comala's beautiful sky represents both heaven and the town's idyllic past—and in Dolores Preciado's memories and the novel's flashback scenes, the past truly does seem like heaven. Dorotea's talk about her soul reveals the novel's counterintuitive implication: the people left in Comala are not souls without bodies, but rather bodies without souls. Dorotea implies that she committed suicide, just like Eduviges, and therefore has to wait for others' prayers to send her from the purgatory of Comala on to heaven. Again, Dorotea's desperation suggests that all hope is false hope for people forced to live in the shadows of men like Pedro Páramo and institutions like Father Rentería's church.*

*Fragment 39.* Back in the past, a group of men, led by Fulgor, crowds outside the Media Luna ranch. Pedro Páramo remembers the morning Pedro's mother tearfully informed him that Pedro's father had been killed. So many other deaths followed. Right now, Fulgor's group has Miguel's body outside, but Fulgor reports that he died alone, because of his horse. As he watches Fulgor's men lay out Miguel's body, Pedro Páramo feels detached and worried—but not sorrowful. He sees Miguel's death as part of his penance. He speaks to the group, then tells Fulgor to have Miguel's horse put down and complains about how loudly the women are mourning.

*Just like Dorotea and Donis's sister view their imprisonment in Comala as punishment for their sins, Pedro Páramo himself sees the deaths of Miguel and his father as a punishment for his own. His total lack of remorse over Miguel's death, like the fact that he is more bothered by the women mourning loudly than his son's actual death, shows that his heartlessness and cruelty cut him off from the human relationships that make life valuable. With all his family members dying, his original goal in life—to settle his family's debts and rebuild their legacy—loses all meaning. Ironically, Pedro contributes to his family's destruction in the very process of trying to save it.*

*Fragment 40.* Father Rentería never forgets the night of Miguel Páramo's death, which he spent wandering around Comala, unable to sleep. He thinks back to how Pedro Páramo got so much power in Comala, sleeping with all the town's women but recognizing none of his children as his own, except for Miguel. Father Rentería brought the infant Miguel to Pedro after his mother died in childbirth—but Pedro tried to convince Father Rentería to raise Miguel to be a priest. Father Rentería didn't want to deal with the child's evil blood, so Pedro made Damiana take care of him. He and Father Rentería drank to Miguel's future.

*Father Rentería serves as a kind of foil for Pedro Páramo: whereas Pedro barely feels guilty for his actions, Father Rentería fully recognizes his hypocrisy and struggles to come to terms with it. By fathering children with all the town's women, Pedro literally acts as Comala's patriarch: he is the father of the next generation. Yet he wants the power that comes with fathering children, but none of the responsibility. By refusing to recognize these children, he ironically prevents them from inheriting the legacy he works his whole life to build. If the evil blood that Rentería talks about is real, then readers should ask if this means Juan Preciado, too, is eternally doomed by his fateful relationship to Pedro Páramo. If this is the case, then blood—like death and forgetting—is just another unavoidable tragedy that prevents people from accomplishing their goals and fully defining the meaning of their lives.*

On the night of Miguel's death, townspeople call out to Father Rentería as he wanders Comala, asking him if someone has died. (He wants to say that *he* has.) When he returns home in the morning, Ana reports that several women have stopped by the house, asking to confess. In fact, earlier that morning, he visited the neighboring town of Contla, where *he* confessed his sins to Contla's priest. But Contla's priest refused to pardon Father Rentería for letting Pedro Páramo corrupt the Church. He chastised Rentería for not working harder to save the townspeople in Comala and even suggested that he should lose his position in the ministry.

*Plagued by his guilt, Father Rentería has lost the moral authority to faithfully carry out his role in the Church: he cannot legitimately pardon the women in Comala. In contrast, Contla's priest becomes the voice of reason. But this creates a kind of moral vacuum in Comala: none of the town's residents can legitimately confess their sins or be pardoned because their priest is himself a sinner. In a sense, because of Father Rentería's sin, they are* all *left abandoned by God. Their hopes for justice and salvation will be dashed, because the person who is supposed to lead them has been corrupted.*

The two priests lament that, while their towns' land is extremely fertile, everything that grows there tastes bitter. But Father Rentería admits that most fruit has stopped growing in Comala. Contla's priest suggests that this is because the wicked Pedro Páramo owns all the land. Father Rentería says that this "is God's will," but Contla's priest disagrees.

*Pedro Páramo's corruption has reached more than just the Comala's church: it is affecting the valley itself and even reaching Contla. This makes it clear that Comala's eventual transformation into a wasteland is precisely because of Pedro Páramo's influence. Pedro's cruelty destroys the town, and the town is left barren, a clear reflection of Pedro Páramo's inner moral depravity. When Father Rentería's says that Pedro's monopolistic rule over Comala "is God's will," he is twisting religious teachings to excuse existing inequalities and his own personal biases. Rulfo seems to suggest that people can do this with any ideology—so anyone can be corrupted by power, no matter how strong their moral beliefs are or how self-aware they are.*

Back in Comala, Father Rentería admits to Ana that he is evil. He goes to the Media Luna ranch and gives Pedro Páramo his condolences for Miguel's death. Then, he spends the evening listening to the confessions of Comala's women. Dorotea is first: she admits to getting drunk at Miguel's wake and then reveals that she used to set the local girls up with Miguel—she has lost count of how many. Father Rentería asks her if *she* can forgive herself—she says no—and then tells her that her sins are unpardonable, and she cannot make it to heaven. As the rest of the women confess, one after the other, Father Rentería grows dizzy and sick. He goes outside and tells everyone waiting that they can return the next day for communion, then leaves the church.

*It's significant that Father Rentería visits Pedro Páramo before attending the women who are waiting for him. This shows that he fully understands his hypocrisy and yet continues to go along with it. Like Pedro, Father Rentería does not fully appreciate the power he holds: when he tells Dorotea that her sins are unpardonable, she takes this to heart. As she earlier told Juan Preciado, she gave up all hope for heaven at this moment. And yet it's also clear that Father Rentería is projecting his own guilt onto her: he tells her that her sins are unpardonable because, deep down, he feels unable to pardon himself. As a result, he unnecessarily destroys her. Similarly, when he leaves the rest of the women waiting, he ends up putting his own feelings before their needs. Like with Pedro Páramo, Father Rentería's moral corruption inevitably spreads, causing more damage than he could have anticipated and even corrupting others.*

*Fragment 41.* An unidentified woman (who later turns out to be Susana) imagines she is in the bed where her mother died, and she grieves for her. But she is really in a coffin, about to be buried. She thinks about windy February, when fruit ripens under a blue sky and sparrows chirp all around. Her mother died in February—and instead of grief, she felt joy. She was just entering puberty. Justina helped arrange her mother's wake, and they prayed even though nobody attended. Actually, someone from the church came, asking for money to pay for a mass. But they had none—they spent what they had on the coldhearted gravediggers. Justina lay down on the grave until Susana got her to move on.

*Susana's voice interjects unexpectedly into the novel, and initially she appears to be just another of Comala's countless forgotten souls. The reader hears her the same way as Juan Preciado: anonymous, lacking context, yearning for her story to be heard and retold. Susana's monologue also sets her up to be a foil for Juan Preciado, because she, too, opens with the story of her mother's death. It's no coincidence that Susana's mother dies in February and Juan's in August, the opposite time of year, or that Susana is happy when her mother dies and Juan devastated. These contrasts set Juan and Susana up to be foils of one another who reveal opposite aspects of Pedro Páramo's life and legacy. Ultimately, although the reader will still listen in from Juan's perspective, Susana's voice and story will take over from Juan's for the rest of the novel.*

*Fragment 42.* Having overheard the previous fragment, Juan asks if Dorotea was talking in her sleep. Dorotea replies that it is doña Susana, who is buried nearby. She was the last wife to Pedro Páramo, and she still talks to herself endlessly, just like while she was living. Juan recalls that she was talking about her mother, but Dorotea points out that Susana never had a mother and then remembers that this mother was reclusive and sickly. Juan remembers the voice saying that nobody visited her mother's wake, and Dorotea says this must be why.

*By showing Juan and Dorotea overhear and comment on Susana's monologues, Rulfo puts different episodes from Comala's history in dialogue. At last, the ghosts in Comala are no longer simply speaking out their stories, waiting to be heard and remembered: finally, someone is listening. Like many of the ghosts in Comala, Susana was much the same in life as she is in death: in fact, the version of her that lives on seems to be a distilled essence of her self. Curiously, even Dorotea forgets Susana's mother, whereas Juan's dead mother is an overriding presence throughout the book. She sets the whole novel in motion. This contrast supports the interpretation that Susana's story is the forgotten history of Comala that Juan has been looking for.*

There are more murmuring sounds, but Dorotea says it's a different voice—a man. The voice speaks of God saving them one night, when they were covered in blood after Pedro Páramo attacked him. Although he lost an arm and an eye in the attack, the man says it "made [him] more of a man." Dorotea says that it could be anyone, since Pedro Páramo killed dozens of people. After someone mistook Pedro's father don Lucas for someone else at a wedding, they shot and killed him, and Pedro took revenge by killing everyone who attended the ceremony.

*Like Susana, this man's voice is initially anonymous, which points to the way most of the people affected by Pedro Páramo's crimes and cruelty ultimately remain anonymous. Strangely, this man ends up thanking Pedro Páramo for gravely injuring him. Like Father Rentería blames God (instead of himself) for corrupting the Church and helping Pedro Páramo gain power, this man's thinking gets corrupted by power. He assumes that power is justified, so the people in power must be doing good. This shows that even the victims of unjust power ultimately get corrupted by it and defend it. Dorotea suggests that Pedro's father's death—which is totally random and meaningless—in turn spurred Pedro to spread meaningless death. He tries to avenge his father's death, but he ends up randomly inflicting harm on innocent people, simply because he doesn't know who to blame. His cruelty and addiction to power can be interpreted as a way of lashing out at the meaninglessness of death.*

Susana starts moaning again and Dorotea asks Juan to listen closely. Dorotea says that Pedro loved Susana and treated her well. In fact, Pedro was devastated after Susana died—he gave up on life and even shut down the Media Luna. With the ranch's fields abandoned, there was no more work in Comala, so the town's men started leaving, and their families soon followed. Dorotea stayed, waiting to inherit the land Pedro Páramo promised her. But then the Cristero War broke out, and the few remaining men went to fight, leaving Dorotea alone to starve.

*Pedro's failure to win Susana's heart sets in motion the collapse of Comala, the history that Juan has been trying to uncover since arriving there. Whereas he treated all the other women in his life like valueless pawns, Pedro seemed to have treated Susana as incomparably precious—but still an object, not a person. Ironically, even though Dorotea tells Juan to listen closely to what Susana is saying, Dorotea starts talking over Susana and ends up telling her story in her place. This reflects the way that many characters struggle to speak for themselves in this novel. Rather than letting herself be defined by the rumors Dorotea has heard, Susana has to talk back and define her own story.*

*Fragment 43.* Back in the past, Fulgor Sedano tells Pedro Páramo that Bartolomé San Juan has returned to Comala. Fulgor doesn't know why Bartolomé is back, but he does know that the man moved straight into Pedro's old house. Pedro chastises Fulgor for not fixing the situation yet, and Fulgor reports that Bartolomé has brought a woman—probably his wife, or maybe his daughter.

*This is the first event in Comala that does not appear to go specifically according to Pedro's plan—but readers will soon learn that he did, in fact, orchestrate it. Moreover, Bartolomé San Juan's ambiguous relationship with the woman who accompanies him recalls the earlier instances of incest in the novel—most notably, Donis and his sister.*

*Fragment 44.* Pedro reminisces about Susana, who left Comala in her childhood and did not return for 30 years. He declares that everything he did in Comala was for her, so that she could have everything she could possibly imagine. Pedro even offered a job to her father, don Bartolomé San Juan. But the messenger kept failing to find Bartolomé and deliver him the job offer. Eventually, he did find them, and Bartolomé and Susana finally returned to Comala when violent rebellions broke out in the surrounding area. Pedro was ecstatic and cried tears of joy.

*It now becomes clear why Bartolomé's return matters and, even more importantly, why Pedro went about amassing land and power in Comala with such ruthless determination. He is still fixated on the hopeful fantasy about Susana that occupied him as a young boy, the very first time he appeared in the novel. While this allows him to have his only real burst of emotion in the novel in this scene, it also appears to be the limiting factor that has prevented him from relating to anyone else in Comala on an emotional level or pursuing a loving relationship with any other woman. Pedro did not even inform Fulgor of his plans, which suggests that he either does not trust Fulgor or does not care enough about his judgments to inform him about his overall plan for Comala and the future.*

*Fragment 45.* Bartolomé San Juan tells Susana, his daughter, that Comala smells unlucky. Everything was alive in La Andromeda, the mine where they were living in the hills, but in Comala things just stagnate and die. Even though he gave them a house, Pedro Páramo is not going to save them. He wants something in exchange: not La Andromeda, the mine, but rather Susana, whom he has loved since their childhoods. Bartolomé considers this scandalous.

*Bartolomé's sense of foreboding here resembles the way Juan Preciado felt at the beginning of the novel, on the road to Comala. Like the Comala of the past, La Andromeda contrasts with the Comala of the present because it is full of life and possibility. The implication is that there is hope for the future in La Andromeda, even if there is also danger, but Comala does not seem to have much of a future at all. It is already in stasis. Even though he loves her, Pedro has presented his request to marry Susana as a transaction: he is trading her, like a piece of property, for the house he promises Bartolomé. This suggests that even his distorted, one-sided version of love does not bring him to treat women as humans or equals.*

Susana insists on going with Pedro. Bartolomé points out that Pedro has already had many other women, and he realizes that he must return to La Andromeda to die. Susana might be a widow, he continues, but she might as well still be living with her husband. Besides, Pedro Páramo is pure evil. Bartolomé insists that Susana is *his*. But Susana says no—Bartolomé is not her father. She knows it sounds crazy, but she really means it.

*Bartolomé's overwhelming sense that it is time for him to die recalls the way so many other characters in the novel seem to predict the circumstances of their deaths beforehand (like Donis's sister, who says she is a "sea of mud" before actually dissolving into mud, and Eduviges and Dorotea, who commit suicide despite knowing it to be a mortal sin). Nevertheless, he does not seem to see any deeper meaning in his death—he just knows that it's time. Like Pedro, he views Susana as a piece of property and marriage as a transaction, so perhaps he thinks that losing possession of Susana means there is no longer any more reason for him to go on living. Bartolomé's insistence that Susana might as well be living with her husband and Susana's strange resistance to recognize Bartolomé as her father both lend credibility to the theory that there is something sinister and incestuous about their relationship.*

*Fragment 46.* Pedro Páramo declares that Susana is the most beautiful woman in the world and then asks Fulgor to make Bartolomé disappear when he returns to the Andromeda mine. This will leave Susana with no option but to marry Pedro. In the meantime, Fulgor will win Bartolomé's trust by helping him get safe passage to and from the Andromeda mine.

*Again, Pedro is so caught up in his feelings about Susana that he does not actually consider what would be best for her. He loves her in the sense that he wants to possess her, no matter what it takes, even if it means grotesquely betraying her by killing her father. Of course, this suggests that Bartolomé is right to sense that he will die if he returns to La Andromeda.*

## FRAGMENTS 47-59, PAGES 86-108

*Fragment 47.* On a **rainy** Sunday, a group of local indigenous people try to sell herbs in the Comala market, but nobody comes because the town's men are busy irrigating the fields. The town seems empty and ominous. Justina Díaz passes them on her way through town and buys some rosemary before returning to the Media Luna ranch and visiting Susana's pitch-black room. A voice tells her to leave town, but she insists that she needs to stay to take care of Susana, who is sick. Justina thinks the voice is from Bartolomé, but before finding out, she starts to scream.

*This scene again lurches forward, jumping from the time when Susana was considering leaving Bartolomé and going to be with Pedro to a time when she is already living with him as his wife. Although the rain brings life to Comala, it is also a foreboding signal for the local native people who are trying to make a living: now, because of the rain, everyone is doing Pedro Páramo's bidding by working on his land. It's significant that the exception is Justina, Susana's caregiver, because this reflects the way Susana ultimately resists Pedro's control.*

Susana wakes up and asks what is wrong. She reprimands Justina for screaming, although Justina denies doing it and claims that Susana must have been dreaming. Susana explains that Justina's cat kept her up all night by leaping around on the bed, all over her body, but Justina says that this, too, must have been a dream: the cat was with *her* all night. Justina tells Susana that she is hallucinating, and that she is too much work: Justina is quitting and leaving in the morning. Susana says she knows Justina is bluffing, and Justina admits that the two love each other too much to leave one another. After all, Justina raised Susana from infancy—they are inseparable.

*Justina and Susana's miscommunications and disagreements again reflect the way that different realities are all equally present at the same time in Comala: Susana may have been feeling ghosts that Justina did not. Just like Juan Preciado, she is clearly attuned to the echoes and voices that linger in Comala. This suggests that her apparent madness is really some kind of insight into the town's past and/or its true nature. And Justina agrees to stay with her because, unlike all the other relationships in the novel, Justina and Susana's is genuinely built on unconditional love, rather than possession and exploitation.*

*Fragment 48.* Susana wakes up in the middle of the **rainy** night and then goes back to sleep. In the morning, she calls out for Justina, who immediately shows up and asks what's wrong. Susana says that the cat is bothering her again, and Justina embraces Susana and cries. She explains that Susana's father, Bartolomé, has died. But Susana smiles: she realizes that the noise she heard in the night must have been her father visiting her.

*Susana's reaction to hearing that her father died further implies that he is somehow the root cause of her trauma. Susana's cat also seems to symbolize her father: it jumps around her body at night, making her uncomfortable, which continues to suggest that Bartolomé may have sexually abused her. Her current friendship with Justina seems to be the only relationship she's been able to find that does not depend on men sexualizing and objectifying her.*

Susana remembers once visiting the Andromeda mine with Bartolomé as a young girl. He lowered her down inside on a rope, until she hit the pitch-black bottom. Her father shone down a light that revealed a skeleton right next to her—he asked her to bring him the bones one by one and look for anything of value. When this memory comes to mind, Susana starts laughing louder and louder, surprising and confusing Justina.

*This scene possibly helps explain the trauma and terror that continues to haunt Susana in adulthood. It also represents the way that violence and death become a source of profit for people like Pedro Páramo. Susana picking up the bones of the dead is also clearly analogous to the way Juan Preciado recovers the stories and memories of the dead by going to Comala but also dies of terror as a result. Finally, this scene also clearly suggests that Susana's relationship with Bartolomé was exploitative and traumatic, even if it was not actually incestuous.*

*Fragment 49.* After **the rain** stops falling in Comala, the harsh winds continue. Susana is lying in bed when someone opens her bedroom door. She asks if it is "Father," and he says that yes, he is her father. She can only see an ominous, blurry outline of his body behind his candle, which he holds where his heart should be. Susana tells him not to fret too much over Florencio's death. Susana's visitor is actually Father Rentería, and she gets up and brings her face up to his candle, nearly burning herself. Father Rentería says he wants to comfort her, but Susana replies that he should leave—she does not need his help. As he leaves the room, she asks, "Why do you come see me, when you are dead?"

*Readers can choose to see the conflation between "Father" Rentería and Bartolomé, the man who purports to be Susana's father, more or less literally. On the surface, it appears that this confusion just points out the way that Rentería has a kind of patriarchal authority over the people in Comala. But it could also be seen as a sign of something more sinister: Father Rentería could be Susana's real father, which would explain her refusal to recognize Bartolomé as such. Notably, even though the last scene focused on Bartolomé's death, this one centers two others: the death of Susana's first husband, Florencio, which happened long before Susana went to Comala, and that of Father Rentería, which happens much later, after Susana's own death. Accordingly, as it mixes the past, present, and future, this passage more generally represents Susana's insistence on facing death alone, without some male figure trying to control her.*

*Fragment 50.* Aman nicknamed "El Tartamudo" (because of his stutter) asks to speak with Pedro at the Media Luna ranch. El Tartamudo reports that Fulgor has just been murdered by a group of self-declared "r-revolutionaries" who ambushed them on the outskirts of town. The men let El Tartamudo live so that he could inform Pedro that these revolutionaries want to take all the land he's amassed in Comala. Pedro tells El Tartamudo to have the revolutionaries visit him as soon as possible, and then to visit La Consagración ranch and tell El Tilcuate that Pedro wants to talk with him.

*The Mexican Revolution inches closer into the foreground of the novel, as it starts threatening Pedro Páramo's power and the overall security of Comala. In theory, it promises the democracy and equal distribution of land that the residents of Comala need to undo Pedro's rule. But in practice, it is not so simple. For one, the Revolution helps explain why the town's population gradually dwindles—people leave either to fight or to get away from the conflict. But Rulfo is also specifically hoping to commemorate the historical conditions of the revolution through his novel. In fact, it's completely reasonable to read Pedro Páramo's revolution in Comala as an allegory for the Mexican Revolution as a whole. This would imply that Juan Preciado's attempt to claim his birthright could represent the masses' attempt to claim the democratic powers they were promised in the Revolution from the elites who actually controlled and benefited from it.*

Pedro does not much mourn Fulgor, whom he thinks served his purpose. Instead, he worries about Susana, who spends all her time in bed, in a constant state of anxiety. He spent all last night in the corner of her room, secretly watching her toss and turn in bed. He wonders what trauma is afflicting her. Even though he doesn't understand, he is glad to know that he finally has the woman he loves by his side, and that he needs nothing more in the world.

*Pedro's fixation on Susana and indifference toward Fulgor again reveal the emotional imbalance of his personal life. He is totally coldhearted and unempathetic when it comes to anyone but Susana, and even with Susana, he has no moral compass whatsoever. In fact, his inhumanity is precisely what divides him from her in this passage: although he has gone to great lengths to kidnap and control her, he cannot truly be with her because she is escaping her confinement through her thoughts. Indeed, as she writhes around in bed, Susana's life is looking remarkably like Juan Preciado's last days in Donis's house. After all, the similarity in their names (*Juan *Preciado and Susana San* Juan*) implies that there is some clear resemblance between the two. For instance, they are foils to one another because their lives are determined by their relationship to Pedro Páramo (and specifically their desire to achieve freedom from his tyrannical power).*

*Fragment 51.* Back in the present, Dorotea and Juan Preciado listen to Susana talk about **swimming** naked in the ocean with a man. He did not much enjoy the sea, which gave her an unparalleled sensation of wholeness and purification. The sea caresses her almost erotically. And so she keeps going every morning, but the man does not accompany her.

*With the image of the ocean, Rulfo continues to associate Susana and her rich emotional life with water. This contrasts with Pedro Páramo's association with stone, barrenness, and emotional frigidity. If the ocean represents freedom and liberation for Susana, then it's very significant that she initially finds it with Florencio, but then finds a deeper and ever more satisfying version of it totally alone. Accordingly, Rulfo implies women need to liberate themselves from men's patriarchal control in order to truly live freely.*

*Fragment 52.* A group of about 20 men visit the Media Luna ranch at nightfall. Pedro Páramo serves them dinner and asks what they are doing in Comala. They marvel at the fact that Pedro owns the whole town and then explain that they're armed revolutionaries. But they don't exactly know what they're fighting for or what they're supposed to do in Comala—they're still waiting to receive orders. One of them says that the group is rebelling against landowners and political elites. But Pedro decides to support them: he offers them 100,000 pesos and 300 men. The revolutionaries eagerly agree.

*Pedro easily buys off the revolutionaries, who don't even have an organized political platform. Just like Father Rentería, they are easily corruptible because they need resources. And because Pedro couldn't care less about morality, he uses power to ensure that the rebels defend his interests. The result is that he inverts the meaning of the revolution: the rebels are protecting his concentration of land, wealth, and power, not trying to more equally distribute them.*

*Fragment 53.* After the revolutionaries leave, Pedro offers to turn El Tilcuate into the movement's leader. El Tilcuate just has to find the 300 men, and Pedro will give them a few thousand pesos for necessities (but keep most of the money he's pledged at Media Luna, for safekeeping). And Pedro will even give El Tilcuate a nearby ranch—his lawyer, Gerardo Trujillo, will handle the paperwork.

*El Tilcuate will essentially let Pedro turn the rebels into a private militia. It's conceivable that he could even use them to seize more land and power for himself. Notably, Pedro is not even giving the rebels the full resources he promised: rather, he understands that it's more important that the rebels believe resources are coming than that they actually have them. In other words, Pedro is manipulating them into acting out of false hope, rather than supporting them in reality.*

*Fragment 54.* In the present, Dorotea and Juan Preciado again listen to Susana talk from beyond the grave. Susana talks about her memories: warming her feet between someone's legs, sleeping cuddled up with him, having sex with him. And then he died. Dorotea and Juan try to figure out who Susana is talking about—he clearly died before her. Susana says that, one night, she fell asleep while reading the newspaper, waiting for him to visit. And then she woke up alone, and someone visited to inform her of her lover's death. As she recounts all this, her coffin makes creaking sounds.

*Although Juan and Dorotea don't know, the reader can see Susana is talking about her first husband, Florencio. The circumstances of his untimely death are never fully revealed, but it is at least one of the traumatic events that continues to haunt Susana. Much like Juan's mother, she dwells on fond memories in order to preserve the goodness of the past in the present.*

*Fragment 55.* Susana dreams about being with Florencio and then learning of his death. When a huge, stoic man visited to tell her, Susana grew furious at God for taking him away. God took Florencio's soul, but she wanted to be with his body, and without him, she does not know what to do with her own body. While she dreams, Pedro Páramo watches Susana from across the room and asks himself what he can do to heal her. But he soon leaves the room and stops thinking about her. The next day, Father Rentería finds her in her bed, asleep and naked.

*It's important to note that, in all of the scenes where Susana reminisces about her past, it's impossible to tell at first whether she's alive and in bed or dead and in her grave. More likely, she's having the same memories in both places, which shows that her experiences while alive are truly indistinguishable from her experiences while dead. In both cases, she lives entirely through the past, which—unlike Juan Preciado and the other ghosts in Comala—she has managed to totally keep alive for herself. For Susana San Juan, death and life are the same, and past and present are unified. Curiously, while Pedro Páramo sees her as mad and tortured, Susana is actually reliving her happiest memories—so what he sees as anguish is actually ecstasy. This further shows the emotional chasm that separates them, which Pedro is unable to bridge merely through power and control—unlike everything else in his life. Susana's power ultimately resides in her mind and memory.*

*Fragment 56.* The lawyer Gerardo Trujillo informs Pedro Páramo that El Tilcuate died the night before in a shootout between the revolutionaries and a group called the Villistas. With the situation worsening, Gerardo is leaving town. He won't be able to work for Pedro anymore, so he offers to give Pedro all his papers. Pedro agrees and says he'll burn them, since nobody will challenge his land holdings anyway. Gerardo leaves slowly because he expects Pedro to give him some kind of gift or reward for his years of loyal service. Earlier that day, his wife told him not to expect one, and surely enough, Pedro doesn't offer him anything at all.

*Like Fulgor Sedano, El Tilcuate dies unceremoniously in the Revolution, which readers should remember is a prolonged armed conflict lasting many years. Gerardo Trujillo's departure likely reflects a broader pattern of middle-class professionals abandoning towns like Comala for larger cities because of the dangers of the war. While Gerardo has been helping Pedro manipulate the legal system in order to steal others' land, now Pedro recognizes that his power is so great that he does not even need to pretend to have the law on his side anymore. (Not to mention that the law is not functioning well during the Revolution.) This breakdown in law poses problems for Gerardo, whose services become far less valuable by implication.*

*Fragment 57.* After only a few minutes, Gerardo Trujillo returns to Pedro and says that he does want to keep working for him, after all. He just needs a little cash upfront. He asks for 5,000 pesos, but Pedro offers him 1,000. Gerardo recalls that Lucas Páramo never fully paid his bills, and Miguel Páramo was constantly ending up in jail, like after he murdered Father Rentería's brother. Gerardo realized that he saved the Páramos so much money—if only they were more grateful.

*Gerardo's desperation suggests that he does not have enough money to make the move on his own. While Gerardo assumes that his relationship with Pedro should be based on reciprocity and fairness, here he realizes that Pedro's willing to cheat him, just like he employed him to cheat so many other people in Comala.*

*Fragment 58.* At night, Damiana Cisneros hears bulls bellowing and then someone knocking on the wall. She thinks it might be a sign from one of the saints but then realizes that it is Pedro Páramo visiting another girl, Margarita. Damiana wonders what is happening but goes back to sleep. Later, she hears Pedro yelling her name. She says she's asleep, and she hears him storming off. Damiana sleeps naked the next night and leaves her door open for Pedro, but he does not come. She envies Margarita. There is another knock at the door—Damiana feels a sense of foreboding and catches a glimpse of a group of several men. But she decides that this is none of her business and decides to go back to sleep.

*By treating Damiana and Margarita as essentially interchangeable, Pedro again shows that he treats women like sexual objects, who exist for his own control and pleasure. His impatience and refusal to directly communicate with Damiana further show that his evil erodes his humanity and regard for others. He leaves Damiana waiting in the dark, hopeful that he will visit but bound to be disappointed. Ultimately, the end of the novel shows that Damiana cares for Pedro when he grows old: she continues to sacrifice herself for him, no matter how poorly he treats her.*

*Fragment 59.* Pedro asks Damasio (El Tilcuate) about the battle he lost, but Damasio insists that his men just got rowdy and started shooting at men who later turned out to be part of the Villistas' army. Knowing he was beat, Damasio joined the Villistas, but now his militia is broke and needs funding from Pedro. Pedro says he's already helped Damasio enough—he suggests Damasio go pillage Contla or some other nearby town. Damasio agrees and leads his army off into the night. Meanwhile, Pedro mourns Susana and realizes that the young girl he has since taken in as a lover will never measure up to her.

*Set before the previous scenes with Gerardo Trujillo, but after Susana's death, this fragment shows that Pedro swindled El Tilcuate, too—just like he did to the militia, Gerardo, and virtually everyone else in Comala. With his militia penniless and hungry, El Tilcuate is basically fighting at random, shooting just because he can. If Rulfo is saying something about the Mexican Revolution as a whole here, it's that its violence was random, unnecessary, and ultimately completely meaningless. The people who fought in the revolution, it seems, put their lives on the line (and lost their lives) for no good reason at all.*

## FRAGMENTS 60-68, PAGES 109-124

*Fragment 60.* At daybreak, Susana tells Justina that life and the world are made of nothing but sin. Justina believes Susana, even if she can't hear the ominous sounds Susana hears emanating from the bowels of the earth. As Justina cleans the room, Susana lies on her bed and asks her questions about death and hell. Susana says she just believes in hell—not heaven—and falls asleep when Justina finishes cleaning.

*As she starts to fixate on death, Susana expresses a number of ideas that shed light on the eternal despair and misery of Comala's lost souls. If the world is just made of sin and there is only hell, not heaven, then this explains why the inhabitants of Comala are not rewarded for their good acts. Instead, they only live with their sins until others manage to pray them away. Under this bleak vision of human life, there is no value in doing good at all—of course, this happens to be nothing less than Pedro Páramo's worldview.*

Outside, Justina reports to Pedro that Susana has given up on life. Father Rentería was supposed to bring her communion today, but he didn't. Justina thinks this means that God has turned his back on Susana, but Pedro disagrees and goes to visit her. He finds her convulsing violently in bed, so he rushes up to her and starts saying her name. At this precise moment, Father Rentería shows up with the communion, which he and Pedro administer to the delirious Susana. Afterwards, Susana says, "We had a glorious day, Florencio," and then falls back asleep.

*In the past, Pedro has always lamented Susana's condition from a distance but never approached or interacted with her. Now, he comes up to her and says her name directly for the first time. It's no coincidence that Father Rentería—who is essentially just Pedro's henchman by this point in the novel—shows up with the communion at the same moment. When Susana speaks the name of her beloved first husband, Florencio, this confirms that Pedro has never managed to get through to her, even though he spent his whole life hoping to be with her. Of course, the Susana whom Pedro wanted to marry was the girl he knew as a child, ultimately more a product of his imagination than the actual person in front of him. He was just chasing shadows of his past—just like Juan, Susana, and arguably even Juan Rulfo himself in writing a novel steeped in the places, traditions, and national historical upheavals that defined his own childhood.*

*Fragment 61*. Two old women named Angeles and Fausta notice that a window at the Media Luna ranch has gone dark. For the last three years, this window—reportedly Susana's—has been lit up every night. The women wonder whether Susana might have died. Angeles sympathizes with don Pedro, but Fausta thinks that marrying Susana was Pedro's punishment for being a wicked man.

*It may seem strange that Rulfo introduces two completely new townspeople at this late stage in the novel, but Angeles and Fausta are deeply symbolic characters. First, they represent two among the countless residents of Comala who are forced to live in the shadow of Pedro Páramo and his exploits. And secondly and more importantly, their names have clear religious meanings: Angeles means "angels" and Fausta references Christopher Marlowe's story of Doctor Faustus, who sells his soul to the devil in exchange for limitless knowledge. It's no coincidence that Angeles sees the good in Pedro, while Fausta sees Susana as having made a deal with the devil. And ultimately, both are valid perspectives. Perhaps angels are watching over Susana, who has made a deal with the devil (by going to live with Pedro).*

On their way home from the church, Angeles and Fausta see Doctor Valencia hurrying toward the Media Luna, before the light in Susana's room comes back on. They hope Father Rentería makes it to hear Susana's last confession and fear that Susana's death will overshadow the Christmas celebration at the church, which they've been decorating. Angeles says she God to do what is right, which comforts Fausta, and then the two women return to their separate homes.

*The fact that Angeles and Fausta have been decorating the church implies that it houses both good and evil. Like so many of the novel's characters, they view life and death through a primarily religious lens. This gives death a clear meaning: it is an opportunity for people to atone for their sins and ascend to heaven. Of course, this is just the opposite of what happens to Comala's ghostly residents—even the benevolent ones, like Eduviges. Rulfo implies that religion deceives people by claiming that death will offer them redemption.*

*Fragment 62.* Father Rentería tells Susana to say "My mouth is filled with earth," but she doesn't understand. He explains that he's helping her get ready to die, but she asks him to go away so that she can die alone and in peace. He says she can die peacefully if she recites the phrase, but instead of repeating it, she starts talking about Father Rentería devouring her mouth with his. Then, he starts whispering to her, and she hears him talk about his face melting and burning, about seeing God in one's last moments before going to face eternal damnation and agony in hell.

*Father Rentería's line, "My mouth is filled with earth," implies that death is a kind of reunification with the natural world. This literally references the way she gets buried underground, but also clearly recalls the circumstances of Juan Preciado's death. Juan watched Donis's sister dissolve into dirt and mud, and then something similar happened to him. When Father Rentería is whispering into Susana's ear, it's impossible for the reader to know whether he's really saying these sacrilegious things about dissolving into mud, or if this is just what Susana hears when he speaks to her. Either way, the prayer he is trying to recite gets distorted, which represents the way he has corrupted the Church and the way the Church's teachings prove totally unhelpful in the bleak world of Comala. At the beginning of the book, Pedro daydreamed about Susana being in heaven, but here it seems like she is going to hell, which again demonstrates that they have completely opposite, incompatible perspectives on their marriage. Of course, both of them are forced to give up on their hopes and live in despair precisely because their only goals are incompatible: Pedro wants nothing more than to be with Susana, who wants nothing more than to leave him and be free. In a way, his heaven is her hell, and vice versa.*

Father Rentería looks over to Pedro, Doctor Valencia, and the other men waiting in the doorway. He decides he has to give Susana the chance to repent, but she just tells him to leave. Justina starts sobbing in the hallway, and Susana suddenly sits up and yells at her to go away. She then collapses again and starts losing her breath.

*Susana's final act is again one of defiance: she insists on dying on her own terms, free from other people's control (especially men's). Curiously, just like Juan Preciado, Susana experiences her death as a loss of breath and specifically a loss of the ability to speak, which again references the way the dead are silenced—or, at least, hard to hear except in places like Comala (where Susana gets to speak freely for the rest of eternity).*

*Fragment 63.* Dorotea says that she watched Susana die. This confuses Juan, but Dorotea says she really means it.

*Dorotea's claim is puzzling because she does not clearly appear in Susana's death scene, but the reader knows that she would have been in Pedro Páramo's house (since she lived and worked there) and that she is likely to have been erased from everyone else's versions of the story. So again, she represents the forgotten participants in history, who are erased from the official version of events. But now that she is with Juan, her voice finally gets heard.*

*Fragment 64.* All the churches in Comala are ringing their bells on the morning of December 8th to mark Susana's death. They do not stop for days. People, musicians, and circus performers from Contla and beyond follow the bells to Comala, where they throw a huge party that lasts even longer than the church bells. While everybody celebrates in town, everyone is solemn at the Media Luna. Pedro locks himself in his room and, furious at the boisterous townspeople, decides that he will take revenge on them by letting them starve to death.

*For Pedro Páramo, the town's ultimate crime is defiance: it refuses to recognize his tragedy as a tragedy, even if it's all based on a misinterpretation. Unable to exert total power over Susana, with whom he's never truly able to have a loving relationship, Pedro cannot stand the town escaping his control, too, so decides to prove his power by destroying it. This scene also evokes the end of the Cristero War between the Mexican government and Catholic Church leaders in western Mexico (including the area surrounding Comala). When the war ended, church bells sounded for the first time in many years, so this might be what the townspeople think they're celebrating. Rulfo himself lived through this celebration, which likely influenced this scene. But it's perhaps more likely that the townspeople think the church bells are marking the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, an important celebration of the Virgin Mary generally held on December 8th. The festival is celebrated at the important pilgrimage site of San Juan de los Lagos in Jalisco, the state where Rulfo grew up, and which borders Colima (where Comala is located). It's no coincidence that Susana* San Juan *shares her name with this town (and a frequent association with water, when los Lagos means "the lakes"). Moreover, the circus performers who arrive for this festival are a direct reference to the story of the Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos, the venerated statue of the Virgin Mary that the festival celebrates. Essentially, the statue was originally recognized as miraculous when it healed a girl who was severely injured during a circus act.*

*Fragment 65.* El Tilcuate offers updates on the war: his militia joins various competing factions, like the ones led by General Carranza and General Obregón. Pedro just says, "Fine." Even Father Rentería takes up arms with the rebels. Pedro says that his men should be on the government's side, but El Tilcuate points out that the government sees them as enemies. Plus, he wants to fight alongside Rentería. Pedro says this is fine and lets him—he just doesn't care anymore.

*This short conversation exemplifies the tricks Juan Rulfo plays with time in this novel. The different factions El Tilcuate claims to be supporting formed and came into conflict over a period of more than a decade (from roughly 1913 to 1926). The novel compresses all this time into just a few lines. This shows how Pedro himself loses track of time after Susana's death. This is similar to how Susana spent in her last years in a kind of fixed present—and how Comala spends all of eternity reliving the past, with no hope for the future. On a different note, Father Rentería's decision to join the rebels is the culmination of his long slide into corruption and self-interest: like the other Cristeros, he cares more about maintaining the Catholic Church's political and economic standing than achieving the justice and equality that the post-revolutionary government claims to be defending.*

*Fragment 66*. Years after Susana's death, Pedro spends all night alone in his chair, unable to sleep and waiting to die. Watching the early morning light, he waits for the exact minute when Susana died. He relives the memory over and over again, whispering inaudibly to himself.

*This fragment reveals the way Pedro lives out the rest of his life after Susana's death. Like many of the dead in Comala, he falls into despair when he is unable to achieve the only thing he hoped for his whole life. He becomes lifeless, static, hardening into exactly what his name means: a stone. As Pedro spends his present reliving his past, death and life become two sides of the same coin: he spends his final years dead inside, waiting for the actual death that he thinks will bring him a new life (by reuniting him with Susana in heaven).*

*Fragment 67*. At precisely the same moment early that morning, Abundio Martínez visits Gamaliel Villalpando's store, but Gamaliel is asleep. When his mother Inés wakes him up, Gamaliel is hungover, angry, and delirious: he makes a vulgar complaint about his life and falls back asleep. Abundio asks doña Inés for some liquor. He needs it to cope: his wife, Refugio, died last night. Abundio did everything possible to care for her—including selling his burros—but it wasn't enough.

*Inés Villalpando and her son are actually significant characters in the novel: very early in the book, she was the shopkeeper who sold Pedro a new mill for his family on credit. While Pedro and Comala totally transformed, she and her son have kept running the same shop. They represent the conventional idea of inheritance within a family, in which parents pass their property (and often their occupations) on to their sons. Pedro Páramo has been unable to do this, despite amassing an enormous fortune. And he's left the Villalpandos—who saved him long ago with their credit—poor and hopeless, since Comala has already dried up and nobody wants to buy anything anymore. This is part of why Abundio—Pedro's illegitimate son—falls into such despair: if he had more money, he might have been able to save his beloved wife. Meanwhile, all the money in the world couldn't make Susana love Pedro Páramo.*

Doña Inés initially doesn't understand what's happened, but soon she starts claiming that she sensed the death, and then she starts complaining about Gamaliel again. Abundio admits that nobody's coming to his wife's wake, and Inés offers him a prayer and two pints of liquor—one is free. Abundio's wife's body is still at home. Father Rentería did not even make it for her last rites, as he is busy fighting in the revolution. Abundio drinks his first pint, and then Inés asks him to have *his wife* pray for *her*. Abundio takes his second drink to go.

*Inés Villalpando's gift to Abundio represents the principle of care and generosity that Pedro Páramo has tried to stamp out of Comala. Inés's plea for a prayer from Abundio's wife—after offering her own prayer—is a mutual exchange of prayers, which further demonstrates the equality and mutuality that their relationship is based on. In contrast, in Pedro Páramo and Father Rentería's world, there's only power, domination, and prayers for hire. However, Father Rentería seems to have condemned Comala's people by abandoning the town, which may suggest that his vicious principle—power over equality—ultimately runs the world.*

On the way home, Abundio gets lost and ends up on the outskirts of town. Pedro Páramo sees him in the distance and sends Damiana Cisneros to go investigate. When Damiana finds Abundio, he is crawling on the ground, too drunk to get up, and he asks her for money for his wife's wake. She makes the sign of the cross at him, and each of them thinks that the Devil has sent the other.

*To make sense of this scene, it's important to remember Abundio Martínez's first appearance at the beginning of the book, also on the outskirts of Comala, when he tells Juan Preciado about having met Pedro Páramo at a crossroads long ago. This is clearly the crossroads he was talking about. In asking for money, Abundio is not only seeking help for his wife, but also asking for his inheritance—in other words, he's trying to fulfill the exact same quest as Juan Preciado. Of course, the crossroads also connects with the sign of the cross that Damiana makes, and both also implicitly refers to the book's chiastic (A-B-B-A) structure: the closing chapters are returning to the subject matter of the opening ones—in terms of characters, events, locations, and of course the deaths of Juan Preciado's mother and (soon) father, respectively.*

Off in the distance, Pedro Páramo seems to suddenly disappear underneath his coat. Damiana calls out that Pedro is being murdered, and Abundio thinks of his dead wife, whose body is all alone on their house's patio. Again, he asks for money, but Damiana does not seem to notice. Several men arrive on the scene. They find Damiana on the ground, Pedro bloody but alive, and Abundio wielding a knife. The men bring Abundio back into town; on the way, he vomits bile and says he's been drinking.

*Distorted and told in fragments, this scene makes it difficult to tell who Abundio actually kills. Somehow, the facts of the matter are just out of the narrative's reach: as with the novel as a whole, readers are forced to guess and reconstruct this scene in order to turn it into an intelligible, linear story. The fact that it resists this kind of reconstruction again testifies to the way history itself is fragmented, disjointed, and impossible to fully reconstruct: the information and voices that are accessible to people in the present day only tell part of the story. Like throughout this penultimate fragment of the text, this section repeatedly calls back to earlier language and events. For instance, Abundio vomits bile, and early in the novel he called Pedro Páramo "living bile."*

*Fragment 68.* Pedro Páramo watches the men lead Abundio into town from his chair. He notices that he can't use his left hand, but this is nothing new, because "some part of him die[s] every day." He returns to thinking about Susana and imagines being blinded by her beauty in the moonlight. Then, he realizes that he can't use his other hand either, and he knows that he is dying. His eyes freeze, his heart stops, and he tells himself that he will no longer have to endure terrifying nights surrounded by ghosts. But he also knows that he will no longer be able to avoid Abundio's plea for help. Damiana comes over and asks if Pedro wants dinner. Pedro says he's coming, but when he tries to get up, he falls over dead "like a pile of rocks."

*The novel ends with a totally different version of Pedro Páramo's death, completing the novel's cyclical structure: it began with Dolores Preciado's death, then Juan Preciado himself died at the halfway point, and now Pedro Páramo—the father Juan was seeking and the title of the work itself—dies at the end. So the last two scenes narrate Pedro Páramo's death twice in different ways, which directly parallels Juan Preciado's death, which also happened over two scenes, told from different perspectives. Similarly, Damiana dies in one version but lives in the other. Her uncertain fate harkens back to the last time Juan Preciado saw her in the middle of the book—he asked if she was dead or alive, but she disappeared and he just heard the echo of his own voice, without hearing her response. As he encounters himself falling apart piece by piece, Pedro is actually excited and hopeful: like Susana, he looks forward to death, because it means a kind of release from the pain of life. At the same time, the ghosts eternally wandering Comala suggest that humans have little to look forward to in death—unless Pedro, unlike all the rest, makes it to some other realm (heaven or hell). The novel's closing line is incredibly significant. For one, the name Pedro comes from the word for "rock," and moreover, Pedro spent the last years of his life frozen in place like a rock (in both mind and body). The fact that he turns into rocks therefore represents not only the logical next step in his slow process of paralysis, but also the way that his fate becomes unified with the fate of Comala itself, which has turned from an Eden-like green paradise into a wasteland (or* páramo*) full of rocks* (piedras).

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