

# Rulfo's Pedro Paramo as a Modern Narrative Experiment

## Abstract

Pedro Paramo is first text to experiment with narrative technique. Yet in Academia it has failed to get that due attention which it deserves. Marques the great exponent of the narrative technique, magic realism has called it a great text, and it is not in vain that Rulfo is appreciated for. The shifting paradigm of narration is studied in this study.

**Keywords :** Pedro, Paramo, Shifting Paradigm, Experiment.

## Introduction

"That night I didn't sleep until I'd read it twice; not since I had read Kafka's Metamorphosis in dingy boarding house in Bogota, almost ten years earlier, had I been so overcome."

Gabriel Garcia Marquez (on Pedro Paramo)

When a writer like Gabriel Garcia Marquez (who also wrote the forward for the book) says this about a book then you are ought to believe that the book is going to be a special one. And indeed Pedro Paramo is a special book. Written by Mexican writer Juan Rulfo in 1955, his only novel, Pedro Paramo holds a special place in Mexican as well as in Latin American literature due to its influence on Latin America writers like Marquez, Carlos Fuentes and Octavia Paz among others. It is also said to be the precursor of Magic Realism in fiction.

Pedro Paramo is a milestone in Latin American literature and in mere 138 pages Juan Fulfo achieves what many writers fail to achieve in their whole lifetime.

In Pedro Paramo there are two plots that run almost paralleled to each other, with narration switching between these two continuously.

The first plot is about a man named Juan Preciado who is going to a place called Comola in Mexico, after promising his dying mother that he would go there to meet and confront his father Pedro Paramo whom he had never met before. But after reaching there Juan realizes that the only things remaining in that town are ghosts and the noises of the dead. Almost every person he meets is a ghost and in the very beginning he comes to know that the father he came to meet was a tyrant and has been long dead. As the story progress forward Juan Preciado meets ghost of the past and present and then eventually becomes one.

The other plot follows the life of titular Pedro Paramo from his childhood to his death. It shows the rise and fall of Don Pedro Paramo and his failed love life with his beloved Susana San Juan. Pedro Paramo and his failed love life with his beloved Susana San Juan. Pedro Paramo is shown as a man filled with all kinds of evil who rules the Media Luna with an iron fist. He kills men, captures territories forcefully, rapes women and abandons his own children except for Miguel Paramo who is an evil incarnate and dies and early death. The only humane quality about Pedro Paramo is that he is aware of his sins and knows that he would have to pay for it.

Juan Rulfo writes in a very lucid and tight prose. He uses his words very economically and has an ability to convey more in less. His direct prose has a special ability to hold the attention of the reader right from the start and not for a single sentence he lets his reader go. Pedro paramo famously starts with lines.....

"I come to Comola because I had been told that my father, a man named Pedro Paramo, 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 hand as a sign I would do it. She was near death, and I would have promised her anything".

As we can see in above lines, Juan Rulfo does not waste his readers time in some mindless exposition. He starts his story right away and in five lines he conveys what many writers would have conveyed in five



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pages. His language is of a common man with simple structure and composition. Yet if one analyzes it deeply it is found to be layered and full with intricate details of life.

Juan Rulfo presents his story in a non-linear sequence with narration shifting alternatively between the present and the past. Juan Rulfo...

Frequently switches his narration between first person and third person which is sometimes challenging for the reader to follow and also at the same time makes it more rewarding experience. These experimentations in narration are what make Pedro Paramo a truly post-modern novel.

One of the greatest strength of Pedro Paramo as a book is its brilliant use of magic realism to alleviate the existentialist dread and isolation of its characters, especially that of Juan Preciado, its main character. The very first person he meets on his way to Comala turns out to be a ghost of Abundio, another illegitimate son of Don Pedro. When Juan Preciado tells Dona Eduvigis, his host of the village, about his encounter with Abundio she simply says.....

"Then it can't have been him. Besides, Abundio died. I'm sure he's dead. So you see? It couldn't have been him."

Later he finds out that Dona Eduvigis is herself a ghost. Almost all the character he meets in the book are ghosts. This increases the sense of isolation and dejection in Juan Preciado and in the reader also. Juan Rulfo is considered as the pioneer of magic realism. And the great master of magic realism, Gabriel Garcia Marquez was himself inspired by Rulfo's Pedro Paramo, But Juan Rulfo makes sure that the absurd elements of magic realism don't overpower the story itself and achieve an perfect balance between the fantastical elements and the reality. Due to this only Pedro Paramo is not considered as a ghost story, instead it is one of the most humane stories ever written.

Like all other great classics Pedro Paramo is full of various themes ranging from religion to sin, from life to death, from love to hate, isolation, dejection and many more. Some of the major themes is the books are as follows.

Religion is one of the major themes of Pedro Paramo. The books essentially shows the degradation of religion in the modern times and the dying hope of poor and corrupt people for their salvation. Through the character of Father Reneteria the books shows how corruption and maliciousness has corroded the religion in modern world. Father Reneteria Pardons Meguel Paramo for his sins when Pedro Paramo offers him money for his church, the same man who had raped his niece and killed his brother. One this Father Reneteria reflects.....

"Because I'm afraid to offend the people who provide for me. It's true; owe them my livelihood. I get nothing from the poor, and God knows prayer don't fill the stomach. That's how it's been up to now."

The paragraph shows the moral dilemma of father between his religion and his basic need to survive. He also denies a poor woman who ask for pardon for her sister as she could not afford the Gregorian mass.

Later in the book when Father Reneteria visits a priest in Contla and asks for the pardon for his own sin. The Priest replies.....

"No, Father, my hands are not sufficiently clean to grant you absolution. You will have to go elsewhere to find it." The books mediates on the inevitable fall of religion and shows almost no hope for resurrection. The book echoes the sentiment of neitzsche when she famously said, "God is dead."

The village Comala in Pedro Paramo symbolizes the humanity itself and by showing its decay Juan Rulfo shows the corrosion of humanity and the world around us. When Juan Preciado visits the village for the first time, he describes it is an follows...

"This was the hour I found myself walking down the main street. Nothing but abandoned houses, their empty doorways overgrown with weeds. What has the stranger told me they were called? La gobernadora, señor. Creosote bush. A plague that takes over a person's house the minuted he leaves. You'll see".

It shows that once prospering humanity is now on the verge of destruction. And the creosote bush here represents the various vices and evil that corrupts a person's mindas soon as he leaves his morality.

Juan Rulfo as an author seems to be fascinated with death. His whole books can be seen as a meditation on death among other things. And the most important thing about it is that he neither romanticizes nor condemns the idea of the death. He just seems to show it as an integral part of life and in this book somehow dead are more important than the living. Therefore there are more dead people in the books than living. Death in the book is seen as the reflection of living. People here reflect on their lives after they are dead.

The whole part of Juan Preciado's life in the book is in fact being narrated by him to a dead woman named Dorotea who lies with him in his grave.

"Are you trying to make me believe you drowned, Juan Preciado? Found you in the town plaza, for from Donis's house, and he was there too, telling me you were playing dead."

Death in this book is taken as a matter fact, nothing more than that and nothing less than that.

The titular character in the book, Pedro Paramo is shown as an inherently evil person full with all kind of vices. He is shown as lustful, greedy, selfish and an absolute villain. He seems to have no moral code and do whatever pleases him. Pedro Paramo as a character is also a commentary on contemporary society. His character reflects the moral code of present society with almost none redeeming quality.

The village Comala itself is a metaphor of hell with Pedro Paramo its Statan. Abundio tells this about Comala's hot temperature.....

"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 blanket."

These lines can also be seen as the

metaphor to the degradation of our environment which has increased the global temperature and which in future will make many places like Comala unfit for living.

With all its bleakness and tragedies Pedro Paramo still is also about love. The whole book starts with the journey of Juan Preciado who undertakes it out of his love for his mother and the promise he makes to her.

"I never meant to keep my promise. But before I knew it my head began to swim with dreams and my imagination took flight. Little by little I began to build a world around a hope centered on the man called Pedro Paramo, the man who had been my mother's husband. That was why I had to come to Comola."

The whole book is somehow knitted together by the love of its main characters. Juan Preciado's love for his mother and Pedro Paramo's love for Susana San Juan.

The only thing remotely humane about Pedro Paramo is his unrequited love for Susana San Juan. From his childhood to his death he longs for Susana, he thinks of Susana and even dreams for Susana his love never gets fulfilled but it doesn't waver him from loving her.

Even in his dying moment he thinks of Susana.....

"An enormous moon was shining over the world. I stared at you till I was nearly blind. At the moonlight pouring over your face. I never grew tired of looking at you, at the vision you were. Soft, caressed by the moonlight, your swollen, moist lips iridescent with stars, your body growing transparent in the night dew. Susana. Susana San Juan."

Pedro Paramo is the first and only novel of

Juan Rulfo who establishes himself as the cornerstone in the Latin American literature and the founding father of magic realism, inspiring the likes of Gabriel Garcia Marquez. His book deals with the story of Juan Preciado and his father Pedro Paramo and through their story Juan Rulfo weaves a powerful story which meditates on the themes of religion, death, love, humanity and the present state of modern world. Through his powerful imagery and succulent language Juan Rulfo transports the reader to his world and makes him to think about humanity and what it means to be human.

#### **Aim of the Study**

The aim of the study is to fix Rulfo's contribution in narrative technique.

#### **Conclusion**

After this analysis it could be said that magic realism as narrative technique started with Rulfo. And writes of great eminence like Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Salman Rushdie owe a lot to this great exponent of narration.

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