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Remembering the Ghost: *Pedro Páramo* and the Ethics of Haunting

Benjamin H. Cluff

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

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## ABSTRACT

Remembering the Ghost: *Pedro Páramo* and the Ethics of Haunting

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Master of Arts

This study seeks to describe what I term the ethics of haunting, as related to trauma and memory, by analyzing Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*. It does not claim to be representative of ghosts and haunting as a whole, but more specifically to illustrate various manners in which the return of the ghost and its subsequent haunting are motivated by an ethics of memory in Rulfo's novel. Within this framework I explore remembrance as a medium of exchange between the living and the dead, haunting as a method by which gaps in the historical archive can be filled, and the psychoanalytic notion of incorporation as way to remember the ghost.

Keywords: Juan Rulfo, *Pedro Páramo*, Ghosts, Haunting, Ethics

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## INTRODUCTION: LEARNING FROM THE GHOST

Una buena parte de la vida busqué fantasmas en el pasado para conversar con ellos [...].

-Marco Antonio Campos, “Árboles”

Ghosts from the start, ghosts at the origin: such will have been the primary concern of the present study [...]. To be haunted, to be in the company of ghosts is not necessarily a cause for fear or panic. It is something to affirm: it is the very condition of thinking and feeling.

-Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny*

In memoriam of his fellow *cuentista*, Mexican poet and short story writer Marco Antonio Campos composed “Epitafio para Juan Rulfo,” shortly after learning of his death. The poem reads as follows:

Sabía muy bien de máscaras  
porque utilizó todas,  
también las fantasmales.  
Creció con las raíces  
de la tierra, y la muerte  
y el sueño moldearon  
en él perfil e imagen.  
Por esta vaga tierra  
de fantasmas y sombras,  
nadie escribió como él  
de pueblos que parecen  
de fantasmas y sombras.  
Se fue a otra tierra,  
quizá dulce o terrible.  
Dondequiera que esté  
Lo recordamos. (cited in Ascencio 9)

Indeed, “nadie escribió como [Rulfo] de pueblos que parecen de fantasmas y sombras.” In praise of the author’s 1955 novel *Pedro Páramo*, which is the story of a ghost town, Jorge Luís Borges boldly writes that it is “una de las mejores novelas de las literaturas de lengua hispánica, y aun de la literatura” (454). Certainly this is high praise coming from a fellow author who, not only is

widely lauded for his own prose, but is an apt critic who is extremely well versed in world literature, having literally read entire libraries of books. If Borges is correct, and I believe that he is, it follows then that Rulfo's novel is one of the best ghost stories "de lengua hispánica, y aun de la literatura." It is for this reason that the current study begins with Campos's elegy, because "Epitafio para Juan Rulfo" at once introduces the fundamental motifs of *Pedro Páramo* and of this thesis; that is, ghosts and remembering the dead.<sup>1</sup>

The inclusion of the subject of phantasms in confluence with the idea of remembrance of the dead in "Epitafio para Juan Rulfo" reflects the crux of *Pedro Páramo* and the focus of this thesis.<sup>2</sup> As we will see, the two motifs go hand in hand; the haunting of ghosts implies a remembrance of the dead. Therefore, I borrow from Nicholas Royle in saying that "[g]hosts [and haunting] from the start, ghosts at the origin: such will have been the primary concern of the present study" (51). As was said, *Pedro Páramo* is a quintessential ghost story that engages the past by way of haunting.<sup>3</sup> A precursor to the Latin American Boom, Rulfo's novel is famously a fragmented narrative, a fact that proves difficult if not maddening for the first-time reader. The text consists of sixty-nine fragments or vignettes that, often, are arranged non-sequentially. Though there are instances of prolepsis and analepsis in the initial five fragments, these occur mostly chronologically within a concise time frame, thus giving the reader a false sense of security in regards to what lies ahead. Rulfo's style is apparent almost immediately as there is relatively little narration. Virtually all characterization and background information is conveyed to the reader by way of succinct, sometimes terse, dialogue between characters though the reader is also granted access to their thoughts and memories. As Carol D'Lugo puts it, Rulfo "relies almost entirely on dialogue and interior monologue, weaving them into a confusing fabric through his use of fragmentation. *Pedro Páramo* effects a repositioning of readers without an



authorial presence” (70). Though a third person narrator is occasionally present, for the most part, the narrator remains in absentia.<sup>4</sup>

The preliminary fragments commence with what is apparently a first person narration directed to the reader by an unnamed focalizer, whom the reader later learns is named Juan Preciado. Juan explains, “[v]ine a Comala porque me dijeron que acá vivía mi padre, un tal Pedro Páramo” (65). The novel opens by noting that Juan has come to Comala in search of his father, for whom the novel is named. As we learn, he does so in part to fulfill his mother’s deathbed wish. Dolores Preciado implores her son to go to Comala, which is the town where she was raised, to find his father and her estranged husband, Páramo; “[e]stoy seguro de que le dará gusto conocerte,” she tells her son (65). Hoping to see the town in the lush green place that Dolores remembers, Juan arrives to find that Comala is a literal ghost town teeming with specters that reside in a dry, dead valley plain where only remnants of life still remain.

The title character of Juan Rulfo’s masterpiece is a rural cacique, the prototypical strong man from Mexican and Latin American history.<sup>5</sup> Pedro Páramo rises to power by way of violence, manipulation and bribery; his “ruthless actions in obtaining land through cunning or force reflect the basic inequalities and sense of justice that led to the revolution” (D’Lugo 72). The lives of all Comalans are, in one way or another, affected by the cacique and it is insinuated that he is largely responsible for the downfall of the once edenic town and its subsequent transformation into a hellish place. In Comala ghosts, disembodied spirits of the dead, wander the streets and interact with Juan. He slowly realizes that every person with whom he has spoken since arriving in Comala is a specter. The first half of Rulfo’s novel is primarily comprised of a firsthand account by Juan Preciado regarding his arrival and inquest in Comala but it is also interspersed with indirectly narrated memories of Pedro Páramo. In addition to the voices of

Juan and Pedro, in the first half of the novel, and throughout, there is what could almost be described as a chorus of voices, echoes and memories of Comala's dead —the voice and memories of Padre Rentería, often with regard to the death of Miguel Páramo, are quite prominent throughout this section— these minor characters make themselves heard along with the more dominant voices of the text.<sup>6</sup> The first-time reader initially believes that Juan Preciado is the narrator, though about halfway through the text the reader learns that Juan too is a ghost — he claims that the *murmillos*<sup>7</sup> of the other spirits in Comala killed him— and has been haunting the reader<sup>8</sup> from the outset, telling his tale from the grave to another spirit of the dead.

The first half of *Pedro Páramo* necessarily allows many voices to speak, since it includes Juan's recounting of his experience in Comala before he died. While Juan walks through the town he hears myriad murmurs from multiple, anonymous sources. However, after he narrates his own death, the focus of the novel shifts from Juan toward his father, Pedro Páramo. As D'Lugo writes:

Part 2 focuses more directly on Pedro Páramo, presenting various episodes from his past, but also includes dialogues among other characters, some again with reference to Miguel Páramo's death. The novel ends with two revelations: Comala dies because, upset by the festive activity after Susana's death, Pedro folds his arms, literally and figuratively, and lets the town waste away; and Pedro has died at the hands of his illegitimate son, Abundio. (73)

The revelation that the cacique is dead is not a surprise since the reader knows about his death from the start, so reading the novel is more a process of discovering how Páramo dies and how Comala becomes a ghost town. Juan guides the reader to Comala and lets us listen and learn along with him, he performs a "self-referential function as a reader-in-the-text paralleling the

activities of the novel's implied reader" (D'Lugo 78). This is the first instance in which it is apparent that the explicit reader too is intended to learn from the ghost, a subject that will be treated below. Yet before we continue it is important to address the problem of the nature of the ghost.

Guillermo del Toro's film, *El espinazo del Diablo*, is similar to *Pedro Páramo* in that ghosts are central, not only to the story itself, but to the narration. As the film commences, a narrator directs a deceptively simple question at the viewer, "¿[q]ué es un fantasma?" He then proceeds to offer some possible answers to his rhetoric query, "¿Un evento terrible condenado a repetirse uno y otra vez? Un instante de dolor, quizá. Algo muerto, que parece por momentos vivo aún. Un sentimiento suspendido en el tiempo. Como una fotografía borrosa. Como un insecto atrapado en ámbar."<sup>9</sup> Del Toro's narrator reveals that the nature of the ghost is really quite complex and that there are many possible interpretations of phantoms, thus foregrounding the subtle difficulty of dealing with them. Nevertheless, the succinct explanation of the ghost-narrator is a useful starting point for approximating an understanding of our subject. Referring back to what the narrator explains in *El espinazo del Diablo*, then, a ghost can be some sort of trauma that repeats itself, something dead that at once seems uncannily alive or a painful moment or feeling suspended in time, like a blurry photo. Though all of these incarnations of the ghost are present in *Pedro Páramo*, the description that best fits the figures of Rulfo's novel is "[a]lgo muerto, que parece por momentos vivo aún," or in other words, disembodied spirits in the form of specters, a distinction we will explore shortly.

Because the specters of Comala are literally spirits of the dead that have returned from the grave, they are also necessarily what Derrida refers to as revenants (*Specters*, 6). A seldom used loan word from French to English, *revenant* is the French word for ghost; it means, literally,

one who returns. In explaining the differences in connotation between the French and Spanish words for ghost (*revenant* and *fantasma*), Julio Cortázar emphasizes the notion of the return inherent in the French usage. He writes, “[e]n Francia los fantasmas se llaman *los que vuelven*; nosotros no tenemos palabra que medrosamente consienta ese retorno entre dos aguas y dos luces” (20). The same could be said for the English Word for ghost. While the verb ‘to haunt’ communicates a nuanced sense of a return —usually in the form of mental anguish caused by the repetition, or return, of a terrible thought or indelible memory, see note 3— the noun ‘ghost’ signifies a disembodied spirit or soul.<sup>10</sup> The word *revenant*, then, is useful in that it conveys a necessary aspect of haunting that is sometimes overlooked. Thus, any ghost that haunts, no matter what its form, is a *revenant* since they must come back from beyond death. Still, as was said, there are disembodied spirits in *Pedro Páramo* that are visible to the living, and should rightly be referred to as specters. Derrida here distinguishes the specter from the *revenant* and the spirit:

[W]hat distinguishes the specter or the *revenant* from the *spirit*, including the spirit in the sense of the ghost in general, is doubtless a supernatural and paradoxical phenomenality, the furtive and ungraspable visibility of the invisible, or an invisibility of a visible X, [...] it is also, no doubt, the tangible intangibility of a proper body without flesh, but still the body of someone as someone *other*. And of someone *other* that we will not hasten to determine as self, subject, person, consciousness, spirit, and so forth.<sup>11</sup> (*Specters* 6, italics in original)

While a *revenant* can be visible or not, the specter, as Derrida explains, is by definition something observable, even if it is only barely discernible or ethereal. The fact that Juan Preciado can see the ghosts with whom he converses and interacts means that they are specters.

Tzvetan Todorov might categorize Rulfo's novel as a marvelous text, that is, a text which "may be characterized by the mere presence of supernatural events, without implicating the reaction they provoke in the characters" (47). The reality of Juan's interactions with spirits, the fact that he hears voices of people long dead and continues to learn about his origins from Dorotea despite the fact that he dies in Comala are all accepted realities in Rulfo's text. The supernatural is never explained away, the ghosts of Comala are genuine specters and revenants; they are dead come back from the grave, Juan Preciado sees them and talks to them.

I make this point clear so as to avoid any possibility that my use of critical theory be confused as an attempt to circumscribe the supernatural phenomena of *Pedro Páramo* within the limits of reality. Also, it is necessary to understand that there is not a single definitive theory of the ghost that would serve as a model for this study. The result, then, is that the supporting ideas used to analyze Rulfo's novel in this thesis form a sort of theoretical patchwork that seeks to accurately describe the nature of the haunts in *Pedro Páramo*.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, I make use of the theories of the thinkers listed above, but with the caveat that there exists a definite tension between the discourse of critical theory and the subject matter of Rulfo's novel.<sup>13</sup> Having addressed some of the possible problems inherent in this study, we will examine the text itself.

It should be more than apparent by now that *Pedro Páramo* is a novel about haunting, about the memories of the dead and what happens when they are allowed to speak, when they are given a voice. After Juan Preciado dies he shares a common grave with a woman named Dorotea, or *la Cuarraca*, who was a sort of *alcahuete* or go-between in Comala. Dorotea is familiar with many of Comala's dead and after Juan's journey to find his origins is cut short by death, she helps him continue his search while in the grave. Dorotea teaches Preciado about the tortured souls that populate the cemetery and guides him through the fragmented labyrinth of

*murmillos*. Dorotea's role as a ghostly repository or witness of Comala's recent past is fascinating, Alberto Vital remarks, Dorotea is "el último testigo en *Pedro Páramo* [...] quien sólo en la tumba parece haber sido una conversadora infatigable" (21). A quiet and reserved woman while she was alive, Dorotea seemingly finds her voice in death and takes it upon herself to remember and tell the story of Comala, thus allowing her to teach Juan Preciado as a ghostly interlocutor.

As Avery F. Gordon writes, haunting is "the sociality of living with ghosts [...]"(201). But one must also learn to "talk to and listen to ghosts," as Juan does, "rather than banish them, as the precondition for establishing [their] scientific or humanistic knowledge" (23). Indeed, without the specters Dolores's son would know little of his origins or his father. *Pedro Páramo* is a ghost story, but also the story of a son's search for knowledge about his past. Appropriately, Rulfo's entire novel is an exercise in abiding with and learning from specters. Though this may seem unsettling, Nicholas Royle reassures us that "to be in the company of ghosts is not necessarily a cause for fear or panic. It is something to affirm: it is the very condition of thinking and feeling" (53).<sup>14</sup> Royle develops his statement more by explaining that one learns from the ghost, because "there is no teaching without memory (no matter how unconscious or cryptic) of the dead, without a logic of mourning that haunts or can always come back to haunt, without an encounter with questions of inheritance" (53). That is, much of the knowledge that one gains is necessarily haunted by those that have come before.<sup>15</sup> However, it is also important to note that haunting is coupled to memory (or knowledge of the past) since the condition of the ghost, according to Fabienne Bradu, is one of a circular existence in which they recall the past, "[I]os muertos hablan de su pasado, hablan su pasado. El estar muerto es, entre otras cosas, ya no poder vivir experiencias nuevas y llevar adentro (o en los labios) una historia acabada, un relato

redondo e inalterable” (14). Perhaps this is why Gordon writes that one must “learn to talk to and listen to ghosts, rather than banish them, as the precondition for establishing [one’s] scientific or humanistic knowledge” (23). Indeed Juan Preciado inherits an understanding of his origins by being haunted by his mother, Dolores, but also by Eduviges, Damiana, Dorotea, and so forth. But there is something more to this notion of learning from the spirits of the dead; it is not simply a question of knowledge and understanding the past.

Jacques Derrida opens the exordium to *Specters of Marx* by presenting the following situation, “[s]omeone [...] comes forward and says: *I would like to learn to live finally*. Finally but why? *To learn to live*: a strange watchword. Who would learn? From whom?” (xvi italics original). As we will shortly see, the use here of the phrase “learning to live,” is didactic regarding what could be called an ethical way of life. Derrida provides an answer to his previous inquiry, “[t]o live, by definition, is not something one learns. Not from oneself, it is not learned from life, taught by life. Only from the other and by death. In any case, by the other at the edge of life” (xvii). Derrida’s answer is rather curious indeed; according to him one should learn how to live from the dead, or those near the margin of death, which would include the ghost. His reasoning becomes more clear when one reads that to learn from the specter, according to Derrida, “is ethics itself” (xvii), because, as he explains, “to learn to live with ghosts, in the upkeep, the conversation, the company, or the companionship” of ghosts is to learn to live “more justly” (xvii-xviii). In other words, living justly and ethically, in the thought of Derrida, is to acknowledge one’s responsibility toward and respect for those who are no longer present, or not yet present.

Learning from the ghost, then, allowing the ghost to haunt, as *Pedro Páramo* does, reveals an underlying theme of Rulfo’s novel and haunting in general, a phenomenon I will call

an ethics of haunting. An ethics of haunting addresses the manner in which the return of the phantom is motivated by teaching the innate duties of thick relations that exist beyond expiration of the deceased. Avishai Margalit explains that “thick relations” are human relationships “grounded in attributes such as parent, friend, lover, fellow-countryman” and that they are “greatly concerned with loyalty and betrayal” (Margalit 7-8). Ethics, of course, addresses the duties inherent in human relations, yet in contrast to morality, which guides “our behavior toward those to whom we are related just by virtue of being their fellow human beings” (Margalit 37), ethics deals with the more familial or intimate, thick relations. The ethics of haunting then is a phenomenon by which one learns from the ghost, by way of the return of the ghost, their obligation to one’s kindred dead. Avery F. Gordon explains the process as follows:

The way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening. Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition. (8)

The transformative recognition is what Derrida calls learning to live. As we will see, one of the duties of the living with regards to the dead is to properly mourn and remember them, a notion that Derrida refers to as “a politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations” (xviii), which is another way of saying that one has a responsibility to remember their forbearers.

This study will explore several instances in *Pedro Páramo* in which haunting and being haunted are tied to ethics. Drawing upon Slavoj Žižek’s statement that the return of the dead “materializes a certain symbolic debt persisting beyond physical expiration” (23), the first chapter will focus on what I term an economy of haunting. As I will demonstrate, in Rulfo’s novel there is commerce between the living and the dead and the medium of exchange is



remembrance. In cases where the dead are not properly remembered, they return to collect on an unpaid memory debt. This chapter focuses primarily on Pedro Páramo and his relations with his biological and symbolic children. Building on the idea of a debt to the dead, the second chapter addresses the role of *Pedro Páramo* as an aesthetic remembrance of small, rural towns, emblemized by Comala, that were abandoned and forgotten in Mexico's shift toward modernity. Relying on Roberto González Echevarría's notion of the archive I explore the way in which Rulfo's novel fills an information gap in the annals of history by representing the lost experience of those who were consigned to oblivion within the discourse of history and modernity. In this interpretation *Pedro Páramo* haunts the present by allowing the ghost to return and tell its story by way of aesthetics. The third and final chapter explores the psychoanalytic notion of incorporation as a willful and ethical way of being haunted and remembering the ghost. Using the theories of Nikolas Abraham and Maria Torok I will show how transgenerational haunting permits an incorporated phantom to continue in the memory of subsequent generations.

In writing *Pedro Páramo* Rulfo wanted to produce a novel that would require the participation of the reader (Beardsell 82). He accomplished this by leaving enough information gaps in the text for the reader to fill in with their imagination. At the same time, he created an ethereal experience for the reader, one that not only foregrounds the ghostly nature of reading, but also allows the reader to coexist with phantoms for a time. Rulfo allows the reader to participate in the text and learn from the disembodied spirits of Comala. Indeed nobody wrote about ghosts and ghost towns like Rulfo, and though he is no longer with us, we remember him and his ghosts.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> A ghost story par excellence, *Pedro Páramo* was published two years after Rulfo's short story collection, *El Llano en llamas* (1953). One of the central themes of *Pedro Páramo*, the importance of memory, is found clearly in this earlier work. Rulfo's first book was printed in the midst of a thriving economic era in Mexico. It was a time of transition during which many *campesinos* were moving to the city, away from the towns where previous generations had made their living from the land; this period of mass migration, economic development and urban growth would later be referred to simply as "Desarrollo" (Blanco Aguinaga 12). Characterized by a rapidly growing middle class that consumed a wealth of goods manufactured and made available by the expanding working class, some interpreted the widespread economic growth during "Desarrollo" as the culmination of the ideologies that inspired the Mexican Revolution of 1910 (Blanco Aguinaga 11-12). "Debido [al Desarrollo]," writes Blanco Aguinaga, "[se podía tener] la impresión de que la Revolución Mexicana de 1910 [iba] llegando, por fin, a su meta" (12). Of course the state did not waste an opportunity dogmatically to affirm the triumph of the revolution and its aims; hence, they affirmed "Desarrollo" as a victory for the political party of the post-revolution, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional. However, the reality of the revolutionary era and the widespread suffering that existed would not be forgotten.

In contrast to the official position of the state, Rulfo's fiction looked back and remembered the suffering and hardship of the post-revolution as experienced by the common *campesino*. While many were looking to the future, a number of the stories from *El Llano en llamas*, by employing memory as a framework, looked to Mexico's agrarian past, reminding the city dwelling-reader of the *campo* and a world characterized by violence, desolation and solitude.

The experience of the characters in *El Llano en llamas* is almost alien that of a modern Mexico City, a place where, surely, many of Rulfo's readers resided. Therefore, one could argue that Rulfo's fiction, from the beginning, has been about remembering a past that might otherwise be relegated to oblivion, or remembering the agrarian roots from the perspective of the city. Though, as we have said, some of Rulfo's early fictions deal explicitly with notions of memory, the short story "Acuérdate" is the first that illustrates an imperative to remember the dead. Further, "Luvina," which is a precursor to *Pedro Páramo*, introduces the reader of Rulfo's fiction to the subject of the ghost. Still, we should remember that "lo que en 'Luvina' es aún comparación y metáfora, en *Pedro Páramo* es imagen de una realidad, una realidad más compleja e inquietante que la definida por la acepción común" (Ruffinelli14). Though some of the central themes of Rulfo's novel are present in his earlier work, it isn't until the appearance of *Pedro Páramo* that the ghost and remembrance of the dead motifs coalesce in Rulfo's fiction.

<sup>2</sup> Remembering is an important motif in the fiction of Juan Rulfo. While *Pedro Páramo* is a work that is essentially comprised of the character's memories, many of the short stories included in *El Llano en llamas* (1953) use remembering as a frame within which the narration occurs. Specifically the stories "La cuesta de las Comadres," "En la madrugada," "Talpa," and "El día del derrumbe" follow this model, while "Acuérdate" illustrates an imperative to remember. The narrator of "Acuérdate" talks with his friend about their former childhood classmate who, at the time the narration occurs, recently died. The imperative "Acuérdate" and several variation of the phrase are repeated throughout.

<sup>3</sup> Haunting is, at its heart, the return of something or someone past. The OED has several definitions for the verb ‘to haunt’, the definition of the verb in the sense that it is used throughout this thesis is such:

[U]nseen or immaterial visitants [in the form of] memories, cares, feelings [or] thoughts [that] come up or present themselves as recurrent influences or impressions, [especially] as causes of distraction or trouble [that] pursue [or] molest [...]; imaginary or spiritual beings, ghosts, [that] visit frequently and habitually with manifestations of their influence and presence, usually of a molesting kind. (“Haunt” definition 5 a-b)

Note the frequency with which the notions of repetition or the return appear in the various definitions. The return is necessarily related to things past since in order for something or someone to return, it must have been already present at a previous moment in time.

<sup>4</sup> While the first five fragments are rather straightforward, fragment six introduces a distinctive narrative voice, one who also goes unnamed until fragment seven, Pedro Páramo (though he is only identified as Pedro at this point). This shift in focalization introduces to the reader a phenomenon that will occur throughout the text and presents the reader with the task of determining which character is the subject or focalizer of each fragment. Many of the fragments in the first half of the novel introduce a new character or theme and the novel soon becomes a confusingly polyphonous collective of voices, memories and murmurs.

<sup>5</sup> It is helpful to note here that, though early drafts of *Pedro Páramo* included specific dates and real place names, the print edition was largely stripped of such referents because,

apparently, Rulfo wanted to create a more universal experience for the reader and one that would not be quickly outdated.

<sup>6</sup> Though he does not play a major role in my analysis of the text, it should be noted that Padre Rentería is a key figure in *Pedro Páramo* and one who is granted a large portion of textual space in which he is the focalizer, in part, perhaps, because of his many interactions with the cacique.

<sup>7</sup> Early drafts of *Pedro Páramo* were actually titled *Los murmullos*, a reference to the voices of the dead that are the source of Juan's death. Yet the prospective title could also be a description of the text of the novel itself since it is largely comprised of *murmillos* of the dead in Comala's cemetery.

<sup>8</sup> Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the reader is haunting Juan, somehow listening in on his conversation with Dorotea though both characters are dead. The fact of Juan's death presents the reader with a conundrum; how are we privy to Juan's narration and the indirectly communicated memories of other characters such as Pedro Páramo and Padre Rentería? Though I do not know that a conclusive answer can be reached, this question will be partially answered in chapter 3.

<sup>9</sup> At the conclusion of the film the narrator, who the viewer now knows is dead, repeats the same question and gives the same answer. Yet the second time the ghost narrator neatly closes his question, “¿[q]ué es un fantasma?,” by saying, “[u]n fantasma. Eso soy yo.” Like Juan Preciado, Del Toro's ghost initially hides its spectral identity. In both cases it is as if the ghost, for a reason that is not immediately clear, does not want the reader or viewer to know that they are being haunted. Yet in both instances, though there are hints that the ghostly interlocutor

is dead, the admission of being a specter doesn't come until after they have told their story, as if it is important to form some sort of bond with the receptor first. Such an interpretation recalls Joan Copjec's observation regarding voice-over narration in film noir. She writes that the voice-over "definitely links the hero to speech and hence, we would suppose, to community, to sense" (183). Copjec further observes that in film noir "the voice-over is regularly attached to a dead narrator, whether literally as in *Sunset Boulevard* and *Laura*, or metaphorically as in *Detour*, or virtually as in *Double Indemnity*" (183).

<sup>10</sup> *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology* notes that the word 'ghost,' as early as 800 and 1200 c.e., connoted a "spiritual being; angel, devil, or spirit...[a] soul...[or something] full of fright" (431). Yet, as explained in the following quote, the spectral notion of the ghost as something visual didn't appear until later:

The meaning of soul or spirit of a dead person, existed in Old English, but the specific sense of apparition or specter, is first recorded in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* (1592), and the transferred sense of a faint image or shadow, slight suggestion (a ghost of a chance) is found in *Purchas his Pilgrimage* (1613). (431)

<sup>11</sup> Derrida elaborates further by explaining that the visibility of the specter is important in that it distinguishes the specter from other incarnations of the ghost. He writes:

This already suffices to distinguish it, not only from the icon or the idol, but also from the image of the image, from the Platonic *phantasma*, as well as from the simple *simulacrum* of something in general to which it is nevertheless so close and with which it shares, in other respects, more than one feature. (6)

<sup>12</sup> As if the fragmented structure and vague narrative style of Rulfo's novel were not confusing enough for the reader, sometimes the very subject matter of the his novel at times proves problematic. The difficulties of reading *Pedro Páramo* naturally translate to a critical study of the novel as well. Nicholas Royle's explanation of the challenges involved with writing about the uncanny could easily be applied to this study since the uncanny itself is ghostly. Royle writes the following:

To write about the uncanny, as Freud's essay makes admirably clear, is to lose one's bearings, to find oneself immersed in the maddening logic of the supplement, to engage with a hydra. [... . E]xamples of the uncanny get tangled up with one another, critical distinctions and conclusions become vertiginously difficult, but they are still necessary. (8)

To be sure, in the case of *Pedro Páramo*, the multitude of ghosts and hauntings "get tangled up with one another" and cause the reader, as well as the critic, to "lose [their] bearings" and get lost in "the maddening logic of the supplement."

<sup>13</sup> For this very reason Derrida once said that he regretted using the phrase "science of ghosts." In Ken McMullen's 1983 film *Ghost Dance*, Derrida says that "[f]ilm plus psychoanalysis equals a science of ghosts." Speaking with Bernard Stiegler on the subject years later Derrida says the following:

I'm not sure I'd keep the word "science"; for at the same time, there is something which, as soon as one is dealing with ghosts, exceeds, if not scientificity in general, at least what, for a very long time, has modeled scientificity on the real, the objective, which is or should not be, precisely, phantomatic. (*Ecographies* 118).

<sup>14</sup> The author here seems to be approximating the Derridian notion of a haunted ontology, though he avoids that vein of thought altogether. In *Specters of Marx* Derrida proposes the concept of "hauntology" in order to describe spectral phenomena. For Derrida, spectrality exists between the "to be" and "not to be" of Hamlet, that is life and death, it is a sort of in-betweenness (10). In a different line of thought, Royle suggests that literature, teaching and psychoanalysis "belong, strangely, together" and that "the heart of this strange belonging would be a logic of haunting and ghosts" (53). *Pedro Páramo* provides support for Royle's summation in that it is a work of literature with strong Freudian elements (a strong father figure, the uncanny nature of the events in the text and the constant theme of trauma and repression as well as incorporation) in which Juan Preciado is being taught by Dorotea about the dead of Comala. Indeed, it would not be a stretch to say that Rulfo's novel illustrates "a logic of haunting and ghosts."

<sup>15</sup> For more on this topic see *Cryptomimesis: The Gothic and Jacques Derrida's Ghost Writing* by Jodey Castricano and chapter 3 from *The Uncanny* by Nicholas Royle.



## A GHOST IS BORN: THE ECONOMY OF HAUNTING

[...] Remember Thee?  
Ay, though poor ghost, while memory holds a seat  
In this distracted globe. Remember Thee?  
Yea, from the table of my memory  
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,  
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past  
That youth and observation copied there,  
And the commandment alone shall live  
Within the book and volume of my brain  
Unmixed with baser matter. Yes, by heaven!  
[.....]  
It is "Adieu, adieu, remember me."  
I have sworn't.

-William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

El olvido en que nos tuvo, mi hijo, cóbraselo caro.

-Juan Rulfo, *Pedro Páramo*

It is unlikely that Nicanor Parra was the first to draw parallels between *Hamlet* and *Pedro Páramo*, yet his poem “Paralelo con Hamlet” does make a noteworthy contribution to the critical discussion regarding Rulfo’s novel:

Hay fantasmas y espectros en ambos casos

[...]

Juan Preciado no tiene mucho de príncipe

Cristiano vulgar y silvestre

Pero aún

Hijo legítimo pero sólo

Desde un punto de vista burocrático

+ mendigo que rey

Llega a Comala a pie

sin equipaje

Con la orden expresa de vengar a su padre

CÓBRASELO CARO HIJO MÍO

Pedro Páramo debe morir

Aunque no x delitos isabelinos

Ojo

x ofensas de orden económico...

No se trata de un viaje de placer (38)

The poet is not saying anything new by noting that Juan Preciado goes to Comala with a vengeful imperative, but he emphasizes what is otherwise only a subtle hint at Preciado’s motives for journeying to his father’s hometown. By emphasizing Dolores Preciado’s

paraphrased instructions to her son, “cóbraselo caro,” Parra foregrounds Rulfo’s use of the verb *cobrar*, a word that conveys a sense of financial exchange or collection of debt.<sup>1</sup> “Paralelo con Hamlet” then makes the implicit explicit by proposing that the cacique must die, presumably, to pay for “ofensas de orden económico.” Parra makes it clear that economics and exchange play a central role in Juan’s journey to Comala, inferring that the debt that Juan is to collect is a financial one.<sup>2</sup> Still, there is more to “Paralelo con Hamlet.” What Parra’s poem implies by its subject matter and conclusion but does not address overtly is that there is an intrinsic connection between haunting and economics, a notion that I will refer to as the economy of haunting.<sup>3</sup> This chapter will explore the idea of economic exchange between the living and the dead and then argue that this is part of the larger framework of the ethics of haunting. With the purpose of revealing the structure of haunting I will briefly examine the archetypal ghost story of the western canon, *Hamlet*. We then will see how economics plays a role in the return of the specter in Rulfo’s masterful ghost story, *Pedro Páramo*.

As Jodey Castricano writes, “[h]aunting always implies a debt [and] has an economic basis in the sense that a return of the dead from the grave, as Slavoj Žižek suggests, ‘materializes a certain symbolic debt beyond physical expiration’” (11). According to Castricano, then, haunting is motivated by a need of the ghost to settle accounts with the living, something is owed to the dead and they must return to collect their due. Žižek reveals a common motivation for haunting, if “something [goes] wrong with their obsequies” or there is “a disturbance in the symbolic rite,” the dead will often return and torment the living (23). The obsequies or funeral rites are central to the economy of haunting since they assure the deceased that “in spite of their death, they will ‘continue to live’ in the memory of the community” (23). Žižek foregrounds the importance of memory in the funeral rite, something that Derrida, in *The Work of Mourning*,

refers to as the last debt we owe a friend (160). It appears then that, though it is sometimes symbolized by material or financial exchange, the medium of exchange within the economy of haunting is remembrance.

As we have seen already, Dolores Preciado's instructions to her son demonstrate that memory functions as a sort of currency within the economy of haunting. When Juan's mother gives him the imperative to seek out her estranged husband, Pedro Páramo, he recalls that she had previously said to him, "[e]xígele [a Pedro Páramo] lo nuestro. Lo que estuvo obligado a darme y nunca me dio...el olvido en que nos tuvo, mi hijo, cóbraselo caro" (65). Though it may not be obvious that "el olvido en que [Páramo les] tuvo" is the "ofensa de orden económico" to which Parra refers in his poem, the fact that Juan is to collect or make a claim against the lack of remembrance with which Pedro Páramo treated his estranged wife and son seems to suggest that very thing. Juan Preciado's return to Comala, then, is motivated, not only by a desire to learn of his roots as we will later see, but also by an imperative to collect on an unpaid memory debt owed to him and his mother. To better understand the economy of haunting we will follow Parra's lead and briefly turn to *Hamlet*.

When the Ghost of Hamlet's father returns to Elsinore to haunt his son, the purpose is twofold. The common understanding is that the Ghost returns to oblige Hamlet to avenge the king's "unnatural death," suffering murder at the hand of his own brother, young Hamlet's uncle. Yet there is another reason for the specter's return from the grave that is often overlooked. As the Ghost parts, his last words are, "Adieu, adieu, adieu. Remember me!" (1356). Though the old king is dead, he does not want to be forgotten and therefore, in the form of a disembodied spirit, continually pleads for Hamlet not to forget him as he departs. This is not the first manifestation of the motif of remembering the dead in Shakespeare's play. In a previous scene,

the prince is angry with his mother for forgetting her husband too quickly after his death, “O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason / Would have mourn'd longer [...]” (1351). Hamlet has a sense even before the apparition of the specter that a proper period of mourning was not observed. The prince makes it known to his mother and others that they still owe on a memory debt to the deceased king (1350). We have examined some common motivations for the return of the ghost, but it is important to make note of another aspect of the economy of haunting. The person who is haunted, in this case young Hamlet, acts as an advocate for the Ghost; the king’s son is visited by the phantom and then becomes a vicarious mouthpiece for the specter among the living.

It is not clear, in the case of *Hamlet* or in many instances that we will examine in *Pedro Páramo*, why the ghost does not directly haunt all of those from whom it is owed a memory debt, though the fact that the ghost often uses a proxy or representative seemingly arises from the structure of the economy of haunting. The economic model is similar to the religious model of the Christian atonement (Packer 54-6). In both schemata, when the debtor is in default, in order to satisfy justice and settle accounts there is an intercessor who mediates the conflict by taking the debt upon themselves and collecting the obligation personally. It is not strange that the economy of haunting would have a similar blueprint to that of the atonement since both are primarily concerned with ethics. The type of haunting that occurs within the parameters of the economy of haunting is carried out with the purpose of collecting on a memory debt or saving the dead from what some philosophers have envisaged as a second death. This double death is a phenomenon wherein there is no trace of the subject left, the very person, along with their name and any memory of them is lost to oblivion, and it is as if they never existed (Margalit 20-1, Ricoeur, *Figuring* 290). By properly remembering the deceased, the memory debt is satisfied as

the dead are assured that they will live on in the remembrances of those who mourn them. This is the same reason why, in the economy of haunting, the subject that the ghost haunts is one with whom the deceased shared what Avishai Margalit would call a “thick” relation in life.

Margalit writes that “[t]hick relations are grounded in attributes such as parent, friend, lover, fellow-countrymen. [They] are anchored in a shared past or moored in shared memory. [...] Thick relations are in general our relations to the near and dear” (7). According to Margalit, this is the very reason that the Old Testament includes many references to memory being closely tied to family and particularly surnames, because “[t]he best bearer of a man’s name, and the best guarantor of its survival, is the dead man’s sons, and by extension, his ‘seed’” (21). Though he is referring to one’s offspring literally carrying on the name of a dead man or woman, Margalit is getting at the fact that there is a strong connection between thick relations and the notion of remembering as an ethical act since “[e]thics [...] guides our thick relations” (20, 37). The advocate for the ghost, then, the one who is initially haunted, is typically one with whom the ghost has a thick relation because, as is the case in *Hamlet*, they care enough to ensure that the dead will be remembered against oblivion. The work of mourning, which is in essence a work of memory, perhaps is best carried out by those close to the dead if they are to be properly mourned and continue on in the collective memory of the living. Still, in some cases, such as that of Dolores Preciado and Pedro Páramo, the debtor is one with whom the deceased should have shared a thick relation in life though they did not. As we will see later, in such situations, the debt to the dead tends to be symbolized in the form of real material exchange.

In the case of our model, *Hamlet*, we have seen that “the dead return as collectors of some unpaid symbolic debt” (Žižek 23). If all accounts are settled at the time of death and internment, generally the dead will rest in the grave rather than return. However, if “something

[goes] wrong with their obsequies” or there is “a disturbance in the symbolic rite”, the dead will often return and haunt (23). Also central to the funeral rite is that proper remembrance be offered, the obsequies assure the deceased that “in spite of their death, they will ‘continue to live’ in the memory of the community” (23). The funeral rite is a sort of performative remembrance; it is precisely because many of Comala’s dead were improperly buried, or not paid their memory debt, that they haunt their town as disembodied spirits and specters. The specters of Comala are relegated to a circular existence, remembering their lives, repeating their stories, waiting for someone to come and listen, someone who can be their advocate and release them from their damned state. In *Pedro Páramo* the economic cycle of haunting is played out multiple times. Fittingly, at the heart of each exchange and each haunting is the central figure of Comala, the cacique Pedro Páramo.<sup>4</sup>

From the outset the reader is informed that Juan Preciado comes to Comala to find the father he never knew, “Vine a Comala porque me dijeron que acá vivía mi padre, un tal Pedro Páramo. Mi madre me lo dijo. Y yo le prometí que vendría a verlo en cuanto ella muriera” (65). Juan reveals that his mother’s dying wish was for her son to come to Comala, not just to meet his father, but also to collect on an unpaid debt of memory, “No vayas a pedirle nada. Exígele lo nuestro. Lo que estuvo obligado a darme y nunca me lo dio...El olvido en que nos tuvo, mi hijo, cóbraselo caro” (65). Dolores Preciado sends her son to the town where she was raised entrusted with what Idelber Avelar calls an imperative to mourn (207). Pedro Páramo had cast his pregnant wife out (Rulfo 81), keeping the land he obtained through marrying Dolores. Though Juan initially doesn’t plan to fulfill his promise, he grows curious about his father: “se me fue formando un mundo alrededor de la esperanza que era aquel señor llamado Pedro Páramo”, and subsequently goes to Comala to learn of his origins as well as to keep his promise (65). An

inversion of Hamlet, Juan Preciado becomes an advocate for the ghost, traveling to his mother's hometown to demand payment from his father on an unpaid memory debt.

Juan is guided into Comala by Abundio Martínez, a mule driver he meets at a crossroads near Comala. What Juan does not know initially is that Abundio is a specter and his half brother, “[y]o también soy hijo de Pedro Páramo” (67). Abundio initiates Juan into the literal *inframundo* that is Comala and then informs him that nobody lives there and that Pedro Páramo is long dead (69). Within the first few pages of the text the reader learns that Juan cannot keep his promise to his mother and that his journey was for naught. Avelar writes that “[f]or Rulfo, [Juan's] return spells failure insofar as the father proves to be also dead, as only echoes of his name still resonate in the ‘valley of tears’” (207). Avelar's assessment recalls an important aspect of the economy of haunting that we have already discussed: it is the living who owe a debt to the dead (Derrida, *Mourning* 159-60). As Slavoj Žižek writes, the funeral rite and proper mourning are central to the economy of haunting (23). Once a person dies, they change roles within the economy of haunting and become one who is owed a memory debt, rather than one who owes. As the advocate for his mother's ghost, Juan cannot collect on the memory debt that Pedro Páramo owes his mother Dolores, since Páramo is also dead.

Abundio directs his half brother Juan to the house of doña Eduvigés, where he learns that the man with whom he was traveling, his half-brother, is dead (78). The circumstances of Abundio's death are not made known to the reader until the end of the novel, though the demise of Juan's half-brother is a tragic episode that takes place some time before Preciado journeys to Comala. Separated in narrative time and textual space, the incident initiates a pattern that uncannily would repeat itself years later when Juan travels to his father's hometown and seeks out the cacique. Abundio, like Juan, is an estranged son of Pedro Páramo, though he is born and



raised in Comala and possibly baptized by his father in the church (68-9), Abundio is never recognized by Páramo in name and he never receives any of his father's money. Abundio, it seems, is happy to live life apart from the cacique, yet after Abundio's wife dies, he approaches his father in anger and desperation seeking financial help. Pedro's illegitimate son cannot afford to give his own wife a proper burial and thus seeks *una ayudita* from his wealthy father. Abundio's lack of a relationship with his biological father, together with his request for money, demonstrates what we have said before. That is, in the economy of haunting, if there is a lack of thick relations where they should have existed (father/son), the medium of exchange is often symbolized by real currency rather than remembrance.

Acting as his deceased wife's advocate with the living, Abundio's petition for funds to bury his wife functions as a double memory debt. To be sure, Abundio's request represents his obligation and desire to properly carry out an act of mourning and remembrance for his wife; to do otherwise would be terrible since the dead who are not properly buried often are those that return (Žižek 23). Yet, Abundio's petition is also the request, directed to the father, of an unrecognized son for the type of acknowledgment that was only ever given to Miguel Páramo (an illegitimate son who Pedro recognizes by adopting and giving him the paternal name). If Páramo gives Abundio the money he needs, the cacique doubly satisfies the memory debt owed to one of his many unclaimed children, symbolically admitting paternity, as well as the debt that Abundio owes his wife, a proper burial. In both cases it is safe to assume that the dead would rest rather than return.

Unfortunately, Pedro Páramo refuses to acknowledge his estranged son's appeal and there is a tragic and violent exchange that ends in the death of both father and son. A drunken Abundio begs his father, "—Denme una caridad para enterrar a mi mujer [...]—Vengo por una

ayudita para enterrar a mi muerta,” but Pedro Páramo does not respond, perhaps lost in his memories of Susana San Juan. As if to emphasize Pedro’s terrible refusal to acknowledge his bastard son, Carlos Velo’s 1966 filmic interpretation of Rulfo’s text adds a poignant line of dialogue to the scene. Upon hearing Abundio’s request the cacique stares him in the eye and asks, “¿Quién eres?” In the film Abundio then fatally stabs his father while in the novel it is not exactly clear how the events come about. Yet in the novel there is evidence that Abundio stabs his estranged father since Páramo’s servant Damiana cries out in horror, “¡Están matando a don Pedro!” (175-6). As Pedro slowly bleeds to death, he understands that he will not be rid of Abundio, but that the terrible scene will repeat itself each night. The dying cacique is aware that the nights in Comala are full of ghosts and that after the sun goes down he will be haunted by his son, “[s]é que dentro de pocas horas vendrá Abundio con sus manos ensangrentadas a pedirme la ayuda que le negué. [...] Tendré que oírlo; hasta que su voz se apague con el día, hasta que se le muera su voz” (178). Despite the fact that Abundio’s return will be in vain since both he and his father are dead, the economy of haunting, the ethics of haunting stipulates that Abundio return to haunt Pedro Páramo and demand what he is owed.<sup>5</sup> Years later, when Juan Preciado arrives in Comala, it is Abundio’s ghost who guides him to the *inframundo* and shows him the boundaries of their father’s ranch, the *Media Luna*. The reader is ignorant of how much time has passed since the horrible death of Pedro Páramo and the extratextual passing of Abundio, yet Abundio still has his voice and we can only assume that as a revenant, he continues to return to his father’s house each night to haunt him, still seeking in vain to collect the unpaid symbolic debt of recognition and remembrance (Žižek 23). As Juan learns after his arrival, Comala is “en la mera boca del Infierno” (67), and Abundio is only one of many souls in purgatory that he will meet.

As instructed by his half-brother's specter, Juan seeks out Eduviges Dyada and finds her after walking through the uncanny streets of Comala. After learning that his host somehow communicates with his dead mother, Dolores, Juan goes to sleep in Eduviges's home only to be awakened by a terrifying scream, the echoing voice of a dead man who was hung years earlier in the very room where Juan has made his bed. This strange meeting with Eduviges and the ghostly scream that wakes Juan are among the first of the hauntings that will torment him to the point of death. Though not all of his encounters with the specters of Comala end in such a frightening and macabre manner, the *murmillos* are too much for Juan Preciado to bear and, apparently, he dies in Comala. At this point the reader learns that what they thought was narration directed to them from Juan, was really just another ghost, giving testimony about his arrival and death in Comala. The revelation of Juan's passing is often interpreted as dividing Rulfo's novel into two parts, the second half focusing more on Pedro Páramo than on Juan's experience in his mother's hometown (D'Lugo 71). Before Juan's death one of the ghostly voices he hears, as he deliriously wanders through Comala, says "[r]uega a Dios por nosotros" (119). In the second half the reader learns, not only about Rulfo's title character, but also the reasons why Comala is a desolate ghost town full of *almas en pena* that beg Juan to pray for them.

The ghosts of Comala are in a purgatory of sorts and will continue in limbo until someone remembers them, and pays the memory debt by praying for their souls so that they can be absolved of their sins and rest. Donis's sister explains to Juan that Comala's inhabitants are in purgatory because there is no possibility of forgiveness. After Padre Rentería leaves to participate in the Guerra Cristiada there is no official church presence in Comala, no one to perform the proper funeral rites. Thus, those who die in Comala are "improperly buried" and "something went wrong with their obsequies" (Žižek 23). The sister of Donis elaborates further,

explaining to Juan that she is living in incest because she and her brother see no other way to repopulate their dying town. This is the reason why a bishop, who passes through town, presumably after Rentería has left, is unable to offer any sort of forgiveness to Donis's sister. She says, “[y el obispo] se fue [...], sin mirar hacia atrás, como si hubiera dejado aquí la imagen de la perdición. Nunca ha vuelto. Y ésa es la cosa por la que esto está lleno de ánimas; un puro vagabundear de gente que murió sin perdón y que no lo conseguirá de ningún modo...” (112). Like Hamlet's father, the spirits of the dead in Rulfo's novel are “[c]ut off in the Blossom of [their] sin [...] no reck'ning made, but sent to [their] account / With all [their] imperfections on [their] head[s]” (Shakespeare 1356). According to the Catholic belief, such souls are condemned to purgatory until the living, as intercessors, pray for the souls of the dead in order to satisfy the debt of their sins, thus freeing them of their damned state.<sup>6</sup> Yet, at the time Donis's sister speaks with Juan about the collective debt that needs to be satisfied for Comala's *almas en pena* is such that those few who are still living<sup>7</sup> can't effectively act as arbiters for the dead. The sister of Donis explains, “[s]on tantas, y nosotros tan poquitos, que ya ni la lucha le hacemos para rezar porque salgan de sus penas” (111). Though the *animas* and specters that still wander the town are painted as victims of circumstance, their fate can be traced back to a decision that many of them likely made at one point or another.

As Juan explains in the opening paragraphs of the novel, he initially didn't plan to return to Comala and fulfill the promise he made to his mother. It was another force that convinced him to commence his journey to the town where he was conceived: “comencé a llenarme de sueños, a darle vuelo a las ilusiones. Y de este modo se me fue formando un mundo alrededor de la esperanza que era aquel señor llamado Pedro Páramo” (65).<sup>8</sup> Juan's error is that of forming an artificial image of his father, one that results in misguided hope. As Alan Bell writes, “[t]he fact

that Juan Preciado is thoroughly susceptible to dreams and to false images, before ever reaching Comala, is one of the primary keys to understanding the work” (238). Juan dies in Comala precisely because of a misconception of what searching for his father means, if it weren't for his imaginations, Juan wouldn't have gone to Comala, “no pensé cumplir mi promesa” (65). Though his mother Dolores told him only to collect on that which Páramo owed them, primarily a memory debt, Juan's words indicate that he is also driven by the possibility of something more, perhaps an economic inheritance.

As was mentioned in the introduction, after Juan's death he shares a common grave with a woman named Dorotea (*la Cuarraca*). Dorotea facilitated relations between the Páramo men (Pedro and Miguel) and many women of Comala with whom they shared their beds. Perhaps her role as an *alcahuete* is the reason that *la Cuarraca* knows so much about the lives of many important figures in the text, thus allowing her to act as a sort of guide, helping Juan learn more about his origins after his death. When Dorotea asks Juan why he came to Comala, he replies, “Ya te lo dije en un principio. Vine a buscar a Pedro Páramo, que según parece fue mi padre. Me trajo la ilusión” (119). The first time Juan explains his reasons for going to Comala *la ilusión* is seemingly a second motivation for going to collect on a memory debt. Yet, as if he had to narrate his story to better understand it, when Juan reiterates his motivation for seeking out his father's hometown, *la ilusión* is now understood as the deceptive beginning of Juan's end. Though he is a literal and legitimate son of Pedro Páramo, Juan has presumably lived the majority of his life without any knowledge of or interaction with his estranged father. This circumstance puts Juan in a similar situation as that of his half brother Abundio, whose death years earlier was the result of seeking out his father to collect on a memory debt. In making the

cacique the core of his hope and imagination, founded on *una ilusión*, Juan unwittingly repeats the past and commits to a path that leads him to his death in Comala.

Like Juan, virtually the whole population of Comala interpellates<sup>9</sup> themselves as symbolic children of Pedro Páramo. Carlos Velo emphasizes this point in his 1966 film adaptation of *Pedro Páramo* when, during the final confrontation with the cacique, Abundio, played by Joaquín Martínez, yells, “¡Soy hijo de Pedro Páramo! ¡Todos... somos... hijos... de Pedro Páramo!” Though many of Abundio’s generation are bastard children of Páramo,<sup>10</sup> the statement that all of Comala’s inhabitants are his children alludes to the symbolic children of the cacique, those who have interpellated themselves as his children by depending on him and hoping for some sort of inheritance from him. Gerardo, Páramo’s lawyer, is an example of one who does so. He plans to leave Comala and go to Sayula to retire but his dream depends on the cacique. In the novel, Sayula stands in sharp contrast to Comala as a place of opportunity and progress that is full of people (110). Before going to his boss to collect the money Gerardo believes Pedro Páramo owes him, the lawyer says to his wife, “[v]oy a despedirme de don Pedro. Sé que me gratificará. Estoy por decir que con el dinero que él me dé nos estableceremos bien en Sayula y viviremos holgadamente el resto de nuestros días” (158). Gerardo’s hope is centered on Pedro Páramo, which is why Gerardo’s dreams quickly fade into disillusion when faced with the harsh reality of the cacique. Though he says he will resume his responsibilities for the Media Luna, it’s not clear whether or not Gerardo actually leaves Comala for Sayula after Pedro Páramo only gives him one fifth of the money he seeks. It is clear though that many of the dead, many who stayed behind rather than leave for the city, were hoping for some form of inheritance or financial recognition of a debt they too felt they were owed by Pedro Páramo (135). By staying in Comala, nursing the false hope that the cacique would honor a debt they felt he would

pay them, symbolic or otherwise, the inhabitants of Comala condemn themselves to an improper burial in a godless town whose only source of hope folds his arms and watches them die along with the town (171).

Until the end of the novel, the reader does not learn exactly why the Comala of Dolores Preciado's memory is not the town that her son finds upon his arrival. Still, it is quite obvious from the first half of the text that Páramo is responsible for the downfall of Comala. As has been insinuated, in the case of Pedro Páramo, the economy of haunting is twisted and adulterated to suit the desires of the cacique. We have already seen how Páramo denies memory to those with whom he should have thick relations (his wife and children), despite this, the cacique does have a sense of justice that compels him to act as an advocate for Susana San Juan and take vengeance for what he perceives as a slight to the memory of his beloved. The Landowner is obsessed with Susana and he wants to forget and to be forgotten by everyone except for his childhood love and the object of his desire, Susana.<sup>11</sup>

When Susana dies there is a strange and almost tragic occurrence in Comala that is the beginning of the end. The church bells of the region ring continually for three days to announce her death, but the lament for the cacique's wife begins to draw people from elsewhere. As more people arrive, the funeral is overshadowed by what becomes a carnival of sorts; the festivities seem to almost celebrate the suffering of Pedro Páramo, "[l]as campanas dejaron de tocar; pero la fiesta siguió. No hubo manera de hacerles comprender que se trataba de un duelo, de días de duelo [...]. Enterraron a Susana San Juan y pocos de Comala se enteraron. Allá había feria" (171). Susana, of course, is not properly remembered at the time of her burial and there is no assurance that her memory will continue with those still living in Comala.<sup>12</sup> The cacique's wife is not properly mourned, the debt of remembering her is not paid and therefore, Pedro Páramo,

who has been haunted by Susana virtually his whole life, does not need to wait for the dead to return; Páramo takes it upon himself to make the people of Comala pay for their disregard for his deceased love object: “Don Pedro no hablaba. No salía de su cuarto. Juró vengarse de Comala: / —Me curzaré de brazos y Comala se morirá de hambre. / Y así lo hizo” (171). This revelation is central to the story as it is the turning point that makes many of the events we have already discussed possible. Páramo’s vow to avenge the slighted honor of Susana is the first manifestation, chronologically, of the economy of haunting in Rulfo’s novel. Yet the cacique twists the notion of a debt to the dead, and tries to collect from those that have no thick relation with Susana while she is living, ignoring the ethics of haunting; thus, the economy of haunting fails.

The reader learns, along with Juan, that Pedro Páramo doesn’t succeed in satisfying the memory debt for Susana. As Juan lies in his common grave with Dorotea, Susana’s ghost is among the *almas en pena* that comprise the archive of *murmillos* and memories that permit him to learn about his origins. As we will discuss later, Susana is “[u]na mujer que no era de este mundo” (164), she is a tortured soul in life and death.<sup>13</sup> She cannot bring Pedro Páramo the happiness he seeks from her and likewise the cacique is powerless to save Susana from her madness. Like his son Juan, Pedro is doomed to fail from the outset. Susana San Juan’s ghost does not rest, not only because she was improperly mourned, but also, as we will see later, because of an apparent psychosis that exists from her early childhood.

Rulfo’s novel reveals a concern for the economy of haunting. There is a notion, manifest in the interactions between characters, that the living owe a debt of proper remembrance and mourning to the dead. Further, this exchange between the living and the dead in the form of remembrance is motivated by ethics and thick relations. Yet the endeavor to collect an unpaid



memory debt from the living is a failed venture from the beginning. Páramo is the catalyst for Comala becoming a godless ghost town in which the inhabitants receive no forgiveness for their sins and wander the streets asking for prayers and remembrance from anyone who is still living so that they may leave purgatory. Páramo's refusal to acknowledge any memory debt that he owes perpetuates the failure of the economy of haunting in Rulfo's novel. The imperative to mourn only falls on dead or unwilling ears and the return of the ghost's advocates, demanding payment on a memory debt "spells failure insofar as [...] only echos [...] still resonate in the 'valley of tears'" that is Comala (Avelar 207).

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Literally *cobrar* means “Recibir dinero como pago de una deuda” (www.rae.es, “cobrar”).

<sup>2</sup> This is a valid conclusion since Pedro Páramo marries Dolores with the purpose of settling an inherited debt that the Páramo family owes the Preciado family. Páramo erases the debt by marrying Dolores and inheriting some of her family’s land (95-100).

<sup>3</sup> Jodey Castricano in her study *Cryptomimesis* discusses what she calls an “economy of the crypt” (11). However, while the crux of Castricano’s study is the ghostly nature of writing, reading, and interpretation, *Pedro Páramo* is a text that deals with real ghosts, not only as metaphors or effects, but also as literal disembodied spirits and specters. For this reason, rather than use Castricano’s phrase, “economy of the crypt,”—a phrase that alludes to Abraham and Torok’s development of the crypt as a metaphor and interpretive tool in the field of psychoanalysis—I will use the phrase “economy of haunting” so as to allow for both a metaphorical and literal usage while at the same time acknowledging a debt to Castricano’s research.

<sup>4</sup> Terry J. Peavler, in his study *El texto en llamas* (New York: Peter Lang, 1988), analyzes the amount of textual space dedicated to the perspective of each character in *Pedro Páramo* and is surprised to discover that Juan Preciado’s perspective receives almost twice as much textual space as that of his father. Further, Padre Rentería’s perspective occupies almost as much space as that of Pedro Páramo (105-06). Still, in the opinion of this author, Pedro Páramo is the central figure, he is the character around which the narration is constructed and the person who plays a roll in the majority of the key events within the story. Rulfo emphasizes the importance of

Páramo in the novel by alluding to his position as a cacique (Vital 200). In my opinion this alone makes his title character the central figure of the novel since he is the dominant presence in Comala itself.

<sup>5</sup> Though Abundio is directly haunting the person who owes him a debt, the reader should remember that he initially approached Pedro Páramo as an advocate for his deceased wife, thus complying with the established pattern of the economy of haunting.

<sup>6</sup> David García would disagree with this statement. He interprets the people of Comala as having a fatalistic view of life, already living in a symbolic hell that represents the real *infierno* to which they will go after death. Therefore, having already lived in hell their whole lives, they have no hope of ever escaping it after death (83-90). However, it is important to note that there is much evidence that contradicts García's interpretation. As Donis's sister explains to Juan, before the burden became too much for them to bear, Comala's living prayed daily for the souls in purgatory in order to free the dead from their suffering (111). Similarly, some of the ghosts or *almas en pena* that Juan sees while walking through Comala ask him to pray for them, presumably with the same end in mind.

<sup>7</sup> The question of whether or not anyone in Comala is alive is one of the enigmas that have plagued critics since the publication of *Pedro Páramo*. In an interview with José Carlos González Boixo, Rulfo says that Donis and his sister are figments of Juan's imagination (González Boixo 248).

<sup>8</sup> Though some believe that Juan's sin, and the justification for his death, is simply that he is a child of Pedro Páramo, my contention is that his death and afterlife as a ghost in Comala is, at least in part, the result of Juan's decision to build the foundation of his hope on the rock of

Pedro Páramo. In doing so, Juan, like so many other Comalans, forfeits any control over their own destinies.

<sup>9</sup> My use of the word interpellation here is in the Althusserian sense. Louis Althusser explains his usage of the term as such:

[I]deology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that it ‘recruits’ subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or transforms the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which it can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: ‘Hey, you there!’

Assuming that the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street, the hailed individual will turn around. By this mere one-hundred-and- eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject*. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was ‘really’ addressed to him, and that ‘it was *really him* who was hailed’ (and not someone else).  
(174)

What Althusser is getting at is that a non-specific address from an ideological position automatically assumes that the person who responds is the subject of the call or hail. Thus the person that responds places, or interpellates, themselves in a given role within the ideology that originated the address. What I’m suggesting by using Althusser’s term here is that there are those among the inhabitants of Comala that, though not biological children of Pedro Páramo, recruit or transform themselves into subjects of the cacique—subjects that he would address

were he to hail anyone—thus becoming his symbolic children. Though there is no hail from Pedro Páramo that would interpellate the inhabitants of Comala as his children, there are those who, like Juan Preciado, become enthralled with the *ilusión* of receiving some sort of inheritance from Páramo, and give a preemptive response to the possibility of a future hail or call from their symbolic father.

<sup>10</sup> In *Los cuadernos de Juan Rulfo* it is revealed that in an earlier draft of *Pedro Páramo* the cacique, at the time named Maurilio Gutiérrez, truly is the father of many Comalans. In addition to claiming to be the father of the town priest, Gutiérrez addresses the “ánimas santas del purgatorio” saying, “todos ustedes, el setenta o el cuarenta por ciento de los vivos, todos son mis hijos” (70).

<sup>11</sup> A close reading reveals that many of the fragments that present the memories of Pedro Páramo are somehow received from the cacique as he sits in his chair remembering Susana after her death. See Jorge Ruffinelli, prologue, *Antología personal*, by Juan Rulfo (Mexico City: Nueva Imagen, 1978) 15-16.

<sup>12</sup> It’s important to note that Susana refused to accept her last rites from Padre Rentería, possibly condemning herself to perdition and a subsequent return.

<sup>13</sup> The haunting of Susana San Juan will be discussed at length in chapter 3.

## THE HAUNTED PRESENT: THE GHOST AS A WITNESS OF HISTORY

They stayed put in their houses  
Or moved to higher grounds  
There are ghosts by the reservoir  
No one wants them round any more

-Fanfarlo, "Ghosts"

Recuerdo días en que Comala se llenó de "adioses"  
y hasta nos parecía cosa alegre ir a despedir a los  
que se iban. Y es que se iban con intenciones de  
volver. Nos dejaban encargadas sus cosas y su  
familia. Luego algunos mandaban por la familia  
aunque no por sus cosas, y después parecieron  
olvidarse del pueblo y de nosotros, y hasta de sus  
cosas.

-Juan Rulfo, *Pedro Páramo*

"[N]o sabes que es más dificultoso resucitar un muerto que  
dar la vida de nuevo"

-Juan Rulfo, "Paso del norte"

Mexican historian Federico Munguía Cárdenas is acutely aware of the fact that Juan Rulfo had more than a casual interest in history. Rulfo once telephoned the historian and expressed his apprehension about, what was at the time, a lack of histories dealing directly with the Ávalos province of Jalisco. In his telephone call Rulfo said, “existe un vacío sobre esa zona en la historia de Jalisco, ya que hasta la fecha, nada se ha escrito sobre ella” (Munguía Cárdenas 478). It is clear that Rulfo was genuinely troubled by an apparent gap in the historical archive of Jalisco. Though the author would work much more with literature than history, Rulfo’s love for history would influence his writings and in turn, Rulfo’s fiction would influence his interpretation of history. Munguía Cárdenas writes that “a veces [Rulfo] mezclaba partes en que su imaginación distorsionaba la verdad histórica” and that eventually it was obvious that “el novelista había dominado al historiador” (478). Yet, behind what the historian perceived as a simple confusion of history and fiction, there is, perhaps, a more complex phenomenon taking place. Indeed, regardless of the fact that Rulfo was a writer of fiction, some scholars have referred to Rulfo’s literary output as realist and historical.

Jorge Ruffellini is among the critics who read Juan Rulfo as a realist, though he believes that the author’s originality lies in his avoidance of the rules of realism. By doing so, Ruffellini writes, “Rulfo logró que sus cuentos y su novela expresaran la realidad social —más ampliamente, humana— de los campesinos de Jalisco” (8). Mexican writer Alfonso Reyes agrees with Ruffellini though he believes that the originality of *Pedro Páramo* lies in using death, not as a subject, but as a means to construct his novel. For Reyes, *Pedro Páramo* is a novel which “por el tono, oscila entre lo fantástico y el humor macabre, [pero] es, en su mismo fondo, esencialmente psicológica y, en cierto sentido, realista” (443). It is strange that anyone would call a novel that deals with ghosts and specters realist, yet Reyes’s contention is that

Rulfo's novel is realist in that its characters "cuentan con detalles su aventura humana, reconstituyen de hecho la historia de una época, la de los caciques del México feudal de antes de la revolución" (444). It would seem that Reyes interprets *Pedro Páramo* as a strange historical document in which the ghosts, by way of testimony, reconstruct a chapter in the historical archive. Such an interpretation not only is in harmony with Rulfo's concern for history, but it also reveals an extratextual function of the fictional ghost, that of the witness of history. My intention in this chapter is to explore the notion of the ghost as a witness to a forgotten past, a witness that can transcend time and death in order to give testimony of the past, in the present. A further aim is to demonstrate how the ghosts of Comala, by haunting the present within the text, fulfill an extratextual role of representing a lost or repressed chapter within the Mexican historical narrative, thus complying with the larger framework of the ethics of haunting.

Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, in their book *Testimony*, address, among other things, "the common ground between literature and ethics" (xiii). One function of literature they discuss is that it becomes "a witness, and perhaps the only witness, to the crises within history which precisely cannot be articulated, witnessed in the given categories of history itself" (xviii). Literature allows the past to come back and remind the present of its forgotten or repressed history. Further, testimonial literature often deals with "crises within history," events that are too traumatic for the victim to comprehend, events that can't be communicated because, for the victim, "[t]here are never enough words or the right words, there is never enough time or the right time, and never enough listening or the right listening to articulate the story that cannot fully be captured in *thought, memory and speech*" (Laub 78). Yet testimonial literature, like a ghost, brings those traumas back from the past to haunt the present. This haunting effect of



literature, according to Laub and Felman is tied to an ethics of memory, and they are not alone in their assessment.

Regarding the victims of traumatic historical events, such as the holocaust, Paul Ricoeur writes the following:

We must remember because remembering is a *moral duty*. We owe a *debt* to the victims. And the tiniest way of paying our debt is to tell and retell what happened [to them]. By remembering and telling, we not only prevent forgetfulness from killing the victims twice; we also prevent their life stories from becoming banal... and the events from appearing as necessary. (*Figuring* 290, italics in original)

The philosopher is quite clear regarding the duty that the living have to remember the dead and the manner in which it should be done. Remembering the dead and telling their stories allows the dead to live on in memory rather than permitting them to die twice.<sup>1</sup> Yet, even Ricoeur admits that this “debt to the dead,” remembering people and events as they really were, is an impossibility that can only be overcome by a form of representation: “[i]t is still the imaginary that keeps otherness from slipping into the unsayable. It is always through some transfer from Same to Other, in empathy and imagination, that the Other that is foreign to me is brought closer” (*Time and Narrative* 184). That is, the stories of the dead are often best remembered by way of reenacting the past, especially when the purpose of telling the story is to create empathy. As Richard Kearney puts it, “[s]ometimes an ethics of memory is obliged to resort to an aesthetics of representation. [Readers] need not only be made intellectually aware [...] of the horrors of history; they also need to experience the horror of that suffering as *if* they were actually there” (107, italics in original). An aesthetics of representation allows the reader of a text or the viewer of a film to more closely approximate the experience of the victims of

historical trauma, thus creating an empathetic connection between the dead and the living, an end that history often fails to accomplish, according to Kearney. Yet, representing the past aesthetically also fills in gaps left within the historical narrative, spaces wherein aesthetics can take license where the rigors of history cannot.

Of course the ghost is the perfect figure to accomplish such a task. If we are to resurrect the past by way of aesthetics, as Ricoeur, Kearney, Felman and Laub suggest, we must turn to the ghost. Avery F. Gordon explains that “we will have to learn to talk to and listen to ghosts, rather than banish them, as the precondition for establishing our scientific or humanistic knowledge” (23). The ability of the ghost to transcend the bounds of death and time permits them, as revenants, to haunt the present and give authentic and accurate testimony about the forgotten or repressed past because they are firsthand witnesses.<sup>2</sup> Within the context of fiction the reality of the ghost is not an issue and therefore the ghost can be believed as a witness of eras long passed.<sup>3</sup> *Pedro Páramo* then, can be read as a ghostly testimonial, a collection of memories and *murmillos* that fills a hole in the historical archive.

This restoring function of literature is one of the attributes of what Roberto Gonzalez-Echevarría terms the Latin American archival novel in his book, *Myth and Archive*. History is subject to emplotment, as much as any other narrative, fictional or otherwise, which implies that there is always something left out of the story. The gaps in the archive of history “[demonstrate] not only a lack of closure that works against the Archive’s capaciousness and desire for totalization, [...] it underscores the fact that gaps are constitutive of the Archive as much as volume” (182).<sup>4</sup> The information that is omitted when compiling a history is often left out because it is not considered to be essential to the overarching narrative. It is with this in mind that González Echevarría writes, “[a]rchival fictions return to the gap at the core of the Archive,

because it is the very source of fiction” (186). The contention that gaps in the archive serve as a source of fiction is fascinating, because it reveals an almost symbiotic relationship between history and fiction, a relationship that was discussed earlier in conjunction with the theories of Laub, Felman, Ricoeur and Kearney. Archival fictions, then, fill in the gap in the archive with their own documentation: Melquíades’s records of the Buendía family, Bustrofedón’s magenteic tapes in *Tres triste tigres*, and the virtual archive of echoes, voices and memories in Rulfo’s novel.

The form of *Pedro Páramo* almost invites a reading of the novel as an archival fiction. Juan returns to Comala from the city,<sup>5</sup> the epitome of Mexican modernity. Juan Preciado is, recalling what Roger Bartra writes, remembering his rural ancestors from the point of view of the city (11). Such a reading would figure Juan Preciado as a representative of a more modern Mexico performing a remembrance of its roots, recognizing its origins and thus, filling a gap within the archive of the official state history of Mexico. Further, Juan serves as a sort of guide or surrogate for the reader, “[his] words support his self-referential function as a reader-in-the-text paralleling the activities of the novel’s implied reader” (D’lugo 78). Juan, perhaps guiding the reader from modernity to the rural past, leads the reader to the archive, allowing them to read the testimonies and memoirs that comprise the archive of Comala, those “spectral murmurs” that, according to Danny Anderson, “bespeak a reality hidden beneath the façade of Porfirian progress” (Paragraph 11). Rural Mexico and towns such as Comala are among the Others of history that were left out of the official state history and the discourse of modernity.

It’s important to note that González Echevarría’s notion of the Latin American archival novel accomplishes what, as we have already discussed, Ricoer, Laub, Felman and Kearney believe is one of the aims of literature and aesthetics. Archival fictions recover what resides in

the gap in the archive; it remembers what history cannot remember. Yet González Echevarría dissents from the previously mentioned views on literature and the ethics of memory in that his position is heavily influenced by Michel Foucault, specifically Foucault's notion of authoritative discourse. Foucault writes that discourse decides what is said in a society and how it is said (Brannigan 313). In essence, discourse decides which people and events belong to official history and which people and events will be relegated to oblivion. In the case of González Echevarría, there is not a question of which stories history can or cannot include, it becomes a question of which stories history wants or does not want to include. An archival fiction that is born out of the gap in the archive, then, is born from an otherness of history, a repressed voice that returns from the past to haunt; it serves as a witness to a part of history that would otherwise be lost. This point has not been lost on the criticism of *Pedro Páramo*.

Many critics read Rulfo's novel as a sort of elegy for the Mexican *campesino*, or Mexico's agrarian past. Roger Bartra, referring to the post revolution *campesinos* writes, "[e]stos campesinos pensados desde la ciudad y desde la cultura moderna son el fantasma, como Pedro Páramo, de recuerdos borrosos en la memoria colectiva: son los ancestros recordados que, como una larva en nuestro pensamiento, se reproducen constantemente" (11). Bartra emphasizes the ghostly nature, not only of the past, but of Mexico's agrarian past in relation to the modern city. The *campesinos* and the *ranchos* represent the repressed in the collective Mexican memory, the forgotten past. Danny Anderson writes that Rulfo's novel "[makes] readers aware of the disquieting presence of a dying but not quite dead traditional Mexico looming just out of sight—a lingering reality no longer present, not yet past" (Paragraph 4). The past is made more ghostly by the fact that it is still lingering, ethereal and almost visible but fading, like the specters that Juan Preciado sees as he walks the streets of Comala. If one subscribes to this interpretation of

*Pedro Páramo* as a manifestation of a disappearing past, then the disembodied spirits of Comala are representative of the ghosts of real people that have been forgotten or excluded from Mexcio's history.

Avery F. Gordon believes that "the ghost is just the sign, or the empirical evidence if you like, that tells you a haunting is taking place" (8). Contrary to a belief in real disembodied spirits, a historical-materialist reading of Comala's specters would imply that some sort of historical crisis that gives rise to the ghosts and in the aftermath they become only remnants and memories of real people that are now dead. Jo Labanyi explains that, according to Derrida, this is exactly what the apparition is:

[Derrida] insists that [ghosts] are not a psychological projection but that they are 'really there', summoning us with their look [...] for ghosts are the return of the repressed of history –that is, the mark of an all-too-real historical trauma which has been erased from conscious memory but which makes its presence felt through its ghostly traces.<sup>6</sup> (6)

The mere presence of the ghost, according to Labanyi's interpretation of Derrida, is a testament to a historical trauma.<sup>7</sup> According to what Gordon and Labanyi write, the spirits of the dead in *Pedro Páramo* can be interpreted as evidence of a historical trauma that occurred in Comala. Once it is understood that the presence of the ghost is a sign of a crisis in history,<sup>8</sup> it is not difficult to deduce that the historical traumas that give way to the ghosts in *Pedro Páramo* are the strongarm rule of the local cacique, the Mexican Revolution, Cristiada War and the subsequent emphasis on modernity and the city at the national level.

Danny Anderson's interpretation of *Pedro Páramo*, which is informed by Gordon's theory of the ghost, reaches this very conclusion:

The haunting effect of *Pedro Páramo* derives from the fitful story of Mexican modernity, a story that the novel tells in a way that more “objective” historical and sociological analyses cannot. As an aesthetic expression characterized by imaginative understanding, the novel explores Mexican social history of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The decadent remnants of a quasi-feudal social order, violent revolutions, and a dramatic exodus from the countryside to the city all gave rise to ghost towns across Mexico.<sup>9</sup>

Like Alfonso Reyes, Anderson understands Rulfo’s novel as a work of fiction that reconstructs “la historia de una época, la de los caciques del México feudal de antes de la revolución” (Reyes 444). Yet Anderson addresses the role of modernity in the creation of ghost towns such as Comala more explicitly.<sup>10</sup> The rule of Porfirio Díaz set the foundations for the move toward modernity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century under the guise of progress (Chasteen 195-6), but the rise of the modern city coincides more closely with the end of the revolutionary era.

Though there are few overt references to specific dates in history in the text, allusions to the Mexican Revolution and the Cristero War place Pedro Páramo’s death near the end of the 1920’s.<sup>11</sup> It is within this timeframe that the people of Comala begin to leave their town as part of the larger Mexican exodus for the city. When talking to Juan in their common grave, Dorotea’s comments illustrate how the mass migration from rural areas to the city that is characteristic of the post-revolution era would have been experienced by those who chose not to leave:

Recuerdo días en que Comala se llenó de “adioses” y hasta nos parecía cosa alegre ir a despedir a los que se iban. Y es que se iban con intenciones de volver. Nos dejaban encargadas sus cosas y su familia. Luego algunos mandaban por la familia aunque no por

sus cosas, y después parecieron olvidarse del pueblo y de nosotros, y hasta de sus cosas.

(137)

Dorotea makes it clear that the original intention of those who left was to return. Yet, once in the city, or some other more prosperous town, such as Sayula,<sup>12</sup> Comala is forgotten.

Sayula is an important referent since in *Pedro Páramo* it is regarded as a living, prosperous place which stands in sharp contrast to a very dead, forlorn Comala. As we saw in Chapter 1, Sayula is viewed as a place of prosperity, evidenced by Páramo's lawyer Gerardo's desire to retire to Sayula and live "holgadamente el resto de [sus] días" (158). The very idea of living comfortably the rest of one's days is one that doesn't mesh well with a Comala under the rule of Pedro Páramo; hence, Gerardo's desire to leave. Sayula is mentioned twice more in Rulfo's text, the first instance being when Juan tells of his arrival in Comala. He notes that, though it is the time of day when children tend to play in the streets, there is only silence in his mother's hometown. This is strange to Juan since a day earlier he experienced something completely different in Sayula, a city that is teeming with life (69). That Sayula is a foil of Comala is clear, since the differences between the two locales are emphasized each time Sayula is mentioned in the text.

The next mention of Sayula also stresses the number of people that reside there in comparison to what is virtually a lack of inhabitants in Comala; Sayula, however small it may be, is depicted as a desirable place. When explaining to Juan how to leave Comala, Donis's sister explains that she has always desired to go to Sayula, in part, because there are many people there. Juan confirms that there are indeed many people in Sayula, "[l]a que hay en todas partes", and in most places except Comala, La Hermana de Donis then gives a reply that is tinged with melancholy, "[f]igúrese usted. Y nosotros aquí tan solos. Desviviéndonos por conocer aunque

sea tantito de la vida” (110). Each time Sayula is invoked in the text, it is presented as a living place, full of people, a place that entices the rural inhabitants of Comala to leave their dusty hometown. Though Sayula is not a large city, it allows for the establishment of the rural, urban dichotomy. Though it was Mexico City and the U.S. that drew away many inhabitants of Mexico’s rural communities, Sayula represents, perhaps, the beginning of a move to even larger cities. There is no doubt that Comala, like many other pueblos, becomes a ghost town in part because of the post-revolution exodus to urban centers.

Indeed, it wasn’t until Rulfo understood the very effect of Mexico’s mass migration to more urban settings that he was able to understand how he should write *Pedro Páramo*. As the author explains, it was the solitude and loneliness of the towns and people that were left behind that was the key to writing about Comala:

Y hubo una cosa que me dio la clave para sacarlo [...]. Fue cuando regresé al pueblo dónde vivía, 30 años después, y lo encontré deshabitado. Es un pueblo que he conocido yo, de unos siete mil, ocho mil habitantes. Tenía 150 habitantes, cuando llegué. [...]. La gente se había ido, así. [...]. Entonces comprendí yo esa soledad de Comala, del lugar ése. (cited in Roffé 60-1)

The solitude of towns and people that were forgotten while many went to the city is a central motivation for Rulfo’s novel. Juan Preciado, like Rulfo himself, returns to the abandoned pueblo from Colima, remembering his origins and its inhabitants from the perspective of the city.<sup>13</sup> Yet, concluding that *Pedro Páramo* is a sort of lament for the pueblos and ranchos is too facile.

To be sure, the phenomenon of abandonment is not exclusive to Comala, yet the previously discussed exchange between Juan and Donis’s Sister also reveals a characteristic unique to the town. Sayula is mentioned as a place that has “as much people as everywhere else”



(110), a description that almost denounces Comala as a non-place. Though many towns in Mexico were nearly completely abandoned as the residents moved to the city, Pedro Páramo's town stands alone for other reasons. Rulfo believes that Comala "fue reaccionario siempre" and so the hell that it becomes, that the people allow it to become "fue como pagar la culpa" (cited in Roffé 62). Comala, Pedro Páramo and the feudal system have to die because they are relics of the past that react against change. Jason Wilson might agree with Rulfo's reading of Comala as a reactionary town, he writes that:

The official history of Mexico bypassed Comala in the novel *Pedro Páramo*. No land reform, no social justice, no socialist equality, just the powerful "macho" Pedro Páramo, with his obedient priest, the Padre Rentería, and faithful henchman, Fulgor Sedano, and Pedro's ability to bribe and force the revolution to go elsewhere. (235)

As Wilson writes, the official history of Mexico celebrated the reforms of the revolution, reforms that "bypassed Comala" in part because of the cacique's reaction against them, but also because the reforms were ineffective, a theme that is echoed throughout Rulfo's fiction. Pedro Páramo though is also responsible for the ruin of Comala, he transforms the town into a "'lost' world [that] was reactionary and awful, and deserved to become a ghost town" (Wilson 237).

However, Mexico in the 1940's and 50's idealized its past, celebrating the reforms of the revolution as a success while at the same time ignoring towns such as Comala where the reforms had no positive effect. Thus, the forging of a new national identity under the banner of modernity, in a way, purposefully forgot and repressed any remnants of the past that did not suit the image of a modern Mexico. Though *Pedro Páramo* presents a microcosm of the effects of Mexico's transition from a largely rural society to a modern, urban culture, the cacique and Comala also represent aspects of its past that Mexico wanted to leave behind. Comala, therefore,

becomes the repressed of Mexican history, the part of Mexico intentionally left out of the archive of the post-revolutionary national agenda that only wanted to see an idealized past, not the harsh reality of Comala and the legacy of an archaic feudal system.<sup>14</sup>

Regardless of whether or not Comala and its people deserved to be blotted out of Mexico's historical archive, as Rulfo and Wilson seem to imply, the question still remains whether Rulfo's text fulfills the ethical role of representing a crisis in history. Anderson writes that by presenting an otherness of Mexican history, *Pedro Páramo* haunts the present with an aspect of its past in such a way that the reader comes to terms with the ghosts of Comala, thus pushing "readers toward a transformative knowledge of Mexican society and its historical struggles" (Paragraph 17). However, the fact that the transformative knowledge to which Anderson refers is communicated on the national or historical level does not allow for an ethics of haunting. Ethics, as discussed in chapter 1, is a notion that exists at the level of thick relations (Margalit 7-8). Further, it seems that Rulfo himself would be opposed to reading his novel as an aesthetic restoration of a lost chapter in Mexico's historical archive.

In an interview with Fernando Benítez, Rulfo backs away from any connection between his fiction and history. The author says, regarding the so-called realism of *Pedro Páramo*:

Di con un realismo que no existe, con un hecho que nunca ocurrió y con gentes que nunca existieron. Algunos maestros norteamericanos de literatura han ido a Jalisco en busca de un paisaje, de unas gentes, de unas caras [...] y como era de esperarse, esos maestros no encontraron nada [...] mis paisanos creen que los libros son historias reales [...]. Creen que la novela es una transposición de hechos [...]. La literatura es ficción, y por lo tanto, es mentira. (Cited in Bradu, 11)

Despite his concern for history, the author adamantly denies any connection between his novel and any real historical events. At the same time, Rulfo once wrote that *Pedro Páramo* is clearly a story that explores the source of the common person's suffering, "el cacigazo" which existed in Mexico and all of Latin America since before the time of the conquest (Vital 200). Regardless of whether or not *Pedro Páramo* works as an archival novel, one that ethically restores the voices of Comala by allowing their ghosts to haunt the present, it is important to remember that this interpretation is only valid as an extratextual reading.

As Avelar writes, in "*Pedro Páramo* [there exists a] home-returning motif [and] the image of past specters' lingering around, reminding the present of the task of mourning [...] the return to the hometown is an imperative, a command passed down by the dying mother. For Rulfo, such return spells failure insofar as the father proves to be also dead, as only echoes of his name still resonate in the 'valley of tears'" (207). Notwithstanding much evidence for an ethics of haunting in *Pedro Páramo*, in the form of restoring a repressed chapter of history, it seems as though Avelar would argue that the ethics of haunting fails. Yet there is hope for Comala yet.

Juan goes to Comala in order to learn about his father, the patriarchal center of history in Comala, and he does. But he also inadvertently learns about Pedro Páramo's victims. Along with the reader, Juan hears the *murmillos* of Comala's historical Others as he wanders the town and lies in the grave. One could argue that Pedro Páramo's memories overtake the narration in the second half of the novel, that the *cacique* again represses the victims of Comala, making himself the centerpiece of the story, thus killing his victims a second time (cf. Ricoeur, *Figuring* 290).

Yet it is important to remember the extratextual function of the aesthetics of representation in regards to a lost history. In chapter one, we saw that the death of every living

character results in a failure of the economy of haunting, the novel ends tragically as the family line is truncated. Yet, outside the text it does not matter that the ghosts are dead, the reader still hears their stories, listens to their murmurs along with Juan, and certainly, remembers them. *Pedro Páramo*, as we have seen, is interpreted by many critics as representing an aspect of Mexico's past that history forgot. One critic, for example, "finds an echo of discourse in his interpretation that the other characters are fragments of Pedro" (D'Lugo 81). Such a bold and even radical reading of the notion of discourse presents a wonderful possibility for interpreting Páramo as a facilitator through whom the Others of Comala's history are allowed to speak. Though he is the central figure of authority, and would thus have a privileged position with regards to historical discourse, it is the connection to him that allows the historical other to have a voice as well. As we will see in the following chapter, the connection that many Comalans share with the cacique plays a central role in the ethics of haunting and being remembered.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This topic was addressed in a different way in Chapter 1, in relation to the symbolizing function of the funeral rite.

<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that the ghost is not necessarily an objective witness of the past. Once a living person, the ghost is still subject to the same biases, perspectives and opinions they had in life. This point is well illustrated in Alejo Carpentier's novel, *El arpa y la sombra*. While hearing testimony about him in a court that is considering Christopher Columbus for beatification, the Navigator is surprised to hear the harsh testimonies of some witnesses who are against Columbus being canonized. Columbus is genuinely surprised and saddened to hear how others perceive his actions.

<sup>3</sup> Rulfo is not the first to allow ghosts to perform this very function, but it does seem as if he influenced other Boom writers. Notable Latin American fictions that employ the ghost as a witness to the past include: Machado de Assis's 1881 novel *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas*, Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (1955), Miguel Cabrera Infante's novel *Tres tristes tigres* (1967), García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* (1967)<sup>3</sup>, and Alejo Carpentier's 1978 novel, *El arpa y la sombra*. Each of these novels employs the ghost in some sort of testimonial role, telling their story or the story of those with whom they lived. As if he wanted to foreground the notion of the ghost as witness to the past, Alejo Carpentier's novel *El arpa y la sombra* allows the ghost to return from the grave to the present of the text and testify, literally, regarding historical events that would be impossible for anyone else but the dead to know about. Bartolomé de las Casas, in some sort of afterlife state, testifies regarding the actions of Christopher Columbus before a tribunal that is to decide whether or not to beatify the Navigator. An aspect that the previously mentioned Latin American novels have in common is the notion of the archive. In each novel

the ghost, either by testifying or writing, fills a hole in the historical archive, restoring information or stories that were formerly lost.

<sup>4</sup> Jorge Luís Borges's short story "Del rigor en la ciencia" illustrates the maniacal totalizing desire of science to describe everything ad infinitum. The historical archive can never be complete and thus the incompleteness of history as a discourse is inherent in its very nature. González Echevarría writes the following about the incompleteness of the archive, and implicitly, historical discourse.

[The incompleteness of the archive is] evidenced by the many unfinished or mutilated documents it contains [...] This incompleteness appears as a blank [...] and signals not only a lack of closure that works against the Archive's capaciousness and desire for totalization, but more importantly it underscores the facts that gaps are constitutive of the Archive as much as volume. (182)

<sup>5</sup> The reader should remember here that Juan Preciado is conceived in Comala. Juan, then, only had previously been to Comala while in his mother's womb. It could be argued that, though it is an extreme instance of the uncanny return, Juan's arrival in Comala is indeed a return to his origins. Such an interpretation would strengthen the metaphor of a return to, or remembrance of his origins that occurs from the point of view of the city. Also, this reading would allow Juan to better represent the average Mexican who lived in the era of the transition to modernity since a great number of them had roots in a rural pueblo though they were raised in the city (Roffé 74-77).

<sup>6</sup> I believe that the Derridian notion of *différance* is central to Derrida's vision of the present as one that is haunted by the past. *Différance* is an ontological view of being in the present as a present that is characterized by confluence with the past, as well as future

possibilities of being. This view of the present in flux is what Derrida seemingly understands as being haunted. According to Bradu, Rulfo's vision for Comala is born of a similar idea, "Habitar la vida o la muerte en un *mismo* lugar, éste es el drama que imagina Rulfo y para el cual inventa un paisaje que tiene como nombre Comala (Bradú 58, italics in original. See also, "Différance," by Derrida).

<sup>7</sup> Again, this hearkens back to Chapter 1 in which the return of the ghost implies that "something [went] wrong with [the] obsequies" of the dead or that there is "a disturbance in the symbolic rite" of burial (Žižek 23). The difference here is that we are referring to the ghost as a rhetorical tool that represents a real past.

<sup>8</sup> Felman and Laub use this wording (xviii), which I will use interchangeably with Labanyi's "historical trauma" (6), to describe the events that result in a chapter of history being forgotten or repressed, purposefully or otherwise.

<sup>9</sup> Anderson's article supports Richard Kearney's earlier contention that an aesthetics of representation is often more effective in communicating history than the discourse of history itself.

<sup>10</sup> Anderson further explains the following:

Reading *Pedro Páramo* creates a transformative recognition of Mexico's move toward modernity in the early twentieth century; more than the objective lessons learned from social and cultural history, as a novel, *Pedro Páramo* produces a structure of feeling for readers that immerses us through the experience of haunting. (Paragraph 10)

<sup>11</sup> González Boixo places Páramo's death in 1927 and provides a convincing reconstruction of the events of the novel in time to support his claim ("Apéndice 1" 181-90).

<sup>12</sup> In footnote 8 to his edition of *Pedro Páramo*, González Boixo gives the population of Sayula to give the reader a better understanding of how the city would contrast with Comala. The note reads, “Sayula: ciudad de México, en el estado de Jalisco, al sur de la capital del estado, con una población de más de 11.000 habitantes” (Rulfo 69).

<sup>13</sup> Though I am aware that the intentional fallacy would disregard Rulfo’s experience as irrelevant to any interpretation of the text, there are many critics who have made it clear that Rulfo’s biography, especially his childhood, is an important influence on his literary output. For example, Rulfo once explained his strange custom of visiting the graves of the towns he visits in order to read the date of passing because the dead are “lo único interesante que hay en los pueblos” (Cited in Roffé 66). Of course this has echoes of *Pedro Páramo*, one could easily argue that Juan Preciado performs a similar function when he returns to Comala since he goes to the graveyard to learn of the dead.

<sup>14</sup> Danny Anderson writes that:

The Porfiriato strove to modernize the nation through the development of infrastructure and investment; it allowed for anomalies such as the creation of the Media Luna ranch and strong local power brokers such as Pedro Páramo who shared the interests of the elite and helped maintain a thinly veiled feudal social order. Within this context, Susana San Juan and other individuals murmur their complaints in ghostly whispers [...]. Speaking in the streets of Comala, overheard in dreams, and groaning in the cemetery, these spectral murmurs bespeak a reality hidden beneath the façade of Porfirian progress (Paragraph 11).



## THE INCORPORATED PHANTOM: AWAKENING TO THE GHOSTS OF COMALA

To silence a ghost, an outrage!

-Nicolas Abraham, "The Phantom  
of Hamlet or The Sixth Act"

Learn [...] not how to have conversation with the ghost, but  
how to talk with him with her, how to let them speak or  
how to give them back speech, even if it is in oneself, in the  
other, in the other in oneself...

-Derrida, *Specters of Marx*

According to Nicolas Abraham, the “phantom is [...] a metapsychological fact: what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others” (171). It follows then that a reading of *Pedro Páramo* through the lens of Abraham’s conception of spirits, the ghosts we have discussed thus far, the disembodied spirits of Comala and the specter of Hamlet’s father, are not real but a psychological phenomenon. As is the case with many scholars that investigate the notion of the ghost, neither Nicolas Abraham nor his counterpart Maria Torok believe in haunts or the actual return of the dead as in Rulfo’s novel.<sup>1</sup> Analyzing their theories in conjunction with *Pedro Páramo* may seem contrary to my purpose in this study since, as we have established, the text is a literal ghost story replete with disembodied spirits and specters. However, the hypothesis of the phantom that Abraham and Torok propose does not stand in opposition to Rulfo’s phantasmagoric tale; it is simply another variation on the theme of haunting, one that functions equally well when applied to the characters of *Pedro Páramo* as it does in the field of psychoanalysis. The aim of this chapter is to analyze the role of Abraham and Torok’s notion of psychological haunting in Rulfo’s text and its relation to the larger framework of an ethics of haunting.

Trained in the school of Freudian psychoanalysis, Abraham and Torok developed the theory of what they call transgenerational haunting. This phenomenon occurs when “repressed secrets are passed from one generation to the next if they are ‘encrypted’ as unprocessed and traumatic information” (Lane 3). According to Abraham, the traumatic kernels of previous generations are a manifestation of the ghost. His argument follows:

It is a fact that the ‘phantom,’ whatever its form, is nothing but an invention of the living. Yes, an invention in the sense that the phantom is meant to objectify [...] the gap

produced in us by the concealment of some part of a love object's life. [...] what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others. (171)

Abraham believes that the phantom is a metaphor, evidence of a gap within the psyche of the subject that is caused by trauma.<sup>2</sup> The mental gaps to which he refers are similar to the historical gaps discussed in the previous chapter in that they exist because crises often “occur too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known” or understood in the moment they transpire and therefore, are not fully assimilated as they occur, resulting in a “breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world” (Caruth 4-5). Rather than a disembodied spirit or specter, trauma and the resultant hole or break in consciousness is, for Abraham, what haunts the subject. This psychological conception of the phantom alone does not add much to the discussion; it is merely the first step toward haunting according to Abraham.

Perhaps the most radical development of Nicolas Abraham's notion of the ghost is that it does not only haunt the victim of a trauma, but subsequent generations as well. He explains that “[t]he phantom is a formation of the unconscious that has never been conscious [...]. It passes—in a way yet to be determined—from the parent's unconscious into the child's” (173). Strangely, Abraham does not explain the conundrum of transgenerational haunting—most likely because at the time of writing he did not fully understand it—though he does provide evidence that it occurs. “The phantom that returns to haunt,” he writes, “bears witness to the existence of the dead buried within the other” (175). Abraham is here alluding to the psychoanalytic notion of incorporation.<sup>3</sup> He writes, along with Maria Torok, that when inexpressible mourning occurs, the object of mourning is incorporated into the one who experiences loss:

[A] secret tomb [is erected] inside the subject. Reconstituted from the memories of words, scenes, and affects, the objectal correlative of the loss is buried alive in the crypt

as a full-fledged person, complete with its own topography. The crypt also includes the actual or supposed traumas that made introjection impracticable. A whole world of unconscious fantasy is created, one that leads to its own separate and concealed existence. (130)

It is precisely because the lost love object cannot be mourned that it becomes incorporated within the living, residing in an intrapsychic tomb or crypt as explained above.<sup>4</sup> The crypt that Abraham and Torok describe here is the very gap within the psyche which, as we mentioned, emerges as a consequence of trauma. The crux of Abraham and Torok's notion of psychical haunting, then, is that when a crisis occurs, which produces the loss of a love object, the traumatic nature of the loss makes it incomprehensible in the moment and therefore, the dead cannot be mourned but are incorporated into the psyche of the living.<sup>5</sup> According to Abraham's theory of transgenerational haunting, the phantom (the dead incorporated in the living) can, in some unknown way, be inherited by successive generations.

It is not difficult to see how the notion of transgenerational haunting can reveal subtleties of Rulfo's text. *Pedro Páramo* is the story of a family dealing with its own ghosts and skeletons in the closet. Many of the characters in Rulfo's novel suffer devastating traumas that affect them not only for the rest of their life, but beyond death as well. In some cases, the effects of the trauma are seemingly inherited, while in others they are not. Yet, to be sure, Abraham and Torok's theories will serve us well as we explore the tormented existence of Susana San Juan and Pedro Páramo along with the repercussions of their respective traumas.

Susana San Juan is, perhaps, the most ghostly figure in *Pedro Páramo*. Described as "[u]na mujer que no era de este mundo" (164), she is the cacique's object of desire and a woman who lives a haunted life. Susana is introduced in the text within the frame of Pedro Páramo's

childhood memories, “Pensaba en ti, Susana. En las lomas verdes cuando volábamos papalotes en la época del aire [. . .], De ti me acordaba. Cuando tú estabas allí mirándome con tus ojos de aguamarina” (74). This passage is important in that it is the first time that Pedro Páramo himself as well as Susana San Juan, or at least the idea of her, are presented to the reader. Further, by presenting Susana within the frame of the cacique’s memories, Rulfo reveals that Pedro and Susana, at least in Páramo’s memories, were childhood playmates (140).

Though Rulfo does give the reader some background regarding Susana, outside of Pedro’s memories, there is little information about her childhood. We learn that Susana is born in Comala, spends time with Pedro Páramo when they were both children (140), and that her mother “[e]ra una señora muy rara que siempre estuvo enferma y no visitaba a nadie” (135). The reader later learns that Susana’s mother dies from tuberculosis and that not a single soul goes to her funeral, supposedly because they are afraid of contracting the disease.<sup>6</sup> In the final version of Rulfo’s novel, Susana leaves Comala after her mother’s death and does not return for years. Her long absence within the text serves to augment the almost ethereal character of the tortured woman when she comes back to Comala. If she is an enigma in her absence, Susana might be considered even more mysterious after her return since she is emotionally, and perhaps even mentally, absent.<sup>7</sup>

It is possible that Susana’s terrible memories are the product of some sort of trauma that she suffered at a younger age. In *Pedro Páramo* there is a fragment that illustrates a possible trauma in Susana’s childhood experience that could be the reason she is emotionally inept with regards to death and mourning. While at Pedro’s house, a cat belonging to Justina, Pedro’s servant, wakes up Susana. Justina comes in to apologize for her cat but also to inform Susana that her father, Bartolomé San Juan, died at a mine outside of town. Susana then associates the

cat with her father, “[e]ntonces era él [...] viniste a despedirte de mí” (146). Immediately following this statement is a fragment that presents one of Susana’s earlier memories of her father, a time when he takes her to what appears to be an open grave or deserted mine shaft. Once down in the earth, Bartolomé forces his daughter to sift through the dust and decaying bones of a human skeleton in order to find something that might be of value. As explained by the narrator, the experience causes some sort of breach in Susana’s experience of time and it seems as if there is a rift between father and daughter, “[e]ntonces ella no supo de ella, sino muchos días después entre el hielo, entre las miradas llenas de hielo de su padre” (148). Upon remembering this experience Susana shocks Justina by beginning to laugh loudly, demonstrating her incapacity to deal with death and mourning.

However, Susana’s strange reaction to her father’s death may be an indication of a different trauma. When Bartolomé returns to Comala with his daughter, invited by Pedro Páramo, the cacique’s ranch hand, Fulgor Sedano reports their arrival to his employer. However, Fulgor mistakenly assumes that Susana’s father has returned accompanied by his wife. Pedro inquires as to whether or not the woman is his wife or daughter and Fulgor responds that “por el modo que la trata más bien parece su mujer” (138). This statement has rightly fueled much speculation among critics as to whether or not Susana has had an incestuous relationship with her father, or is possibly a victim of rape. The incest hypothesis is supported by a strange dialogue between Bartolomé and his daughter. While explaining to his daughter that Pedro Páramo wants to live with her, Susana repeatedly responds to her father’s questions begrudgingly, calling him by his given name, “Sí, Bartolomé.” The interchange continues in the following manner:

Bartolomé: -No me digas Bartolomé. ¡Soy tu padre!

[...]

Susana: -¿Y yo quién soy?

Bartolomé: -Tú eres mi hija. Mía. Hija de Bartolomé San Juan.

Susana: -No es cierto. No es cierto.

[...]

Bartolomé: -Susana. ¿Por qué me niegas a mí como tu padre? ¿Estás loca?

Susana: -¿No lo sabías? [...] Claro que sí, Bartolomé. ¿No lo sabías? (141)

Bartolomé's emphatic response that Susana is his, as if she were his property, coupled with Susana's denial that Bartolomé is not her father strengthens the case for an implied incestuous relationship. As if to settle the debate, Carlos Velo's 1966 film adaptation of Rulfo's novel suggests that Bartolomé does indeed take advantage of his daughter. Whatever the case may be, there is little doubt that Susana struggles with emotional connections to men. Still, there is yet another mystery regarding Susana's past and the possible source of her mental state.

While on the road to the Media Luna, Bartolomé tells his daughter that he explained her fragile mental state to Pedro Páramo in order to dissuade him from taking her in, "[I]e he dicho que tu, aunque viuda, sigues viviendo con tu marido, o al menos así te comportas" (141). Her father reveals that Susana was married at one point while they lived outside of Comala, or at least she believes that she was.<sup>8</sup> As was mentioned above, Bartolomé's daughter is "[u]na mujer que no [es] de este mundo," a locution that might be read as a declaration of Susana's *locura* (164). The first night she lives with Pedro, he and Susana share a bed but thereafter, she sleeps alone suffering through "noches doloridas, de interminable inquietud" in which something "la maltrataba por dentro, que la hacía revolcarse en el desvelo, como si la despedazaran hasta inutilizarla" (151). Indeed Susana is an angst-ridden woman, haunted by some painful memory

that reveals itself in her sleep. Despite the fact that Pedro sees the apparently torturous outward effects of Susana's dreams, she does not experience them in such a way.

The narrator makes a rare appearance in fragment 49 to pose a rhetorical question to the reader and provide an answer, "¿Pero cuál era el mundo de Susana San Juan? Ésa fue una de las cosas que Pedro Páramo nunca llegó a saber" (151). In Fragment 50, the reader is then allowed into Susana's secret world, a dream place in which she remembers an ostensibly happy marriage and in which she bathes in the sea with her husband:

Mi cuerpo se sentía a gusto sobre el calor de la arena. [...] En el mar sólo me sé bañar desnuda —le dije. Y él me siguió el primer día, desnudo también [...]. Me gustas más en las noches, [me dijo] cuando estamos los dos en la misma almohada, bajo las sábanas, en la oscuridad. [...] Y al otro día [yo] estaba otra vez en el mar, purificándome.

Entregándome a sus olas. (151-52)

Not only are Susana's dreams pleasant, but paradisiacal. The man in the dream is presumably the husband of whom Bartolomé speaks earlier. Yet Susana's husband, whom the reader later learns is named Florencio, is only a blurry vision of love in her memory. When Susana remembers the moment in which she is informed of Florencio's death, her response indicates that, perhaps, her love is only a dream. "¡Qué largo era aquel hombre! ¡Qué alto! Y su voz era dura. Seca como la tierra más seca. Y su figura era borrosa, ¿o se hizo borrosa después?, como si entre ella y él se interpusiera la lluvia" (156). Susana's description of her lost love begins with general descriptions and quickly fades into a fog of forgetfulness. There is no sure evidence that Pedro's childhood love was ever truly married; in fact, Juan Rulfo denies that Florencio ever exists.



Rulfo explains, in an interview with González Boixo, that “[e]se fulano [Florencio] que se casó con [Susana] no existió nunca. Son locuras, son fantasías. Nunca conoció el mar, nunca se casó con nadie, siempre vivió con su padre” (250). The reader is under no obligation to believe Rulfo’s denial of Florencio’s existence, though it seems likely that Susana’s dreams are indeed *locuras* and fantasies. It is strange that, though they were supposedly married, Susana cannot describe her husband though he appears in her dreams after his alleged death. Further, Bartolomé’s daughter admits to being crazy, which calls into question her reliability as a focalizer. Also, in Rulfo’s earlier drafts, Susana apparently suffers from some mental anguish and she is apparently unable to mourn or even love. These elements of Susana’s psyche together with the idyllic beach scene of her dream recall Abraham and Torok’s description of what happens when one loses a love object and is unable to mourn: “[a] whole world of unconscious fantasy is created, one that leads to its own separate and concealed existence” (130). Though Susana must have lost something or been traumatized in some unknown way,<sup>9</sup> to be sure, she has created an unconscious fantasy, a concealed existence in which Susana believes she was married to a man named Florencio.

It is in this mental state that a delusional Susana San Juan goes to live with Pedro Páramo. As was mentioned, Susana is Pedro’s love object and has been since they were children. The motif “Pensaba en ti Susana” comes to represent the cacique’s emotional dependence on his memories of Susana and it characterizes Pedro Páramo’s obsessive love for his childhood companion. The motif is a sort of Macguffin or watchword similar to “Rosebud” in *Citizen Kane* and “Cruzamos el río a caballo” in *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*. That is, “Pensaba en ti Susana” is one of the keys to unlocking the life of Pedro Páramo just as the

previously mentioned phrases give insight into the protagonists of their respective works (see Gyrko and Weatherford).

We have already seen how Pedro idyllically remembers his youth with Susana, his recollections of her include green hills and flying kites: “[p]ensaba en ti, Susana. En las lomas verdes cuando volábamos papalotes en la época del aire [. . .]. De ti me acordaba. Cuando tú estabas allí mirándome con tus ojos de aguamarina” (74). Páramo’s desire for Susana becomes an obsession; however it is never clear why he believes that he loves her so much. Still it is apparent from Páramo’s memories that he associates Susana with the almost edenic youth of his childhood. The answer may be as simple as “Rosebud” is for Charles Foster Kane; the love object is associated with a lost childhood (see Gyrko). Still, even if that is the case and Susana represents Páramo’s lost childhood, in both cases it is never made clear why the sled (Rosebud) and Susana become the love object and not some other item or person. In other words, the original trauma remains hidden and repressed; it forms a gap in the psyche of Pedro Páramo and is eventually inherited by his son, Juan.

Yet in spite of the perfect world that Pedro recalls from his youth, it seems that, as we have seen previously, life is not quite heavenly. From an early age Susana suffers from melancholy, and if we are to believe this particular memory of the cacique, her relationship with young Pedro was one of her only sources of happiness. The day that Susana and her father leave Comala, she says to Pedro regarding her hometown, “Lo quiero por ti; pero lo odio por todo lo demás, hasta por haber nacido en él” (82). If Susana is forlorn when she leaves, Pedro doesn’t find happiness in anything after her departure and will live his life haunted by Susana San Juan.

Years later, after Páramo’s violent rise to power, constant womanizing and manipulation of all who surround him, Susana returns to Comala and lives with her childhood playmate. Yet

the paradise that Pedro hoped would return along with Susana remains hidden in the past, as does the girl he remembers. The narrator explains what happens after Susana goes to reside at the

*Media Luna:*

Desde que la había traído a vivir aquí no sabía de otras noches pasadas a su lado, sino de estas noches doloridas, de interminable inquietud. Y se preguntaba hasta cuándo terminaría aquello. [...] Nada puede durar tanto, no existe ningún recuerdo por intenso que sea que no se apague. Si al menos hubiera sabido qué era aquello que la maltrataba por dentro...” (151)

The phantom that has tortured Susana her whole life persists, despite her reunion with Pedro Páramo. Pedro's love for Susana seems genuine; not only does he hope that she can help him escape a torturous memory, he too wants to free her of her ailment so that she can leave this life “alumbrándose con aquella imagen que borraría todos los demás recuerdos (151). In essence, Pedro seemingly wants to help Susana rest after she has died, in the same way he hopes that her presence can cure him of years suffering from painful memories.

In the case of Pedro Páramo, the reader learns that his father's death is extremely difficult for the cacique. When Pedro is young his mother wakes him in the middle of the night to tell him of an event that will radically effect him, “[h]an matado a tu padre” (86). (86). Don Lucas, Pedro's father, had previously said to Fulgor Sedano that young Pedro was a person of little consequence, “[n]o se cuenta con él para nada, ni para que me sirva de bordón. Se me malogró, ¿qué quiere usted Fulgor?” (98). If don Lucas's words are correct, then the death of his father brings out a hidden aspect of Pedro's personality as he violently and brutally avenges the death (136-7). These memories combined had a traumatic affect on Pedro Páramo, such that he never wanted to remember them again:

Vino a su memoria la muerte de su padre. [...] Nunca quiso revivir ese recuerdo porque le traía otros, como si rompiera un costal repleto y luego quisiera contener el grano. La muerte de su padre que arrastró otras muertes y en cada una de ellas estaba siempre la imagen de la cara despedazada; roto un ojo, mirando vengativo al otro. Y otro y otro más, hasta que la había borrado del recuerdo cuando ya no hubo nadie que se la recordara. (125)

Any instance in which Páramo remembers his father's death is doubly painful since it also brings to the cacique's mind, a parade of gruesome images, the lifeless and deformed faces of those he himself seemingly killed in order to avenge his father's death, but also the deaths of others he loved, such as his son Miguel. Federico Campbell writes that the death of the father painfully reminds Páramo as well of the lost paradise of his youth (433). It would follow then that Pedro wants Susana near in order to redeem him from his torturous past and to take him again to the childhood that he remembers as a *locus amoenus* with Susana by his side.

The narrator here reveals a harsh reality. Though the cacique thinks he knows Susana well, it is not so (151). This could be interpreted in many ways. One possibility is that the childhood friends have grown apart and simply do not know each other anymore. Another more poignant interpretation is that Pedro Páramo's memories have been incorrect all along. It is important to note here that the cacique's fond memories of Susana are quite similar to a phenomenon that in psychoanalysis is called a screen memory. Such memories serve, literally, as a mental screen or filter that is subconsciously meant to repress or block other painful or traumatic episodes, usually those occurring in childhood. Yet they are not spontaneously created: there is typically a "connection with some other unmistakably important experiences, for which they were appearing" (Freud, *Recollection* 359). Screen memories are often characterized

by their idyllic nature and frequently hold “the key to [a patient’s] mental life” (Freud, *Recollection* 358-59). Yet, the key to Páramo’s life remains hidden. Regardless of whether Pedro’s memories are also fantasies (as is probably so in the case of Susana and her dreams), the source of his angst as well as that of Susana remains a mystery.

At one point in the novel, Juan wonders if his father caused Susana some sort of suffering. Dorotea’s quick and sure reply reveals a tender side to the otherwise brutal Pedro Páramo:

No creas. Él la quería. Estoy por decir que nunca quiso a ninguna mujer como a ésa. Ya se la entregaron sufrida y quizá loca. Tan la quiso, que se pasó el resto de sus años aplastado en un equipal, mirando el camino por donde se la habían llevado al camposanto. Le perdió interés a todo. Desalojó sus tierras y mandó quemar los enseres. Unos dicen que porque ya estaba cansado, otros que porque le agarró la desilusión; lo cierto es que echó fuera a la gente y se sentó en su equipal, cara al camino. (137)

Pedro Páramo wanted to give Susana San Juan peace and rest from the phantoms that haunted her. He was unable to do so while she was alive though his actions after her death could be read as a radical attempt at redeeming Susana from her sorrows.

Pedro wants little more than to free Susana from her torment. One night, while she is sleeping, Pedro watches Susana’s disturbed slumber and wishes he could somehow cure her. The narrator reveals the cacique’s tender thoughts, “[s]i al menos fuera dolor lo que sintiera ella, y no esos sueños sin sosiego, esos interminables y agotadores sueños, él podría buscarla algún consuelo. Así pensaba Pedro Páramo, fija la vista en Susana San Juan, siguiendo cada uno de sus movimientos” (157). Pedro’s vision stays fixed on her after she dies as well. Pedro ceases to live his own life after Susana dies; he lets his fortunes crumble, sends away most of the workers

and sits in his chair staring in the direction of the cemetery remembering Susana, thus transforming himself into a living vessel of memory dedicated to his lost love object (137).

Pedro's dramatic change after Susana dies resembles Abraham's description of incorporation. The cacique dedicates his time to creating a "world of unconscious fantasy, [living a] separate and concealed existence." (130). Further, his own life becomes, in a way, "[r]econstituted from the memories [and] scenes of [Susana's] life" as if he wants her "buried alive in [his psychic] crypt as a full-fledged person, complete with its own topography (130). Though Abraham might disagree with this radical interpretation, especially since Pedro's efforts occur on a conscious level, it seems as if Páramo makes a concerted attempt to willfully incorporate the phantom of Susana San Juan, and preserve her, in him, by way of memory. Though Pedro Páramo's actions could easily be described as what Freud refers to as profound mourning,<sup>10</sup> such an interpretation does not account for the fact that Pedro tends to recall the idyllic memories of his youth above all others, a possible attempt at curing Susana from her trauma after death by remembering/telling her story a different way.

Cathy Caruth writes that the survivor of a trauma experiences an awakening to the other, the victim of the trauma. In doing so they understand that the "story of survival is [...] no longer simply [their] own, but tells, as a mode of response, the story of the dead" as well (102).<sup>11</sup> The survivor, then, becomes connected to the victim, the other, and the two stories, that were previously separate, are impossibly entangled; they become one and the same story. "To awaken," Caruth writes, "is thus to bear the imperative to survive: to survive [...] as one who must tell" the story of the other (105). There are, of course, echoes of incorporation here, in that the dead become closely identified with the living and continue on in the survivor. The self awakens to the other and identifies with them in a way that resembles a sort of internalization or

incorporation within the living. In awakening to Susana San Juan, Pedro Páramo becomes a living vessel of her memory as he consciously dedicates the rest of his life to mourning and remembering her, even speaking to her on occasion though she doesn't answer (172-3). Yet the cacique's attempt at giving Susana happiness, even after death, fails as Juan learns from Dorotea since Susana is still haunted by her past in the grave. Though he does not successfully free Susana from her suffering, the model of willful incorporation that the cacique attempts will serve us at a later point. Still, the phantoms that haunt Pedro and Susana their whole lives, born of some unknown trauma, will be inherited by the subsequent generation, emblemized by Juan Preciado.

Compelled by his mother's dying wish and haunted by the illusory world that he forms around Pedro Páramo, Juan Preciado goes to Comala in search of his father, only to find death. "Me mataron los murmullos," he tells Dorotea, "[s]e me había venido juntando, hasta que ya no pude soportarlo. Y cuando me encontré con los murmullos se me reventaron las cuerdas" (118). Juan's use of the verb *soportar* suggests that it is the psychological weight of the ghostly murmurs that is too much for him to bear. Thus, Dolores Preciado's son suffers a sort of psychological trauma and is haunted to death, killed by the psychosomatic and emotional weight of Comala's dead. As we saw in the first chapter of this study, much of the agony that the murmurs represent is caused by Pedro Páramo himself. In a curious manner, Páramo's only legitimate son inherits his father's legacy of mental anguish, coupled with the grief of those who suffered under the cacique.

The last surviving member of the Páramo line, Juan, is the victim of transgenerational haunting and inadvertently incorporates the phantom of his father. We will recall that according to Abraham the phantom unwittingly "passes [...] from the parent's unconscious into the

child's" (173). If it is indeed the psychological weight of the apparition's murmurs that kills Juan, then it would follow that he is the accidental victim of mass incorporation as well. Keeping in mind that many of the *ánimas en pena* that haunt Comala are symbolic children of Pedro Páramo, and are therefore somehow connected to the cacique, it is possible that Juan also incorporates the phantoms of the entire collective unconscious of Comala's souls in purgatory along with their respective traumas and memories.<sup>12</sup> Surely the collective woes of Comala, "[r]econstituted from the memories of words, scenes, and affects" along with "the actual or supposed traumas" of the dead would be enough to kill a man (Abraham and Torok 130).

In the first chapter of this study, the economy of haunting fails because there is nobody left to be haunted, not a soul among the living who can remember the dead, pray for them, or satisfy their memory debt. We could arrive at a similar conclusion here since Juan Preciado is the last of the Páramo line and the phantoms that he seemingly incorporates cannot be passed on to subsequent generations because they do not exist, Pedro Páramo's line is truncated with Juan's death. However, if Cathy Caruth is correct in writing that trauma reveals the "ethical dilemma at the heart of consciousness itself insofar as it is essentially related to death [...] of others," then there is hope still (104).

Though Juan Preciado dies in Comala under the weight of transgenerational haunting, the trauma of his death is also an awakening to the other, an awakening to the ghosts of Comala. Though Caruth's explanation does not account for the possibility of a ghost as one who experiences awakening and tells the story of the dead, this is what occurs in *Pedro Páramo*. As one who was an intercessor for his mother within the framework of an economy of haunting, Juan's responsibility to the other is only augmented after he inherits the phantoms of Comala's dead. Thus, in telling his own story, Juan necessarily tells the stories of those with whom he is



now connected through trauma, giving speech back to the ghost. Yet Juan does more, in speaking with the specters, awakening to them and his responsibility to them, he does what he must and tells the story of his awakening to the reader. Since the dead of Comala are intertwined with Juan through incorporation and trauma, by telling his story—which is also their story—he “[gives] them back speech,” as Derrida writes, “even if it is in oneself, in the other, in the other in oneself” (*Specters* 122). Juan allows the spirits of Comala to haunt the reader, who, by virtue of reading *Pedro Páramo*, willingly awakens to the phantoms that are incorporated within Juan Precidao. To read Rulfo’s novel is to willfully be haunted, thus, ethically allowing the ghosts to live on in one’s memory.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Derrida briefly analyzes the reasoning behind this observation in *Specters of Marx*. He writes the following:

There has never been a scholar who really, and as a scholar, deals with ghosts. A traditional scholar does not believe in ghosts—or in all that could be called the virtual space of spectrality. There has never been a scholar who, as such, does not believe in the sharp distinction between the real and the unreal, the actual and the inactual, the living, and the non-living, being and non-being (“to be or not to be,” in the conventional reading), in the opposition between what is present and what is not, for example in the form of objectivity. Beyond this opposition, there is, for the scholar, only the hypothesis of a school of thought, theatrical fiction, literature, and speculation. (12)

<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Avery F. Gordon writes that “[i]f haunting describes how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities, the ghost is just the sign, or the empirical evidence if you like, that tells you a haunting is taking place” (8). As is the case with Abraham, Avery believes that the ghost is merely a symptom of a deeper problem and not a literal disembodied spirit.

<sup>3</sup> Abraham and Torok give the following, succinct, explanation of the phenomenon referred to in psychoanalysis as incorporation:

Incorporation results from those losses that for some reason cannot be regarded as such. In these special cases the impossibility of introjection is so profound that even our refusal to mourn is prohibited from being given language, that we are debarred from providing indication whatsoever that we are inconsolable. Without the escape-route of somehow conveying our refusal to mourn, we are reduced to a radical denial of the loss,

pretending that we had absolutely nothing to lose. There can be no thought of speaking to someone else about our grief under these circumstances. The words that cannot be uttered, the scenes that cannot be recalled, the tears that cannot be shed—everything will be swallowed along with the trauma that led to the loss. Swallowed and preserved. (130)

<sup>4</sup> As in chapter 1, improper burial and a failure to mourn result in the return of the dead as a ghost or phantom. Yet, in this instance, proper mourning and burial are impossible due to the traumatic nature of the events that lead to loss of the love object (see note 3).

<sup>5</sup> Since this chapter focuses more on the principle of incorporation as applied to Susana San Juan and Pedro Páramo, I could not include any discussion on what I read as a fascinatingly aberrant example of incorporation in the text, the case of Dolores Preciado and her son Juan. Perhaps the most glaring departure from Abraham and Torok's theories is that in the case of Dolores and her son is that Juan is acutely aware that a phantom haunts him. When he arrives in Comala Juan carries the only known photo of his mother in his shirt pocket. As Juan explains, his mother was "enemiga de retratarse. Decía que los retratos eran cosa de brujería" (68). Juan's recollection of his mother's opinion regarding photography invites a supernatural reading of the medium in Rulfo's text, and it comes just after Dolores's son strangely personifies the picture by saying that in the heat it is seemingly "calentándo[le] el corazón, como si ella también sudara" (68). By embodying the photo and repeating his mother's aphorism, Juan simultaneously introduces the photo and its phantasmagoric nature into the narration.

Roland Barthes writes that there is something "rather terrible [...] in every photograph: the return of the dead" (9). Barthes's contention is that the photograph makes it impossible to deny that the referent or subject of the photo was at one time present but is now separated from the viewer (76-7). One could argue, then, that in an uncanny way, Dolores Preciado is somehow

present in the photo that Juan carries in his pocket. This is possible because “[t]he photograph,” as Barthes explains, “is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here. [...T]he photograph of the missing being [...] will touch me like the delayed rays of a star” (80-1). Barthes’ interpretation of the photograph almost allows for a bizarre sort of incorporation of the subject within the photo.

It could be argued, then, that by keeping his mother’s picture (which may be her ghost) in his pocket, next to his heart, Juan incorporates his mother’s phantom. Yet there is also evidence of psychological incorporation of Dolores within her son, which would strengthen the phantasmagoric evidence of the photo. When Juan sees Comala for the first time with his own eyes and he is taken aback. His reaction is the following:

Yo imaginaba ver aquello a través de los recuerdos de mi madre; de su nostalgia, entre retazos de suspiros. Siempre vivió ella suspirando por Comala, por el retorno; pero jamás volvió. Ahora yo vengo en su lugar. Traigo los ojos con que ella miró estas cosas, porque me dio sus ojos para ver [...]. (66)

This whole quote suggests the notion of a phantasmagoric return by way of ghostly incorporation. First the notion of a return by proxy is the epitome of the uncanny, especially when coupled with transgenerational haunting since the subject that is haunted is a sort of doppelganger, at once themselves and someone else. The last phrase of the citation could be read as a simple metaphor if it were included in any other text. Yet in *Pedro Páramo*, the idea of Dolores giving Juan her eyes to see takes on an uncanny ghostly meaning. Also, as Juan draws closer to Comala, his mother’s voice gets stronger and Juan is able to hear her better, as if the

phantom in the beat up photo, sitting in her son's shirt pocket, somehow draws strength from being closer to home (70).

<sup>6</sup> Uncannily, this event repeats itself years later. When Susana San Juan dies, as was discussed in chapter 1, nobody attends her funeral. This information only reinforces the solitude in which Susana lives, seemingly, much of her life.

<sup>7</sup> If early drafts of *Pedro Páramo* carry any weight in the matter, one fragment that was discarded by Rulfo provides some insight into the childhood relationship between Pedro and Susana. In sharp contrast to Pedro's idyllic childhood with Susana, an early fragment that was not included in the published version of *Pedro Páramo* presents a young girl already suffering from melancholy and delusion. In the fragment, which was published posthumously by Rulfo's wife Clara, Pedro finds Susana daydreaming in the afternoon; as he draws close she tells him, "[h]e estado deseando tu muerte [...]. Eso he estado haciendo toda la tarde; deseando que tú mueras, para saber si así puedo llorar un poco" (*Cuadernos* 81). Susana then explains to Pedro that she likes to think about her loved ones dying as martyrs so she can wallow in the emotions such thoughts cause her. There is also an allusion to some sort of abuse toward Susana by an unidentified group of people called los Colorados. Pedro asks Susana if somebody has done something to her and she replies, "¿No te acuerdas Pedro? ¿Por qué entonces quise abrir la puerta y no pude? —y es que alguien estaba detrás de ella, empujándola con todas sus fuerzas—; pero no me dejaron salir a verte. Y a ti te estaban matando los Colorados" (*Cuadernos* 81). Of course, Pedro is not dead and he refutes his friend's claim that los Colorados tried to kill him by explaining that los Colorados take care of both Pedro and Susana the best they can.

<sup>8</sup> One of the difficulties in reading *Pedro Páramo* is that very few events or facts are concrete. Rulfo's text, as is the case with Susana's dead husband, leaves much open for the

reader. One could easily assume that since Susana admits to being crazy, the memories she believes to have of her husband are really just fabrications. Even though Bartolomé calls his daughter a widow, and says that she continues living with her husband, he adds, “o al menos así te comportas,” which leaves room for doubt (141).

<sup>9</sup> Though there is a fair amount of evidence that something is amiss with Susana’s relationship to her father, it’s important to recall that in Abraham and Torok, the source of the trauma remains unknown or concealed (171). Also, Rulfo’s text does not provide enough information to arrive at an incontrovertible conclusion regarding the source of Susana’s anguish and suffering.

<sup>10</sup> Profound mourning is characterized by “loss of interest in the outside world [and] turning from every active effort that is not concerned with thoughts of the dead” (*Mourning* 153). Indeed this description could apply to Páramo after Susana’s death. However it doesn’t account for his determination to cure or save Susana while she was alive.

<sup>11</sup> Chapter 5 of Caruth’s book, *Unclaimed Experience*, analyzes the implications of Lacan’s reading of the dream of the burning child. His interpretation is a development of Freud’s analysis, originally found in chapter seven of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Lacan, according to Cathy Caruth, understands the dream of the burning child as revealing how trauma lays bare the “ethical dilemma at the heart of consciousness itself insofar as it is essentially related to death, and particularly to the death of others” (104). In other words, Lacan reads the dream as illustrating an awakening to the other.

<sup>12</sup> This interpretation provides a possible answer to the question of how the memories of Pedro Páramo, as well as the memories of others, are received by the reader. If Juan acts as a sort of surrogate for the reader (D’Lugo 70), then he shares a privileged position in relation to

them. When the reader discovers the truth of Juan's death in Comala, they become the survivor of a trauma that killed Juan and are thus connected to Juan. Since the phantoms of Comala are incorporated in Juan's psyche, it is by him and through him that the reader can receive the memories of Pedro Páramo as well as the rest of the murmurs and memories of the ghosts of Comala, allowing the ghosts to live on in the mind of the reader of *Pedro Páramo*.

## CONCLUSION

*Pedro Páramo* is a novel that haunts the reader, one that could easily be prefaced by the epigraph that opens this thesis, “[g]hosts from the start, ghosts at the origin: such will have been the primary concern of the present study” (Royle 51). We have seen that Rulfo’s specters, as the father of Hamlet, return from the dead in order to demand that proper remembrance be carried out for their passing. Also, many of Comala’s spirits are stuck in purgatory, without anyone to pray for the release of their souls (González Boixo, 32). In both cases the *almas en pena* need someone else, perhaps a character in the novel, perhaps the reader, to pray for them and give them rest, thus participating in an economy of haunting as part of an ethics of haunting.

We have discussed the potential role of *Pedro Páramo* as an aesthetic representation of the downfall of a feudalistic town that still clings to *caciquismo*. Comala is emblematic of a harsh reality that Mexico didn’t want to remember during the mid twentieth century. Rulfo’s novel, then, by aesthetically representing this reality, saves Pedro Páramo’s victims from banality and from being forgotten by a discourse of overly idealistic and nostalgic readings of Mexico’s post-revolutionary history. By way of haunting the present with a representation of an oppressed history, *Pedro Páramo* acknowledges a debt that the living owe to the dead, that debt being an imperative to remember the victims of history, to fill in the holes in the archive of history.

Finally we addressed the psychological trauma’s that haunt the characters in Pedro Páramo and learned how traumas can awaken serve to connect victims with those who did not



experience the trauma, causing them to recognize the ethical imperative to remember the other. Also we discussed how the effects of trauma can be inherited by subsequent generations of the victim, a phenomenon which Nicolas Abraham calls “the phantom” (171). Still, there is some unfinished business, wither the ghosts of Comala? What are we to make of this ethics of haunting?

Fabienne Bradu believes that in writing *Pedro Páramo*, “[q]uizá Rulfo haya intentado escribir con su novela la oración que le falta a este pueblo, si no para vivir, al menos, para morir en paz” (66). I do not pretend to know what the author’s intentions were in writing his master work, yet Bradu’s interpretation of *Pedro Páramo* as a sort of elegy for the dead, one that allows them to rest but also implies a sort of exorcism.

Julieta Campos suggests a similar approach to the ghosts of *Pedro Páramo*. She writes that in making the film *El abuelo Cheno y otras historias*, Juan Carlos Rulfo returned to Comala, “[a]caso para exorcizar, de una vez por todas, los murmullos que mataron a Juan Preciado...”<sup>1</sup> (7). Campos’s short essay, entitled “Exorcismo”, reads Juan Rulfo’s novel as something of a relic, a work cursed with a rulfian vision that is “absorta en la fascinación de un tiempo desmoronado” (7). The crux of the essay is the notion that Juan Carlos Rulfo, feeling the anxiety of influence at the start of his career, needed to understand and come to terms with his father’s ghosts so that he could lay them to rest and begin his own work. Differing somewhat from Bradu’s interpretation, which would give the phantoms rest, Campos’s vision is more explicitly one of exorcism, yet both Bradu and Campos suggest an approach to the ghost that entails ridding one’s self of the ghost so as to not be bothered. Yet I don’t agree that Rulfo, a man who would visit graveyards in towns he visited, would want to exorcise the ghosts, but remember them, *convivir* with them (see Roffé, 66).

If we are to reach a conclusion that fits with my notion of an ethics of haunting, we must not deny the ghost or exorcise the spirits of the dead, but embrace them, willfully be haunted. Derrida concludes his extended meditation on Marx and spectrality with the following injunction for those who would seek justice and ethics:

If he loves justice at least, the ‘scholar’ of the future, the ‘intellectual’ of tomorrow should learn it and from the ghost. He should learn to live by learning not how to make conversation with the ghost but how to talk with him, with her, how to let them speak or how to give them back speech, even if it is in oneself, in the other, in the other in oneself [...]. (221)

Though being haunted is an imposition of the ghost upon the haunted subject, it seems that Derrida would have us seek out the ghost and be haunted. Indeed, this notion is what makes the text of *Pedro Páramo* possible. Juan Preciado is unwittingly haunted as he arrives in Comala, only to die from the weight of the *murmillos*. Yet Juan is still haunted after his death, a ghost himself, he dwells in the company of other phantoms. Yet Juan does not deny speech to the other haunts, he welcomes the presence of and talks with Dorotea’s ghost. Juan learns from Dorotea, thus accomplishing what Derrida calls learning “how to talk with [the ghost], how to let them speak or give them back speech, even if it is in oneself, in the other, in the other in oneself” (*Specters*, 221). In so doing, Juan becomes the medium by which the specters of Comala are able to be remembered, tell their stories, and aesthetically recover a lost history.

Perhaps, then, this is the essence of an ethics of haunting, choosing to be haunted. The subject does not initially decide whether or not to be haunted by the ghost, such is the case with young Hamlet as well as Juan Preciado. Yet after the ghost has made contact, the subject can decide whether to accept or reject the presence of the ghost. To embrace the presence of the

ghost would be the ethical act, to remember the dead and learn justice (Derrida, *Specters* 221). The purpose the ethics of haunting is not for the haunted subjects to “live just for the sake of retaining the memory of the dead” (Margalit, viii), thus becoming living vessels of memory, but to acknowledge that “[t]o be haunted, to be in the company of ghosts is not necessarily a cause for panic. It is something to affirm [...]” (Royle 53).

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