Unlike Rulfo’s novel, D’Lugo’s comprehensive starter article is a “readerly text”; it encourages an understanding of and appreciation for *Pedro Páramo*. D’Lugo asserts that Rulfo’s goal is to “liberate” and “dislodge” readers from the “conventional conditioning to a passive experience” (468). By fragmenting the story’s exposition and denying Juan Preciado’s narrator function, Rulfo “forces the reader into an acceptance of discourse itself” (468). Another reason that readers are forced to contend with the work is that it “refus[es] to identify” voices, experiences (469), chronology, or the boundaries of the living and dead (470). However, D’Lugo suggests that Rulfo’s “reiteration of dialogues and images” lends readers a semblance of orientation with which to work (470). Also presented is a discussion of the desperate ways in which readers “react” to the novel’s structure and the jarring realization that Juan Preciado is dead; readers cling to him because they identify with his quest and curiosity (471) and often feel that “[h]is being dead violates specific notions of traditional narrativity” (471). Critics also search for clues to the text’s unity: various scholars suggest themes of death, nature, falls from grace, mythic searches, antithesis, and associations of characters with motifs (473). D’Lugo explains that what we might perceive as roadblocks are Rulfo’s deliberate
techniques; they force us to re-read the work for clarity and connections, which in turn “helps fulfill the potential for an even richer literary experience” (472).


Dove’s dense and writerly article springs from an assessment of Rulfo’s work by Carlos Fuentes, in which Fuentes praises Rulfo’s work for being “the highest achievement so far in the Mexican novel” and “related to “the so-called international crisis of the novel” (91). Because pre-1960 and 1970 Latin America valued naturalism and “bad copies of European works” (91), Rulfo’s work was perceived as a catalyst for the “collapse of aesthetic ideology” so long upheld by the Western tradition (91). Dove also alludes to the Mexican writer and critic Octavio Paz, who opines that what Rulfo did for Mexican literature was to break away from describing the “national character” and instead create “an ‘image’ for the ongoing interrogation” of Mexican modernity” (92).

Dove contrasts Rulfo and Paz’s visions of modernity versus modernization—where modernity is the realization of a simultaneously developed and egalitarian state with a thriving artistic culture (93). Paz sees Mexico’s failure to strike the balance, whereas Rulfo imagines the two as “faces of a complete paradox” (italics Dove’s 93). Dove theorizes that a balance is attainable by way of Ángel Rama’s theory of transculturation (93). And concluding in two rarely lucid passages, Dove discusses theories with which readers might more easily navigate Pedro Páramo. For example, he mentions Alberto Moreira’s interpretation that Rulfo’s bleak landscape signifies the Mexican government’s need to provide for “cultural agency” (95), and Pablo Neruda’s use of the “testimonio” style in which the reader is given “an account of an experience for which there was no
witness” (99), which in this case, would be the oppressed and unrepresented village people of Comala (100).


De Valdés sees Rulfo’s work as an example of literary work that “subverts the social codes of alienation and domination of the other” (34). She posits that Susana San Juan’s voice “stands out as intimate and lyrical in a land where language and voices are used to subjectify (35-6). In three well-articulated and plausible parts, De Valdés discusses Pedro Páramo’s “discourse of power,” his infatuation with Susana as his object of desire, and Susana’s “language of introversion” which overcomes Pedro’s domination, but by means of her insanity and death (36-7). Pedro’s discourse of power emerges from his consuming desire, which proves “destructive of collective social values” (38), namely, his “routine substitution [for Susana with] any young girl” (39) and his ultimate “revenge” on Comala for reveling during her funeral. However, De Valdés first glimpses Susana’s power to resist Pedro’s domination in her analysis of character names. She notes that Pedro obsessively enunciates Susana’s full name, but that she never enunciates his. Furthermore, the alliteration, internal rhyme, and forceful stressing of opposite syllables in the names “Susana San Juan” (second syllables) and “Pedro Páramo” (first syllables), establishes a motif of lyricism and harshness, respectively (42). Susana’s agency is fully realized in what de Valdés terms a “language of progressive introversion” (36): whereas Pedro evokes youthful fantasies of Susana and expresses his sexuality with “handfuls of flesh” (41), Susana recalls her sexual encounters or impresses of her late
husband Florencio and her own “hermaphroditic orgasm” in the sea (43). Furthermore, Susana resists the church’s intermediary redemptive function on her death bed (47). Although De Valdés likens Susana to the goddess Isis, a female possessing “exuberance in her body” (48), Susana remains a victim of Mexican sexism because her triumph necessitates her insanity and death (46).


Building on previous critics’ allegorical considerations of Pedro Páramo, Guerrero studies the relationship between the brutal reality of violence and the “lyrical silence and stillness” in Rulfo and writer/critic Walter Benjamin’s works. She identifies with Shoshana Felman’s 1999 critical article entitled “Benjamin’s Silence,” in which Felman argues that “the horrors of war…leave one mute” (258). In a touching anecdotal passage, Guerrero discusses how Benjamin produced no work for six years after World War I, the onset of World War II, and his friend’s suicide (Benjamin discovered the body) (259). Although Rulfo and Benjamin write about different settings, their response to homeland violence is the same: Benjamin’s “The Storyteller” portrays traumatized World War I veterans who are “reduced to silence because the trauma cannot be shared, cannot be told” and Rulfo portrays the restless souls of Comala, where “destruction is embodied in the abandoned town and devastated characters” (260). Guerrero posits that the silence in Rulfo’s work is “inherent in its fragmented structure” (260); the majority of conversations begin as if in a haze, drop off abruptly, and are never completed. The action always dissolves into oblivion. Clearly, Rulfo’s work presents a land of “eternal purgatory” (260), as evidenced by the arresting effects of Pedro Páramo’s world: Pedro’s
“haphazard, arbitrary violence,” Juan Preciado’s death by fright, and Abundio’s confusion and incapacitation at the novel’s end (262-4). But unlike Rulfo’s work says Guerrero, Benjamin’s contains a redemptive element, “the possibility for…divine destruction” (261).


In this article, Pérez explores a pedagogical quandary he confronted as a result of including Pedro Páramo and María Ampara Ruiz de Burton’s The Squatter and the Don on the same syllabus in a Chicano/a literature course. Both works treat the subject of hacienda rule in pre-Revolutionary Mexico, a period that historians claim to be crucial for an understanding of Mexican and Mexican-American experiences (33). Pérez explains that when studied in conjunction with one another, the works presented his students with conflicting representations of Mexican experience: de Burton’s work presents and privileges the Alto California rancher elite, Rulfo’s of the Indian and mestizo campesino people (33-34). In attempts to reconcile this disparity for his students, Pérez consulted histories and cultural representations in the novels (37). However, what he discovered most helpful in accounting for the difference was comparing his own grandfather’s memories of the hacienda with Rulfo’s depiction in Pedro Páramo. Ultimately, Pérez advocates that scholars strike a “dialectical balance” (43) when considering opposing narratives because we have often to compare proverbial apples and oranges: “the deconstructive and naturalistic representations of history…and the reconstructive project of Mexican American and Chicano/a writers…” (43). For Pérez then, that Rulfo
remained in Mexico and experienced more revolutionary violence—unlike Pérez’s grandfather who emigrated to the United States at six years old—explains why Pedro Páramo contains none of the myth and “wistful longing for the hacienda” (42) contained in Pérez family history.


Like many of Rulfo’s critics, such as Patrick Dove, Wilson highlights the notion that Pedro Páramo and The Burning Plain comment on “the complex identity of what it meant to be Mexican in the 20th century” (232). The desolate setting of Comala mirrors the Mexican countryside, whose inhabitants migrated to the cities after so much violence and political instability from the Mexican Revolution of 1910-20 (232). Despite Pedro Páramo’s narrative murkiness and meager initial sales of 1,000 copies, Wilson posits that it will achieve “classic status” because Rulfo wrote from impassioned experience, producing a work over which critics “cannot exhaust” themselves (236). Because his father and uncle were murdered in the Cristero uprising, and his mother had died by the time he was nine, Wilson suggests that Rulfo projects his orphanhood onto the novel, that his characters “have no family structure, ignore love, and do not belong to any social groups” (237). Furthermore, Wilson envisages Rulfo’s dual purpose in projecting this motif: a “recuperation” or rural Mexico and its misplaced people, and an indictment of a “‘lost’ world [that] was reactionary and awful, and deserved to become a ghost town” (237). Wilson begins his analysis of the novel by noting the translation of “Páramo”—which means “bleak plateau” or “wasteland”—and argues that Rulfo’s title is more than a
surname, but an allusion to “urban anguish” such as that in T.S. Eliot’s poem (233).

Wilson also traces the origins of the town name, Comala, connecting it with other Rulfo short fiction, in which Mexican oligarchs, such as Porfirio Díaz in pre-Revolution Mexico, issued only the hottest, least arable land, or “comal” (235). As can be expected, Wilson suggests that the reader conceptualize Pedro Páramo as an experimental work with surrealistic motifs whereby Rulfo’s purpose is “to blend memory and dream, and make the past a bad dream that cannot be explained away” (239). We even learn that Rulfo’s original manuscript was 300 pages, but that he trimmed as a means of forcing collaboration with the reader (240). Confused readers take heart: “Rulfo joked that he cut out so much that even he couldn’t understand it” (240).