
The author of only one novel and one short story collection, both published in the 1950s, Juan Rulfo is considered one of Mexico’s finest contemporary writers. His work has been the subject of numerous analyses, and Joseph Sommers explains that the purpose of this volume of essays is to make available the best of those studies, especially of Rulfo’s novel Pedro Páramo. Written by critics from the United States, Latin America and Europe, these essays reflect the widespread interest in Rulfo’s work, as well as the various analytical approaches to which it lends itself: the formalist, which stresses its intrinsic, structural aspects; the mythological or archetypal, wherein universal patterns and themes are underscored; and the socio-literary, which emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between literature and society.

As corpus, these studies help to explain the meaning of Rulfo’s narrative vis-à-vis Mexican literature and the post-Proustian and Joycean novel. Individually, they often show keen insight into the profound significance of the structural and thematic complexities of Pedro Páramo. The articles by Luis Leal, Mariana Frenk and Carlos Blanco-Aguinaga, are milestones in Rulfo studies, and they clearly prove that the novel’s apparent chaos, so perplexing to some critics, is in fact a highly ordered disorder, easily perceived after a careful reading of the text.

While Julio Ortega discusses the function of myth in some detail, José de la Colina’s comments on the feminine myth would reduce Pedro Páramo to a story of unconsummated romantic passion and frustrated maternal instincts. Although these are important aspects, he fails to see them in a larger context. In his essay on the archetypal substructure of “Paradise and Fall,” George Ronald Freeman concludes that this substructure defines the novel, after explicating only one episode in detail, again, without explicitly connecting it to the novel as a whole.

In a way, the format of this volume mirrors the weaknesses of the latter two essays, as the division by different critical approaches could suggest that they are mutually exclusive or that one aspect outweighs the other. A comprehension of Pedro Páramo requires an understanding of all the elements these articles stress. Thus, Sommer’s own contribution, and that of Carlos Blanco-Aguinaga, most closely approach a total view of this complex fictive world. These articles are necessary readings for all students of Rulfo and Professor Sommers is to be thanked for making them so accessible to us.

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The literary implications of the Spanish-American War have not been widely studied, save for the peninsular and Latin American projections. It is well known that the end of the Spanish role in Latin America (loss of Cuba, the Philippines and Puerto Rico) brought about a trend of thought usually referred to as the