

## SPECTRAL DIALOGUES: UNVEILING HISTORIES OF INJUSTICE IN *PEDRO PARAMO* THROUGH LYOTARD'S "DIFFEREND" AND DERRIDA'S "HAUNTOLOGY"

*Spektral Diyaloglar: Pedro Paramo Adlı Eserde Adaletsizlik Hikâyelerinin  
Lyotard'ın "Differend" ve Derrida'nın  
"Hauntoloji" Kavramları Üzerinden İncelenmesi*

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**ABSTRACT:** This study investigates the spectral presence of the past in the contemporary world of Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Paramo* (1955) through theoretical framework of Lyotard's concept of "differend" and Derrida's "hauntology". It is argued that conflicts between peasants and local rulers under the system of *caciquismo* following the Mexican Revolution result in a differend because the discourse of rule of judgment serving the interests only of those in power like Pedro Paramo, does not allow peasants to present their damages and seek justice. Since the causes of peasants remain unresolved when they die, the burden of the past marks the present. Like Derrida's specters, the deceased return to demand that their history is heard. The peasants haunt the living to relate their version of reality unheeded when they were alive. It is claimed that spectral hauntings function as a kind of language communicating the history of oppressed peasants. Hauntings prove that voices of the past cannot be simply denied or buried. The act of return through reconnection with the deceased in a spectral language provides prospects for justice, considering that the specter has the power to transgress ontological boundaries, disrupt established structures, and bring about substantial changes that would reframe society.

**Keywords:** Differend, hauntology, gothic, spectrality, spectral language, justice

**ÖZ:** Bu çalışma, Juan Rulfo'nun *Pedro Paramo* (1955) adlı romanının çağdaş dünyası üzerinde, geçmişin spektral varlığını Lyotard'ın "differend" ve Derrida'nın "hauntoloji" kavramlarının oluşturduğu kuramsal çerçeveden incelemektedir. Meksika Devrimi'ni takip eden *caciquismo* sistemi altında, köylüler ve yerel yöneticiler arasındaki çatışmaların "differend" ile sonuçlandığı, çünkü Pedro Paramo gibi sadece iktidardaki kişilerin çıkarlarına hizmet eden yargının üstünlüğü söyleminin köylülerin zararlarını ifade etmelerine ve adalet

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aramalarına izin vermediği savunulmaktadır. Köylüler öldüklerinde bile davaları çözümsüz kaldığından, geçmişin yükleri günümüz üzerinde izler bırakmaktadır. Derrida'nın spektral figürleri gibi, hayatlarını kaybeden köylüler de hikâyelerinin duyulmasını talep etmek için geri dönmektedirler. Köylüler, hayattayken kulak verilmemiş olan kendi gerçeklik versiyonlarını anlatmak için yaşayanlara musallat olurlar. Spektral görünümünün, ezilen köylülerin hikâyelerini aktaran bir tür dil olarak işlev gördüğü ileri sürülmektedir. Görünüm, geçmişe ait seslerinin basitçe inkâr edilemeyeceğini ya da bastırılmayacağını göstermektedir. Hayalet figürlerinin ontolojik sınırları aşma, yerleşik yapıları sekteye uğratma ve toplumun yeniden düzenlenmesini sağlayacak değişiklikleri meydana getirme gücüne sahip olduğu düşünülerek, ölümlerle spektral dilde yeniden bağlantı kurma yoluyla gerçekleşen geri dönüş eylemi adalet beklentilerini sağlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Differend, hauntoloji, gotik, spektralite, spektral dil, adalet

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### Introduction

Critics have read the Mexican author Juan Rulfo's short novel *Pedro Paramo* (1955) as a poignant account of the social fragmentation of his homeland, Mexico, during the first half of the twentieth century. That century commenced amidst a civil war that failed to eradicate completely the entrenched feudal social structure and mitigate the conflicts between social classes. The central figure after whom the book is named, Pedro Paramo, is a landowner from the times of the civil war, who brings ruin and death to the town that lives and eventually perishes under his dominion. Pedro Paramo's role as a self-imposed ruler wielding authority through language and violence over the inhabitants of Comala has frequently attracted scholarly attention. This study, rather than focusing on destructive consequences of unbalanced power relations, aims to call into question the oppressor's power to control the course of history and explore the potentials for the oppressed to intervene in the existing social structures.

In *Pedro Paramo* (1955/2002), Juan Rulfo intricately weaves the stories of Juan Preciado, Pedro Paramo and Susana San Juan. The novel begins with Juan Preciado declaring that he has returned to Comala to find his father and to claim "just what's ours" (p. 12), as he promised to his dying mother, the wife of Pedro Paramo. While Juan Preciado traverses the town, he encounters numerous inhabitants of Comala whom he soon suspects are dead, only to later realize that he too has died and become one of the ghosts haunting Comala. Juan's story is fragmented with flashbacks to the life of Pedro Paramo. They reveal that being the son of a wealthy landowner, Pedro Paramo has taken charge of the family estate upon the death of his father. Through violence and usurpation, he has enlarged his lands and caused many people to suffer. Notably, Pedro Paramo abuses his power not only to seize

lands and wealth of others, but also to possess the bodies of women he desires. Henceforth, Pedro Paramo cunningly devises a series of vile schemes, ultimately succeeding in marrying his childhood love, Susana San Juan, even in the face of her strong disdain towards him. Despite his conquest, it turns out that Pedro Paramo cannot truly possess his wife in that Susana's haunting memories of her deceased lover, Florencio, drive her to madness, thwarting Pedro's complete control of her. When Susana dies of sorrow over her deceased lover, being consumed by grief, Pedro Paramo commits to bring destruction upon Comala, which eventually leads to his own demise. Pedro Paramo's inability to establish domination over Susana, due to her reconnection with the deceased, brings along a tragic end for him, hinting at the enduring influence of the departed on the present.

Rulfo's creation of a confined realm filled with haunting presences of ghosts inevitably compels an exploration of his work from a Gothic perspective. By incorporating Gothic elements into the rural setting of Mexico, the author expresses apprehensions about the state of the country in the aftermath of armed conflict. Furthermore, through the use of Gothic devices, the author highlights the enduring influence of the past on Mexico's present, and calls attention to the potentials of engaging in dialogue with the past that might open up to a more comprehensive grasp of Mexico's present and future. In this respect, this study aims to investigate the spectral presence of the past in the contemporary world of Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Paramo* (1955) within the theoretical framework of Lyotard's concept of "differend" and Derrida's "hauntology". It attempts to illustrate that as the conflicts between peasants and rulers cannot be resolved in a just manner, due to the lack of a language and rule of judgment paying regard to accounts of all parties, the oppressed are forced to seek justice for their wrong through language of spectrality. This language is posited as a potent medium for reshaping entrenched social structures, aligning with Derrida's premise that the lingering specters of Marx persistently menace the established capitalist order of the world.

### **The "Differend" Between Peasants and Rulers**

In *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* (1983/1988), Jean-François Lyotard marks the moment when language fails as the differend and characterizes it as "[...] the unstable state and instant of language wherein something which must be able to put into phrases cannot yet be" (p. 13). Through the concept of differend, Lyotard examines how injustices occur in the context of language. A differend takes place when conflicts between parties cannot be fairly resolved due to the absence of a criterion of judgement observing the

interests of both sides. In the case of a differend, the parties are unable to reach a consensus on a rule or standard by which their dispute might be resolved. Hence, Lyotard distinguishes a differend from a litigation by pointing out the contrast between the plaintiff and the victim. The plaintiff is the wronged party in a litigation whereas the same party appears as the victim in a differend. While the plaintiff's injury can be presented in a litigation, that of the victim, in a differend, cannot be articulated. Lyotard (1983/1988) argues, "economic and social law can regulate the litigation between economic and social partners but not the differend between labor-power and capital" (p. 10). For Lyotard, a victim is not just someone who has experienced injustice but also someone who has been stripped of the power to articulate that injustice. This loss of power can manifest in different ways. The victim may be reduced to silence by threat or in some other way that disallows him or her to speak. On the other hand, even if the victim is permitted to speak, their speech might not be able to present the wrong done in the discourse of the rule of judgement. The words of the victim may not be believed or understood. He or she may be thought to be mad. As a result, the injustice suffered by the victim cannot be framed as a wrongdoing within the framework of the judicial discourse. (p. 10-11).

Lyotard (1983/1988) presents the example of the revisionist historian Faurisson's demands for Holocaust evidence to illustrate how a differend operates as a double bind. Faurisson insists on proof of gas chambers only from eyewitnesses who were victims themselves. Since these eyewitnesses are dead and cannot testify, Faurisson concludes that gas chambers did not exist. This creates a situation where either there were no gas chambers, and thus no eyewitnesses, or there were gas chambers, but no eyewitnesses can testify because they are deceased. Faurisson's refusal to accept evidence from anyone other than the deceased victims leads to the same conclusion: gas chambers did not exist. This situation is a differend because both scenarios result in the same outcome. The harm done to the victims cannot be conveyed within Faurisson's criteria for judgment (p. 4). Lyotard maintains that the meanings of phrases cannot be determined by their referents. Therefore, the meaning of a phrase as an event cannot be decided by appealing to reality. Since the referent does not fix meaning, and reality consists of various competing meanings attached to a referent, the meaning of a phrase event remains uncertain (p. 44). Using the concept of the differend, Lyotard highlights the difficulties of presenting the referent when the disputing parties cannot agree on a shared standard of judgment.

Lyotard's concept of the differend defines the dispute between peasants and rulers in *Pedro Paramo* (1955), which takes its roots from the legacy of the Mexican Revolution. In 1910, the Mexican civil war erupted, driven in part by peasants' demands against the country's capitalist economic system. The conflicts began because, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, small land holdings were acquired at very low prices or through violence. Consequently, at the start of the civil war, large estates known as *haciendas* occupied most of the arable land. The owners of these estates paid the peasants working for them very low wages (Gonzalez, 2018: p. 42). After a decade of fighting, the war ended at the same point where it had begun. New oligarchies replaced the old ones, and social class disparities remained unchanged. Now, being in power transcended mere land ownership and the exploitation of the lower classes; it also included control over the political system. Under this new arrangement, peasants became reliant on government protection and the influence of powerful local leaders known as *caciques*. This new type of interaction between those who had power and those who did not implicated a continuation of the established practice of subjugating people from lower classes (p. 42).

Juan Rulfo portrays Pedro Paramo as one of the *caciques* who exercise political power locally. Under his control, the inhabitants of Comala suffer oppression and abuse. He seizes lands of the peasants by force or intrigue and holds the power to justify his actions. The peasants cannot present the wrong done to them and seek justice because there is not a common rule of judgement applicable to both parties. In this situation of the differend, the *caciques* themselves create the standard of judgement in which the cause of the peasants will not be believed.

[Pedro Paramo]: "And next week you will go see Aldrete and tell him he must tear down the fence. He has encroached on the land of Media Luna."  
[Fulgor]: "He measured the boundaries carefully. That is my impression."  
[Pedro Paramo]: "Well, tell him he was mistaken. That he made the wrong calculations. Tear down the fences if necessary."  
[Fulgor]: "But what about the law?"  
[Pedro Paramo]: "*What laws, Fulgor? From now on we are going to make the laws.*" (Rulfo, 1955/2002: p. 55).

Aldrete is disallowed to present his wrong in the discourse of rule of judgement created to serve the interests of the *caciques*. Since the meaning of phrase is not fixed by the referent, those who hold the political power are able to manipulate the perception of an actual event. In his analyses of the relations between power and knowledge, Michel Foucault (1980/1984) points out that discourses are shaped by the influence of power within a

social structure, and this power establishes specific rules and categories that determine the standards for legitimizing knowledge and truth within that discursive framework. As knowledge is determined by power, and discourse is not a transparent medium that mirrors the world, there occurs the differend in which Pedro Paramo as the *cacique* is able to lay claim on the land of a ruled subject, and the wronged peasant is precluded from defending his cause against the offender. The discourse of the victim is suppressed.

[Galileo]: "And who says that this land is not mine?"

[Don Enmedio]: "They have declared that this land has been sold to Pedro Paramo."

[Galileo]: "I have never had anything to do with that man. That land is mine."

[Don Enmedio]: "That's what you say. But here they say it all belongs to him."

[...]

[Don Enmedio]: "Look Galileo, between you and me, I am fond of you. [...] *But you can't tell me that you didn't sell this land.*" (Rulfo, 1955/2002: p. 60).

Like Aldrete, Galileo suffers injustice under the rule of Pedro Paramo, who lays hands on his land. Galileo attempts to vindicate ownership of the land in dispute, but he is not understood by Don Enmedio because Galileo's statements are not valid in the discourse of rule of judgement. The judicial regulation of the conflict between Pedro Paramo and Galileo results in the differend, in which the latter is deprived of the power to present the harm done to him. He is threatened with death to abandon the pursuit of his cause. Hence, those who hold the reins of political power seek to silence Galileo either through the denial of his voice or the deprivation of his very life. As Lyotard (1983/1988) highlights that in the differend, damage is accompanied by loss of the means to prove it (p. 5), Galileo is hindered from testifying for his damage.

Lyotard (1983/1988) argues that the differend arises when resolving the conflict is framed in the language of one party, failing to acknowledge the harm experienced by the other in the same terms (p. 9). The wrong comes from the fact that the damages are not expressed in a language shared by both parties. In order for the differend to be resolved and the plaintiff to cease being a victim, the wrong must find an expression. This necessitates the establishment of new rules for the formation and linkage of phrases, thereby enabling the attachment of new significations to the referent (p. 13). In *Pedro Paramo* (1955), the deceased peasants who suffered damages and could not put them in expression under the *caciquismo* of Pedro Paramo, return from the realm of death and seek justice through the language of spectrality. Since the language of *caciques* and the discourse of rule of

judgement in that language preclude peasants from expressing themselves, they are obliged to formulate a new language that allows them to speak.

### **Language of Spectrality for Justice**

In *Specters of Marx* (1994), Derrida characterizes the prevailing narrative of the post-Cold War era as emphasizing the demise of any alternative to global capitalism. However, through his deconstructionist approach, he advocates the end of communism to be, in fact, a new beginning. In the late 20th century, the Berlin Wall symbolized a stark division between East and West, Capitalism and Communism, Right and Left. Its collapse in 1989 was celebrated by historian Francis Fukuyama as signaling "the end of history" and by scholar Mark Fisher as the emergence of "capitalist realism". They conveyed the idea that capitalism was not only the only feasible political and economic system but also made it impossible to imagine a coherent alternative (Shaw, 2018: p. 5).

According to Derrida (1994), the collapse of the Berlin Wall did not mark the end of history but rather disrupted the fixed binaries it symbolized. Consequently, he diverges from Fukuyama and others, arguing that "Marxism has always and will always haunt society" (p. 2). Accordingly, he coined the term "hauntology" to offer fresh perspectives on how we contemplate the past, present, and future, as opposed to the idea of the end of history. "Hauntology" arises from *Specters of Marx* as a concept to supplant its near-homonym "ontology". In doing so, hauntology shifts the focus from the importance of existence and presence to the figure of ghost, which exists in a state that is neither fully present nor absent, neither entirely alive nor dead. Derrida's specter is a deconstructive figure that hovers between life and death, presence and absence, and destabilizes the established certainties. It is committed to deconstruction's project of *differance*; hence, to a destabilization of all reductionism, essentialisms, dichotomies, ontologies, teleologies and epistemological claims (Miller, 2003: p. 3). Derrida's specter seeks to signify the ambiguous realm between existence and non-existence, life and death. It embodies a desire to engage with shades of existence that defy traditional ontological categories of being or non-being, alive or dead. While the dominating discourse of the West expels ghosts, Derrida grants them voices with an urge "to encounter what is strange, unheard, other about the ghost" (Davis, 2005: p. 378). Thereby, Derrida allows them to articulate alternative accounts of the past and to open up possibilities about a still unformulated future.



Much like communism, the Mexican revolution fails to realize its objectives. However, rather than fading into oblivion, its aspirations endure and cast a lingering presence across the annals of history. In *Pedro Paramo* (1955), Rulfo depicts such presence through unrelenting specters, haunting persistently the present. Consistent with Derrida's "hauntology", Rulfo fills his novel with ghostly characters who, despite their deceased state, possess voices. This creates an "uncanny" effect, which Freud explicates by referring to the German words *heimlich* and *unheimlich*. The former signifies "I. familiar" and "II. concealed or kept out of sight". As the negation of *heimlich*, the latter means "I. unfamiliar" and "II. unconcealed" (Freud, 1919: p. 3). These two words converge to encapsulate the essence of what the 'uncanny' represents. The uncanny originates from revelation of what is private and concealed, of what is hidden. Freud (1919) defines the uncanny as "familiar thing that has undergone repression and then emerged from it" (p. 15). The uncanny is the mark of the return of the repressed. We get a feeling of the uncanny when something that ought to have remained hidden has become visible. In *Pedro Paramo* (1955), Rulfo's dead characters that ought to have remained buried under the ground become visible in the realm of the living. Representing the oppressed peasants of the town of Comala, these characters walk, talk and engage themselves in everyday activities as if they are alive, yet they are not. Familiar earthly qualities get added to their unfamiliar substance.

According to Botting and Edwards (2013), ghosts are markers of others as well as representations of personal and communal losses and traumas (p. 11-2). Avery Gordon (1997) considers a ghost primarily as a symptom of what is missing (p. 63). In this respect, Rulfo's ghosts represent a social class that has been marginalized and excluded from the established structures under the system of *caciquismo*. In line with the return of repressed in Freudian terminology, the ghosts of oppressed peasants of Comala intrude into the living-space in order to assert their existence. As the ghosts break through the boundaries of time and space, they create feelings of uncertainty and being haunted, which eventually results in sickness and death of the three principal characters; Juan Preciado, Susanna San Juan and Pedro Paramo. The disorientation resulting from hauntings brings along death within the ontology of linear historical time. In the spectral understanding of time, however, it leads to insight into the history of the oppressed.

In *Specters of Marx* (1994), when Derrida asserts that the specter of communism is haunting Europe, he makes references to Shakespeare's

*Hamlet*. The spirit of Hamlet's dead father incarnates itself in the specter, and becomes some "thing" that defies easy categorization. It is neither soul nor body, yet embodies elements of both. (p. 5). One cannot be sure if it is living or dead, present or absent. Therefore, this being-there of an absent defies semantics as much as ontology. The specter of Hamlet's dead father returns when "time is out of joint", and demands Hamlet to set it right (p. 23). Derrida understands "time" as referring either to the temporality of time; "time as history, the way things are at a certain time, the time that we are living, nowadays", or to the monde; "our world today, our today, currentness itself, current affairs" (p. 21). When time is out of joint, then it is meant that in our time or world, it is not going so well; it is rotting or withering; time is unhinged, the world is upside down (p. 21). When considered ethically, out of joint could indicate "the moral decadence or corruption of the city, the dissolution or perversion of customs" (p. 22). When time is so out of its natural lodging, the past interrupts the present, and the ungraspable visibility of the invisible calls Hamlet to put time on the right path, to do right, render justice, and to redress the wrong of history (p. 24).

Similarly, when Juan Preciado's mother is hovering between life and death in her dying moments, she implores her son to demand from Pedro Paramo "what is ours", and make him pay for the way he neglected them (Rulfo, 1955/2002: p. 12). She asks Juan Preciado to render justice and correct the wrong done by his father. At the very beginning of the novel, hence, it is perceived that the time is out of joint, and the current order of life needs to be repaired. In this disjointure of the present, Juan Preciado meets the spirits of the deceased who return to Comala as specters, and hears them speaking. The dead haunt the present with their voices, and give us insight into their painful lives under oppression, their sufferings and desires which remained unheard when they were alive. The act of haunting thus proves to be a particular way of expressing what has happened or is happening.

When Juan arrives in Comala, he relies on guidance from several locals, only to later discover from others that they are already deceased. Like the specter of Hamlet's dead father, these people are neither alive nor dead, neither present nor absent. They transcend the ontological boundaries of time and place. Juan discovers that Comala is filled with their voices. He observes, "This town is full of echoes. It is as if they were hiding behind the walls or under the rocks. When you walk, you feel that they are following in your footsteps" (Rulfo, 1955/2002: p. 55). Comala is a place filled with ghosts, where even those who think they are alive are themselves haunting

specters. Even though Juan is dead from the moment when he steps into Comala, he remains oblivious to this fact for some time. Like all the ghostly inhabitants of Comala, Juan Preciado becomes trapped in-between life and death. When he gradually comes to the realization that he is dead, he deduces that it must be the voices of the dead people which killed him. He declares, "When I heard those murmurs, they shattered my lifeline" (p. 72). It is understood that in his quest for rendering justice, Juan Preciado becomes one of the spectral voices in the town. Since Juan Preciado will not be allowed to present the injustice in the idiom of Pedro Paramo, he is compelled to adopt a language in which his plea can find an expression.

Speaking in the language of spectrality becomes not just imperative, but a transformative necessity when confronting a situation where one social group is deliberately rendered absent by another. This dynamic is clearly demonstrated in Pedro Paramo's denial of the existence of those who come from lower classes, which is exemplified by his callous statement, "You don't have to worry about them, Fulgor. Those people don't exist" (Rulfo, 1955/2002: p. 81). Paramo's words not only reflect a prevailing attitude in the Mexican society but also expose a systemic erasure that denies a voice to the marginalized. In this respect, the absence should not be conceived simply as an outcome of disregard but as an intentional act of negation. Accordingly, a contradiction arises from the fact that the absent are expected to be voiceless within the confines of ontological divides; however, for assertion of their presence, they must overcome these ontological constraints and disrupt established categories of knowledge. This rebellion is signified in the language of spectrality which is discerned as an influential medium capable of unsettling and destabilizing the foundations of ontological divisions. When the specter speaks, it enacts a subversive act that threatens the structures maintaining the denial and silence of the absent. The language of spectrality is therefore not merely a mode of expression. It is an instrument of countering the systems that deny the existence of oppressed groups. In this rebellion, an opening is forcefully carved out for the absent, which creates the possibility for subversion of the enforced erasure. Hence, the strength of the language of spectrality lies in its capacity to not only articulate the struggles of the oppressed but also to deconstruct the oppressive structures that aim at suppressing their voices.

Spectrality operates within the liminal spaces that exist between traditionally defined borders, emerging as a powerful agent which demands a questioning of the boundaries set by ontological categories and of the limitations of conventional perceptions. Rulfo's spectral characters who are

the agents of ontological destabilization, are mirrored in the bewildering landscapes of Comala itself. Like its spectral inhabitants who hover between the worlds of the living and the dead, the town is depicted as erasing the line that divides the territories of life and death. Similarly to the spectral characters, Comala's geography resists conventional binary oppositions, sometimes turning a house into a grave or a sensed coffin into a bed. As readers proceed with the narrative, the uncertainty deepens, constantly challenging them to question whether the characters exist in the realm of the living or the domain of the deceased. This ambiguity is exemplified when Juan's mother, on her deathbed, implores him to seek justice from Pedro Paramo in Comala, only for Juan to discover Paramo's demise upon reaching the town. Gradually, it becomes evident that Juan's mother directs him to Comala not solely for justice but because she believes their connection will be closer there. In Comala, the ontological boundaries governing life and death dissolve, giving rise to an intricate interplay between past and present, the living and the dead. This constant dialogue unfolds as the deceased address the living, transmitting their messages across the ontological divide. Juan's mother, in a poignant moment, reveals, "There you will hear me better. I will be closer to you" (Rulfo, 1955/2002: p. 20). Her words encapsulate the liminality of Comala and the essence of its inhabitants' spectral language—a language that transcends recognized boundaries and fosters an intimate connection between the living and the departed.

Juan Rulfo illustrates that the dead cannot be laid in rest because their business in this world has not finished, which obliges them to repeatedly return and demand that we acknowledge and reckon with their untold histories. Through haunting manifestations, the absent challenge the conventional flow of chronological history and defiantly disrupt the established boundaries of past, present, and future. This disruption serves as a mechanism for giving voice to those who were previously silenced and for rendering visible those who were once overlooked. The intrusion of the specter into the realm of the living signifies a weighty burden of the past on the present, a haunting reminder that transcends the temporal constraints. Derrida's insight that "haunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony" (1994, p. 46) resonates, emphasizing the imperative nature of spectral interventions in systems of oppression. In Rulfo's narrative, the specters of the oppressed linger, haunting the living, aiming to offer a renewed viewpoint on the past, present, and future. For these specters to effectively communicate, for the echoes of the past to address the present and shape the future, Rulfo deliberately disrupts the linear perception of time. His use of a

fragmentary literary technique becomes a intentional act of subversion, challenging the conventional understanding of temporal progression and allowing the voices of the oppressed to permeate across temporal boundaries, creating a narrative that transcends the limitations of traditional storytelling.

Gonzalez (2018) observes the narrative line of *Pedro Paramo* to be composed of nearly seventy fragments. In the first five fragments, Juan Preciado recounts the reasons and circumstances of his arrival in Comala, implicating to readers that the narrative will unfold in a linear manner. The rest of the story, however, unravels into a complex interplay of temporal shifts. The constant oscillation between Preciado's contemporary account and the historical events involving Pedro Paramo and Susanna San Juan introduces a temporal fragmentation. Beyond temporal intricacies, the novel further fractures reality by presenting multiple subjective perspectives on various events. This fragmentation, rooted in subjective assumptions, intertwines diverse voices, predominantly belonging to the deceased (p. 43). Victor Shklovsky's concept of aesthetic strangeness, which values unfamiliarity and the challenge of form to elicit a distinct perception of the object, resonates in Rulfo's deliberate use of a fragmentary literary technique. Rulfo's employment of fragmentation is not merely a stylistic decision but a strategic tool to offer a novel understanding of Mexico's social and political realities. The absence of traditional dialogue attributions at the novel's outset, leaving readers to discern speakers at their own efforts, exemplifies this deliberate departure from conventional narrative structures,

"And what can you tell me about your father, if I may ask?"

"I don't know him," I said. "I only know that his name is Pedro Paramo."

"Ah!, you don't say."

"Yes, that's what they told me his name was."

Again I heard the mule-driver say "Ah!" *I had met him in Los Encuentros, where there are several crossroads. I had been waiting there, until this man finally came.*

*When he got there I had asked him, "Where are you headed for?"*

"I am going down that way, señor."

"Do you know of a place called Comala?"

"That is where I am going." (Rulfo, 1955/2002: p.15).

The dialogue, which is later understood to take place between Preciado and already dead Abundio, is presented in a reversed chronological order. Juan Preciado tells his companion that his father is Pedro Paramo. Then readers are abruptly led to the beginning of the conversation. The absence of a linear structure and a unified perspective of events underline the limitations

of chronological history and the limits of standard perception. Only when reader's experience of time is distorted through abrupt narrative breaks, specters find openings from which they surge and tell their accounts of history. Only that way, the oppressed are able to seek justice that the differend denied to them. Since the injustices done to the peasants cannot be presented in the language of Pedro Paramo, and conventional structure would force a false totality on what remains hidden and unspoken, a new formulation of phrases and a disrupted temporal order can reflect the existence of the oppressed and their version of history.

According to Derrida (1994), "a ghost never dies, it remains always to come and to come-back" (p. 123). Therefore, he contends that we must learn to live with ghosts, and grant them hospitable memory out of a concern for justice. In *Pedro Paramo* (1955), Rulfo illustrates the power of cooperation with ghosts through the character of Susana San Juan. Pedro Paramo ultimately marries her by intrigue, yet he can never truly possess her because she defies the ontological certainties by engaging in dialogue with the specters of her dead father and lover. For that reason, Susanna is portrayed as a living-dead in a constant semi-conscious state. She finds herself caught between her physical reality and the realm of specters. As a result, she manages to remain isolated from the present world and to live in her own dreamy world. Her ability to transcend the actual time and place and connect to the specters helps her evade Pedro's attempts to impose his authority on her (Gonzalez, 2018: p. 50). Moreover, Susanna's hospitality to the presence of specters opens up possibilities for justice. The narrator reveals, "Since he had brought her to live here, he had seen nothing but these stressful nights of constant uneasiness, and he wondered when it was going to end" (Rulfo, 1955/2002: p. 120). During her days at Pedro's side, by communicating with the ghosts, Susanna makes Pedro Paramo suffer and pay for the sins he committed. In a sense, Pedro Paramo is haunted by the return of the people he oppressed. After her death, Susanna keeps him haunted by her memories. Just before he declares, "This is my death" (p. 161), Pedro Paramo attempts to clear Susana's haunting images from his mind, yet he feels too weak to stop them from bringing him to his death. Thus, towards the end of the novel, Juan Rulfo illustrates that the dead can sometimes be more powerful than the living. It is supported by the revelation of what Pedro Paramo has felt about the ghosts. The narrator discloses, "He was afraid of nights that were full of ghosts. They frightened him" (p. 161). Since they evoke feelings of anxiety in him, Pedro Paramo gradually acknowledges that the voices of the past cannot be simply denied or buried.

The act of return promises justice because the specter has the power to disrupt the established structures and bring about substantial changes that would reframe the society.

### **Conclusion**

In *Pedro Paramo* (1955), the conflicts between the peasants of Comala and Pedro Paramo as the *cacique* result in the differend. Since the idiom and discourse of the rule of judgement that are available serve the interests of only those who hold the political power like Pedro Paramo, the wronged peasants are not able to present the harm done to them and demand justice. As the meaning of phrase is not fixed by the referent, the discourse of judgement ruled by the offender justifies iniquities by evaluating them from a perspective that precludes the testimony of the wronged. As a result, the plaintiff is reduced to silence and the dispute between the parties remains unresolved. According to Lyotard, in order for the differend to be resolved, injustices must find an expression. Since the damages suffered by the peasants cannot be signified in the idiom of Pedro Paramo, they are obliged to speak in a different language and attach new significations to the referent.

The social order maintained under the *caciquismo* of Pedro Paramo denies the existence of peasants. They are regarded as absent despite being physically present. As a result, it becomes problematic to define the peasants according to the ontological criteria of being and non-being. In this regard, Juan Rulfo associates the peasants of Comala with ghosts. Like Derrida's specters in his concept of "hauntology", the peasants are depicted as neither truly alive nor completely dead. Besides, as the corrupt social order in Comala induces disjuncture in the linear historical time, the past is shown to actively interrupt the present. Transgressing the ontological boundaries, the peasants who have deceased intrude into the living-space in the form of specters. They haunt the living to relate their version of reality and to seek justice. The spectral voices of the deceased peasants emerge as a special language that articulates their history of oppression. This spectral language possesses the inherent power to disrupt conventional ontological categories and challenge the established structures that deny their existence. As such, the spectral speech offers the prospect of justice, pointing to Derrida's premise that the oppressed cannot be simply silenced.

Juan Rulfo illustrates that engaging in the language of spectrality is crucial when attempting to communicate the experiences and perspectives of a social group that is perceived as absent or overlooked by another. In a societal context where certain voices are marginalized or neglected, speaking

in the language of spectrality that disrupts conventional modes of speech and diverges from the dominant discourse renders possible the articulation of a history that is forcibly suppressed. By adopting the language of spectrality that contradicts the standards of language of rule, individuals from marginalized groups can assert their presence and make their narratives heard, even when their experiences are not readily recognized by the dominant social discourse. Juan Rulfo presents the language of spectrality as a means of transcending conventional boundaries and challenging the unbalanced power relations that render certain social groups invisible. The spectral language that initiates communication with the suppressed and the unheeded functions as a medium for unveiling the hidden stories, perspectives, and struggles that might otherwise remain obscured. Rulfo shows that the language of spectrality is hence capable of developing a more inclusive dialogue, contributing to a more comprehensive and empathetic understanding of lives and embodied experiences of diverse groups within a society. As in Rulfo's narrative, reconnection with the deceased can therefore hold a promise for a critical examination of the history and transformative restructuring of societal systems.

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