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Juan Rulfo's legendary novel "Pedro Páramo" is about a man who stumbles upon a village populated by ghosts — a mystical narrative crossing between the living and the dead.

Published in 1955, the story provides the here-and-there theme of the XXI Colloquium on Mexican Literature — "Nepantla, Between Comala and California, and Other Crossroads"— a three-day conference presented by the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at UC Santa Barbara. "Nepantla means in between and you can imagine being in two places at the same time," said Sara Poot-Herrera, a professor in the department.

The 21st colloquium, which is free and open to the public, will feature more than 50 presentations in 12 sessions with scholars from the United States and Mexico. It opens at 5 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 9, in UCSB's Multicultural Center Lounge. The first session, from 5:30 to 7 p.m., begins with Pablo Brescia of the University of Florida, giving the talk "Camino y camino y no ando nada: los que caminan con Juan Rulfo" (Road and path and I walk nothing: Those who walk with Juan Rulfo).

Kicking off day two of the colloquium at 9 a.m. Friday, Nov. 10, in the McCune Conference Room, Patricia Saldarriaga of Middlebury College will deliver the first presentation, "De esfera en esfera durante el Sueno de Sor Juana" (From sphere to sphere during the Dream of Sor Juana).

The proceedings move into the community for day three, which begins at 9 a.m. Saturday, Nov. 11, at the Alhecama Theatre in downtown Santa Barbara. Tanius Karam of Universidad Autonoma de la Ciudad de Mexico will give the opening presentation, “Modernidades en collision. Entre Amor perdido y Balas de plata” (Modernities in collision. Between Lost Love and Silver Bullets).

“The conference was organized chronologically,” said Poot-Herrera, who is also director of UCSB’s UC-Mexicanistas, an intercampus research program. “Each session has a solid structure.”

The colloquium will mark the 100th birthday of Juan Rulfo, a Mexican writer, screenwriter and photographer. In addition to “Pedro Páramo” — a Mexican literary bible, according to Poot-Herrera — Rulfo is known for “El Llano en llamas” (“The Burning Plains and other Stories”). The conference also is celebrating Pedro Infante, a Mexican singer and actor who would have been 100 this year, and Gabriel García Márquez, who wrote the landmark 1967 story “Cien años de soldedad” (“One Hundred Years of Solitude”). Considered a masterpiece, the book centers around the Buendía family, whose patriarch, José Arcadio Buendía, founds the town of Macondo.

A Nobel laureate, García Márquez credits his signature book to a life-changing discovery of “Pedro Páramo” in 1961. He described Rulfo’s writings as durable as “the pages that have come down to us from Sophocles,” an ancient Greek drama master.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.