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The Mediation of the Cross: Spatiality and Syncretism  
in *Pedro Páramo* and *Grande sertão: Veredas*

Faith Arianna Blackhurst

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

### The Mediation of the Cross: Spatiality and Syncretism in *Pedro Páramo* and *Grande sertão: Veredas*

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Juan Rulfo and João Guimarães Rosa stand at a literary crossroads, the intersection where traditional regionalists and celebrated Boom-era novelists meet. Although Rulfo and Guimarães Rosa chose the Mexican Llano Grande and the Brazilian *sertão* of Minas Gerais as the settings of their most celebrated novels, they go far beyond the techniques of traditional regionalism by distancing themselves from their national literatures. They universalize their narratives by incorporating universal religious themes, including the symbol of the cross. The symbol of the cross/crossroad has been analyzed and alluded to in a handful of essays on *Pedro Páramo* and *Grande sertão: Veredas* but has never been applied comparatively or in depth, beyond a connection to Hermes, Greek god of the crossroads. Rulfo and Guimarães Rosa use the spatial organizing power of the cross—and by extension, the crossroad—to highlight the importance of racial and religious mixing to Mexican and Brazilian identity, determine narrative structure, and strengthen mythic, religious, and epic themes. The motif allows the reader to transcend (although not eradicate) a geographical conception of setting. Instead, the reader recognizes the construction of a mythic space that intertwines national history with primordial creation stories, modern heroes, and ancient religious symbols.

Keywords: Juan Rulfo, João Guimarães Rosa, cross, crossroads, spatiality, syncretism, religion

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## Introduction

As the celebrated American author Flannery O'Connor (1925–1964) observed in 1963, “The writer operates at a peculiar crossroads where time and place and eternity somehow meet. His problem is to find that location” (848). Her Latin American contemporaries Juan Rulfo (1917–1986) and João Guimarães Rosa (1908–1967) rose to that challenge in the 1950s. Their masterpieces, *Pedro Páramo* (1955) and *Grande sertão: Veredas* (1956) respectively, are centered around important crossroads that shape the journeys of their protagonists.<sup>1</sup> These crossroads are places where divine and infernal realms can interact with the physical world, where “time and place and eternity” literally intersect. As a regionalist (and devoted Catholic) herself, O'Connor may have recognized the fruitfulness of celebrating local color while treating universal themes. With this aim in mind, Rulfo and Guimarães Rosa used the cross to mediate the competing ideals of traditional regionalism and more cosmopolitan universalism. First, in both novels, references to the crossroad motif allow the reader to transcend (although not eradicate) a geographical conception of setting. Second, specific references to Catholic, indigenous, and African religious traditions culminate in a universal perception of good and evil, forces that mirror spatial associations as explained by the cross. Rather than focus solely on autochthonous or universal elements, Rulfo and Guimarães Rosa innovate, choosing to imbue their national imaginaries with universal archetypes to deepen the richness of their narratives. As a result, the reader recognizes the construction of what Diógenes Fajardo Valenzuela calls a

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<sup>1</sup> While I focus on this specific intertextual relationship, *Pedro Páramo* and *Grande sertão: Veredas* dialogue with a myriad of other texts as well. Scholars have argued, for example, that *Grande sertão: Veredas* has been influenced by the works of Miguel de Cervantes, Lewis Carroll, and Dante Alighieri (see “O tema da Idade de Ouro em *Grande sertão: veredas*” by Heloisa Vilhena de Araújo, “Os rastros da *narratofilia* na Mancha e no Sertão” by Beny Ribeiro dos Santos, and “A travessia quixotesca no sertão rosiano” by Márcia Denise Assunção da Rocha). Likewise, Carlos Fuentes mentions Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* and Homer’s *Ulysses* as possible influences on *Pedro Páramo*, and Douglas J. Weatherford’s comparative analysis of *Pedro Páramo* and Orson Welles’s 1941 film *Citizen Kane* is quite notable as well in its crossover of literary mediums.

mythic space, which intertwines national history with primordial creation stories, modern heroes, and ancient religious symbols (96).<sup>2</sup>

The usefulness of the cross/crossroad as an analytic framework for both *Grande sertão: Veredas* and *Pedro Páramo* cannot be overstated. As Caroline LeFeber Schneider affirms, both novels are “written ‘spatially’ rather than temporally” (32). As a result, the extensive references to the cross in settings most crucial to the protagonists highlight its metaphorical role as a place of decision-making. Even the title of the Guimarães Rosa’s novel emphasizes the multitude of possible pathways—the ambiguous *veredas* that cross the *sertão mineiro*—which lead to the constant *travessia*, or crossing motion, of Riobaldo throughout the narrative. He also interlaces his self-identity with the crossroad, saying, “lugar meu tinha de ser a concruz dos caminhos” (419). Similarly, the town where Juan Preciado’s parents met, Comala, serves as “el lugar de la encrucijada laberíntica” on his journey to find his father (Fajardo Valenzuela 102).

A handful of previous studies have established the presence and importance of the crossroad in both novels, although the topic has never been approached comparatively. The crossroad is so central to Rulfo’s narrative that Lilia Leticia García-Peña describes *Pedro Páramo* as a rewriting of the myth of Hermes, who is god of the crossroads. As a result of his dominion over travelers, guidance of the dead to the underworld, and mischievous ambiguity in his comings and goings, Hermes shares much symbolic value with the cross. In the case of

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<sup>2</sup> These similar techniques and themes used by Rulfo and Rosa may have developed independently, or rather as the result of separate literary influences, but one point of contact for the two authors is Machado de Assis (see Wiseman and Krause). As the most celebrated author of Brazil, he was widely known in Latin American literary circles, and according to Paulo Moreira, Rulfo’s library contained five of Machado’s novels at the time of his death. Although it is difficult to pinpoint when Rulfo acquired these volumes, his editions of *Dom Casmurro* and *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas* predate the publication of *Pedro Páramo*, which could suggest that he read them before or during his writing project, although we cannot declare this with any degree of certainty (Moreira, “Juan Rulfo y la literatura brasileña”). Machado’s *Memórias Póstumas* (1881) may have also inspired both men to write in a fragmentary and sometimes digressive style, and more particularly, may have given Rulfo the idea to narrative a story from the grave.

*Grande sertão: Veredas*, Adélia Bezerra de Meneses recognizes that the Rio São Francisco is the main axis of Riobaldo's world, which forms a cross at the beginning of his journey. Bezerra de Meneses also develops the right-left duality of the river's banks, which she associates with government-imposed order and lawlessness, respectively.

This spatiality is key to understanding the journeys of the two protagonists because Juan Preciado and Riobaldo often find themselves at the center of the cross, in a place described as “void” and “empty” by metaphysician René Guénon (43). At this center, they inhabit a liminal space where they find themselves separate from the world around them. They become more than the quintessential *jalisciense* or *sertanejo* as they take on traits of the universal man, questioning religion, morality, life, and death. As a result, both Guimarães Rosa and Rulfo transcend traditional regionalism to achieve what Francis Utéza calls “a sacralização do espaço, fundamentada sobretudo na simbólica da cruz em cujo centro se reúnem verticalidade e horizontalidade” in the most ambiguous of ways (136). Traditionally, as Guénon argues, “at the center of the cross...all oppositions are reconciled and resolved,” but upon analyzing these novels, we see that this expected outcome is subverted, which leaves the reader questioning if the crossroads is the place of God or the Devil—or both (41). This ambiguity is a defining feature of the symbolism of crossroads in both *Pedro Páramo* and *Grande sertão: Veredas*.

I seek to expand on the ideas of Schneider, who focuses on the spatiality of the novels; García-Peña, who speaks overtly of the crossroads in *Pedro Páramo*; and Bezerra de Meneses, whose left-right division of the *sertão rosiano* can be overlaid with the symbol of the cross. Although these regional settings can be geographically located, Rulfo and Guimarães Rosa inscribe these geographical identities with the mythic symbol of the cross, engendering several analyses that reference the Greco-Roman myth of Hermes, god of the crossroads (see, for

example, Armindo Bião, Lila Leticia García-Peña, and Francis Utéza). However, these analyses rarely approach the cross symbol in the more global sense that I intend to emphasize here. In order to first contextualize my analysis, I will discuss the role of Rulfo and Guimarães Rosa as transitional figures that stood at the crossroads of traditional, nationalistic regionalism and international, Boom-era editorial success. Then, I will lay the theoretical framework for approaching the novels spatially, as arranged by the symbol of the cross or crossroad. Next, I will approach each of the two novels separately, beginning with *Pedro Páramo*. I will explain how the historical traditions of Mexico and Brazil have caused the countries to internalize their roles as racial and spiritual crossroads, which mediate myths that emerge in their search for national identity. To conclude, I will explore the roles of the protagonists as modern heroes who begin and end their journeys at crossroads, a fact that helps universalize both novels.

### **Transcending Regionalism: Rulfo and Guimarães Rosa as Transitional Figures**

By the time João Guimarães Rosa and Juan Rulfo were writing their masterpiece novels, Latin American realism and regionalism had well established traditions in Mexico and Brazil. A push for more experimental literature began in the 1930s and 1940s with authors such as Alejo Carpentier and Miguel Ángel Asturias, who began to break with traditional Latin American genres, intermingling regionalism with avant-garde elements. Their focus on indigenous and African legends (such as Asturias's *Leyendas de Guatemala* [1930] and Carpentier's *El reino de este mundo* [1949]) paved the way for Guimarães Rosa and Rulfo to approach their novels from a more universal perspective and to include diverse cultural traditions as mythic foundations for their stories. In part, Guimarães Rosa drew upon Euclides da Cunha's acclaimed *Os Sertões* (1902), African and indigenous religious traditions, and copious reading of European classics to

put a modern spin on the traditional regional novel through his innovative magnum opus, *Grande sertão: Veredas*. Meanwhile, Rulfo drew upon such sources as the uniquely Mexican *Novela de la Revolución* and weaved together myths from Christian, indigenous, and classic traditions to publish one of the most influential novels in the history of Latin American literature, *Pedro Páramo*.

Rulfo and Guimarães Rosa, while choosing the Mexican Llano Grande and the Brazilian *sertão* of Minas Gerais as the settings of their novels, chose to go far beyond the techniques of traditional regionalism by incorporating religious themes, including the symbol of the cross. They transcend these limits by creating what Horácio Costa deems “movimento, por certo ascensional, de ‘região’ ao ‘cosmos’” and by including several innovative elements popularized during the Boom, most notably a distinct fragmentation of time and narrative flow (236).<sup>3</sup> Rulfo evokes a particular geographical location by setting his narrative in his native region of Jalisco, but also emphasizes the universal themes of death, redemption, and condemnation, in part by positioning Comala as an eternal purgatory. Guimarães Rosa achieves a similar universal effect by making his protagonist, Riobaldo, a wily Brazilian *jagunço* who constantly philosophizes about the existence of God and the Devil. The focus of both novels is highly spiritual, which broadens the universal reach of the texts; however, their regional feel is never lost. As Caroline LeFeber Schneider notes of both the Brazilian *sertão* and the Llano Grande, they are “geographically places, culturally inscribed, and spiritually felt” (31–32).

Ángel Rama discusses this phenomenon of combining the particular (or regional) and the universal as transculturation, which occurred leading up to the Latin American Boom. Both Rulfo and Guimarães Rosa’s narratives have been approached heavily from this framework of

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<sup>3</sup> Coutinho affirms that the combination of both regional and universal themes is what links *Grande sertão: Veredas* to the Latin American “nova narrativa” (92–3).

transculturation,<sup>4</sup> which explains the balance of regionalism and universalism in their novels as an attempt to mediate the modernizing influences present in the 1950s with a sense of personal and national identity.<sup>5</sup> A perceived dichotomy between national and universal themes became even more pertinent in the 1960s, as the widespread success of the marketing and sales of Latin American literature around the globe surged along radical innovations in literature and thought encouraged, in part, by the Cuban Revolution of 1959. The international acclaim gained by such writers as Mario Vargas Llosa, Gabriel García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, and Julio Cortázar helped bring a new type of Latin American narrative into the table in the 1960s, which attempted to balance traditional regional narratives with innovative, erudite ideas and structures.

Rulfo and Guimarães Rosa served as transitional figures during this period because of their role as precursors to the Boom.<sup>6</sup> They are proverbially positioned at a crossroads because

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Prisca Rita Agustoni de Pereira and Suellen Cordovil da Silva.

<sup>5</sup> During this period, such nationalist ideologies were a topic of hot debate as Latin American authors sought to break free of traditional, regional themes in favor of more universal topics. Jorge Luis Borges took up this polemic debate in his “El escritor argentino y la tradición” in 1953, in which he plainly pushed back against the national discourse of Juan Perón’s presidency, claiming on behalf of all Latin Americans that “nuestro patrimonio es el universo” (310).

<sup>6</sup> Although the men worked in close chronological proximity, Valquiria Wey seems to be the only person that directly corroborates personal contact and friendship between the two men. We know that they both attended the *Columbianum* in Geneva in 1965, and as Wey related to Paulo Moreira, Guimarães Rosa and Rulfo enjoyed a long bus ride together from Guadalajara back to Mexico City after attending the conference of the *Comunidad Latinoamericana de Escritores* in 1967 (“Juan Rulfo y la literatura brasileña” 169). According to Wey and two other witnesses, the ride inspired not only “mutual appreciation, on both personal and literary levels”, but also a significant friendship (Moreira, *Literary and Cultural Relations* 95). However, the most detailed information about the authors’ friendship was revealed by Davi Arrigucci Júnior, a tenured professor of literary theory at the Universidade de São Paulo, during a 2004 interview. He stated the following:

Primeiro, uma proximidade extraordinária entre a novidade de Rulfo e a novidade de Guimarães Rosa: os dois grandes escritores foram amigos e têm afinidades secretas mais amplas do que se imaginaria à primeira vista. Eles foram de fato grandes amigos e têm pontos de contato em pontos profundos, nem sempre óbvios; passaram decerto bons momentos de amistosa convivência no México, como soube por Valquiria Wey, querida amiga minha e grande conhecedora de ambos, que pôde vê-los juntos, em casa de seu pai, Walter Wey, na capital mexicana. (Costa and Alcaraz 134)

Such a strong point of contact elucidates possible connections between the two men’s creative projects. Although it does not appear that they would have influenced each other’s *obras primas* due to the timing of their meetings, it is interesting to note that among four unpublished stories found in Rosa’s manuscripts after his death in 1969, there was one story—the only story he had ever set outside the context of the *sertão mineiro*—that was named “Páramo” (Moreira, *Literary and Cultural Relations* 86). This could imply Rulfo’s influence on Rosa’s writing post-1965, as does Rulfo’s inclusion of *Grande sertão: Veredas* among his favorite novels in a 1980 interview with Armando Ponce (61). It is important to explore such points of contact between Rulfo and Rosa because the two authors are

they neither embody traditional national literature, nor did they receive the international praise that others obtained in the editorial zenith of the 1960s. Sometimes both Rulfo and Guimarães Rosa are incorporated into this group of Boom authors *a posteriori* because their texts so clearly demonstrated the innovative narrative techniques that were later appropriated by Boom authors, such as fragmentation, ambiguity, and non-linear time.<sup>7</sup> Speaking of such stylistic similarities among pioneering authors of the mid-twentieth century, Luis Harss and Barbara Dohmann emphasize that “for each of these writers, without exception, language is a primary concern at all times” (31).<sup>8</sup> Although Guimarães Rosa was highly experimental with his language use, mixing colloquial Minas Gerais speech patterns with archaisms, neologisms, and terms from other languages, Rulfo took a starkly different approach. As Jean Franco notes, he opposed the neo-baroque style of contemporaries such as José Lezama Lima and Alejo Carpentier by combining simple, unadorned language with his poetic sensibility (348).<sup>9</sup> Despite their varied approaches, both Guimarães Rosa and Rulfo create “language that is at once intimate and universal” (Harss and Dohmann 31).

This universality, combined with regional themes, was one of the most significant factors in the later editorial success of Boom-era novelists and the continued development of Latin

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often categorized together as precursors to the Boom phenomenon, but scholarship is lacking close analyses of textual similarities.

<sup>7</sup> This is a stylistic rather than chronological categorization, however, and is not accepted among most scholars. For more information, see Randolph D. Pope, p. 232, and James Remington Krause, p. 113.

<sup>8</sup> They comment specifically on the linguistic focus of Guimarães Rosa, Rulfo, Carpentier, García Márquez, Vargas Llosa, Onetti, and Fuentes.

<sup>9</sup> Jean Franco calls Rulfo “a writer of unusual brevity and economy” because of “his stories with their short sentences, their deliberate shying away from emotionally-loaded words, their concentration on behavior rather than states of consciousness” (348). As Harss and Dohmann add, “For him, the rhythm of speech is that of life itself ... He has always been against the tendency toward the baroque in Latin-American literature” (271). In a comparison of both authors, Paulo Moreira references their common “conscientious linguistic labor” and “poetic language of mythical tones.” He emphasizes the varied effects of their methods, however, positing that “the Guimarães Rosa text gives the impression of being the result of a slow process of accumulation while [*sic*] Rulfo text gives the opposite impression, that of resulting from a process of subtraction in which only the essential is left” (*Literary and Cultural Relations* 89).

American fiction.<sup>10</sup> Alberto Vital argues, for example, that “Rulfo fue una síntesis de ambas [tendencias]: el contenido era nacional; la estructura narrativa, profundamente innovadora. Eso permitiría a escritores más jóvenes, como Fernando del Paso y Carlos Fuentes, ocuparse de asuntos mexicanos sin sentir la presión de que tales temas eran ya caducos” (135).<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Guimarães Rosa successfully found and mediated “the point of confluence of the mythical and personal, the social and the subjective, the historical and the metaphysical” (Harss and Dohmann 23). Although the dichotomy between regional and cosmopolitan novels had previously “denoted differences of mentality” (regional novels were perceived as traditional and simple, and the cosmopolitan novel as more innovative and cerebral), it is apparent that, as the Boom-era approached, it became an increasingly superficial distinction that pointed only to geographical preference (23). Eduardo F. Coutinho, Paulo Moreira, and Caroline LeFeber Schneider also rebut this “perceived contradiction” between narrative foci, although the debate continues among scholars even today (Schneider 32).<sup>12</sup> As Mariano Siskind explains,

*The tension between universalism and particularism is never resolved. On the contrary, the incommensurability between the cosmopolitan desire for a universal belonging and the self-representation of the marginal particularity of Latin American culture reinforces and reproduces its tension throughout the twentieth century and even defines the split at the center of Latin American cultural and aesthetic debates today. (120, my emphasis)*

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<sup>10</sup> See Donald L. Shaw, pp. 363–364, for a more in-depth discussion.

<sup>11</sup> Vital positions Rulfian narrative as a solution to the “intensa disputa en torno al futuro de la literatura mexicana” in which “los cosmopolitas y los nacionalistas no tenían en apariencia punto de conciliación” (135).

<sup>12</sup> Coutinho also notes this “enfraquecimento da velha dicotomia entre rural e urbano, o ainda regional e universal” during the 1950s (65). Moreira discusses his opinion on the matter quite extensively in *Modernismo localista das Américas*, in which he prefers to call both Rosian and Rulfian texts examples of “modernismo localista” because “a estética modernista e o localismo rural se fertilizarem mutuamente na extraordinária qualidade das obras de Faulkner, Guimarães Rosa e Rulfo” (35).

In Guimarães Rosa's and Rulfo's novels, this tension is manifested through the extensive incorporation of the symbol of the cross, which is ancient and *universal*, but also deeply imbued with *particular* cultural and religious meaning. It thereby reflects this universalism and particularism referenced by Siskind above and is key to my analysis.

### **The Universal Symbol of the Cross**

It is crucial to first explain the theoretical conception of the cross, with its four branches and the quadrants they create. The symbol of the cross, although now strongly associated with the Christian tradition, is a universal symbol that has been in use for millennia. For example, the cross appears in prehistoric petroglyphs found in European caves, as astrologic indicators in ancient Aztec temples, representations of "life" in Egyptian hieroglyphs from 3000 BCE or earlier, the "four winds" in Native American oral tradition, and as symbols of prosperity in Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism. Seemingly since the beginning of time, the cross has presented itself as a significant element of both Eastern and Western traditions, both religious and secular. For the purposes of the analysis of *Pedro Páramo*, we will envision the cross as a three-dimensional figure as posited by René Guénon in *The Symbolism of the Cross*. Two horizontal axes, which form their own two-dimensional cross, form a sort of earthly crossroads whose arms symbolize the four cardinal directions spanning out from the center of the earth. This central site is depicted by the Garden of Eden in Christian theology. For Guénon, as well as most other religious scholars, the single vertical axis represents ascension to heavenly realms, a connection to God, an experience with the divine. In *The Sacred and the Profane*, Mircea Eliade

also associates the vertical axis with a descent to infernal realms and contact with the Devil, consistent with the Mayan *axis mundi*, or world axis.<sup>13</sup>

In a schema more appropriate for the analysis of *Grande sertão: Veredas*, Herbert Whone calls the symbol of the cross an “archetypal image of all duality, conflict” (vi). In reference to Jesus Christ, the duality of the symbol is quite clear because it represents both his Crucifixion and Resurrection. Thus “the actual point of crossing, that is the crossing of the force of time and eternity, is one of anguish, and yet of potential enlightenment” (Whone 15). In this same way, although the upright cross is a religious symbol that shows devotion to God, a cross in the horizontal plane (a crossroad) is a traditional place where the Devil can be summoned, which serves as a significant theme in *Grande sertão: Veredas*. In this case, not only does the cross represent both death and life, but it also represents “anguish” and “enlightenment,” two proverbial sides of a coin that can be represented through the use of the dividing axis of either the vertical or horizontal plane, which create two equal halves. To highlight the way in which this motif influences the narrative structure of both novels, I analyze the texts as literal crossroads, written to reflect an intentional point of division.

### **Narrative Structure: An Example of Innovative Technique**

Not only do the settings of the novels mark this theme of crossing and duality, but the narrative structures that Rulfo and Guimarães Rosa employ are markedly cruciform. Each author divides his novel into two halves, placing at the center a point of crossing, a point of revelation

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<sup>13</sup> The earth-heaven-hell connection as made by the *axis mundi* is explained as follows: “Where the break-through from plane to plane has been effected by a hierophany, there too an opening has been made, either upward (the divine world) or downward (the underworld, the world of the dead). The three cosmic levels—earth, heaven, underworld—have been put in communication. As we just saw, this communication is sometimes expressed through the image of a universal pillar, *axis mundi*, which at once connects and supports heaven and earth and whose base is fixed in the world below (the infernal regions)” (Eliade 36–37).

where both anguish and enlightenment are possible. Before explaining the structure of each novel in full, brief summaries are provided here for context.

*Grande sertão: Veredas* is a monologue told from the perspective of Riobaldo, a moderately educated, middle-class *sertanejo* who adopts the adventurous life of a *jagunço*, or hired gunman, in the Brazilian *sertão* of Minas Gerais. Although his dislike for the lifestyle clashes with the romanticized image of *jagunços* that he entertained as a child, the mysterious Reinaldo (also known as the Menino or Diadorim) captivates his interest. Riobaldo joins Diadorim's band, falls in love with him, and resolves to help take revenge on Hermógenes, who has killed Diadorim's father, Joca Ramiro. Seemingly unable to defeat Hermógenes through common warfare, however, Riobaldo decides he must make a pact with the Devil to triumph. From the beginning to the end of the novel, Riobaldo's worry is centered on this diabolical pact—whether it occurred and what it implicates for his spirituality if it did. Not only is his relationship with God and the Devil ambiguous as a result of his actions, but his relationship with Diadorim suffers because of his inability to admit his romantic impulses to himself. Riobaldo only recognizes the true love he feels for Diadorim when it is revealed—in a major plot twist—that she is truly a woman.

At the halfway point of Guimarães Rosa's *Grande sertão: Veredas*, Riobaldo indicates that his story, although jumbled, has been told to completion. The crux is signaled by the following commentary by Riobaldo to his interlocutor: “Ah, meu senhor, mas o que eu *acho é que o senhor já sabe mesmo tudo*—que tudo lhe fiei. *Aqui eu podia pôr ponto...O senhor pense, o senhor ache. O senhor ponha enredo*” (308–9, my emphasis). At this moment, we see that it is up to the reader to untangle the various narrative threads and weave them into a cohesive story. Diadorim's climactic death (and the subsequent revelation of her identity as a woman) that will

take place near the end of the novel has already been clearly delineated.<sup>14</sup> However, Guimarães Rosa refrains from communicating it directly, using this halfway point to tease his reader into returning to the first half of the novel for answers to unresolved questions. Much like in *Pedro Páramo*, as Paul Dixon indicates, “The perception of chiasmus requires the mind to go in opposing directions. The reader proceeds without hesitation to the crux, but then he must read forwards and backwards at the same time” (86). With this in mind, it is important to note that an infinity symbol is used to mark the end of the novel—this never-ending, figure-eight symbol not only represents this point of crossing, but also a constant “return to the point of origin,” a review of the past (Dixon 86).

In *Pedro Páramo*, there is a distinct shift in narrators between the two halves, which indicates a marked separation. According to José C. González Boixo, Juan Preciado serves as the first-person narrator of the first half, while the second part is dominated by a third-person narrator who tells the story of Pedro Páramo and those who cross paths with him during his life (“Introducción” 19).<sup>15</sup> At the beginning of the novel, Juan Preciado’s mother dies and asks him to undertake a journey to Comala to find his father, Pedro Páramo. When he arrives, however, he discovers that Pedro Páramo is dead, much like several of the inhabitants Juan meets as spirits. They seem unable to move on, caught in a purgatory that denies them salvation. When Juan stays with Donis and his sister at their home, which sits at a crossroads, he seems to cross over into

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<sup>14</sup> Relatively early in the novel—about a third of the way in—Riobaldo reveals much about Diadorim’s death and identity, but the significance of this brief paragraph is easily drowned out by the quantity of meandering storylines and tangents that surround it. In retrospect, however, Riobaldo’s explanation seems quite direct: “Me lembro, me lembro dele nessa hora, nesse dia, tão remarcado. Como foi que não tive um pressentimento? O senhor mesmo, o senhor pode imaginar de ver um corpo claro e virgem da moça, morto à mão, esfaqueado, tinto todo de seu sangue, e os lábios da boca descorados no branquiço, os olhos dum terminado estilo meio abertos meio fechados? E essa moça de quem o senhor gostou, que era um destino e uma surda esperança na sua vida?! Ah, Diadorim...” (191).

<sup>15</sup> González Boixo affirms that “Los frags. 36 y 38 son una especie de puente, de intermediario, entre las dos partes de la novela: Juan Preciado termina su narración y Dorotea le habla de sí misma, compensando narrativamente su silencio hasta este momento...” (“Introducción” 20).

their realm. He wakes up in the middle of the night and wanders through the streets, eventually succumbing to “los murmullos,” which he later says suffocated him, causing his death (117).<sup>16</sup> Once Juan Preciado completes the narration of his own story, his presence recedes into the background, and we learn more about Pedro’s life, from his childhood to death, through the perspectives of various townspeople. Pedro has children with several of Comala’s women, and when one dies in childbirth, he is obligated to raise his son Miguel. Miguel murders Padre Rentería’s brother and rapes his niece, but Rentería still forgives him through official church channels at Pedro’s request. Despite finding salvation for his son, Pedro is unable to deliver his love, Susana, from her insanity. At her death, Pedro crosses his arms in an act of extreme defiance that ends up denying economic and spiritual salvation to the rest of Comala’s inhabitants.

Due to the novel’s chiasmic structure between Juan Preciado’s and Pedro Páramo’s stories, each half reflects the other in content through what Paul Dixon calls “dual motifs” (82).<sup>17</sup> Consequently, Dixon posits that “the point of division for the pattern is the moment at which Juan Preciado becomes conscious of his death—the same point generally acknowledged by critics as a structural halfway mark for the novel” (Dixon 85). This revelation is not only Juan’s however—it is also the reader’s. This is the moment when we discover that Juan Preciado has been narrating his story for Dorotea, with whom he shares his grave in Comala, since the very beginning. Although the reader feels anguish at the failure of Juan’s quest to meet his father and “*exigirle lo suyo*” he or she also feels a sense of enlightenment and increased knowledge about

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<sup>16</sup> Juan Preciado’s moment of death remains a point of debate for scholars. While the narrative seems to indicate that Dorotea finds him dead in the plaza (117), some scholars argue that he may be dead from the beginning of the narrative, before he embarks on his journey to Comala.

<sup>17</sup> See Dixon, pages 82–86, for a more detailed explanation of the chiasmic structure, including examples of repeated motifs.

Comala and its phantasmagorical nature upon learning that Juan has also succumbed to its purgatorial depths.

### **Mexico: Miscegenation and Religious Syncretism**

Religious themes as depicted through the symbolism of crosses and crossroads reflect the religious syncretism present in both Mexico and Brazil and reveal one of the transculturation techniques used by both authors to project their writing onto the international stage. For example, Ángel Rama explains that in the decades leading up to the Boom,

El mito (Asturias), el arquetipo (Carpentier), aparecieron como categorías válidas para interpretar los rasgos de la América Latina en una mezcla *sui genesis* con esquemas sociológicos, pero aun la muy franca y decidida apelación a las creencias populares supervivientes en las comunidades indígenas o africanas de América que esos autores hicieron no escondía la procedencia la fundamentación intelectual y del sistema interpretativo que se aplicaba. (60)

This religious syncretism stems from the colonization of Mexico and Brazil in the 16th century, evangelization of indigenous peoples and slaves, and the miscegenation that followed.<sup>18</sup>

Juan Preciado's yearning to be recognized by a father figure, for example, is deeply rooted in the collective history of Mexico and its colonial past. Conquistador Hernán Cortés is often positioned as the father of the Mexican mestizo race, the intersection between the Peninsular Spaniard and the Nahua tribe. He serves as yet another transitional figure that allows the miscegenation that characterizes Mexico as a land of mestizos. As Randolph D. Pope explains, "the racial and existential condition of Mexicans has been defined by the rape of native

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<sup>18</sup> Hernán Cortés conquered Tenochtitlán on August 13, 1521, thereby marking the end of the Aztec empire. Pedro Álvares Cabral claimed Brazil as Portuguese territory in the year 1500.

Mexican women (symbolized by La Malinche, Cortés's Indian mistress) by Spanish conquerors and their latter-day surrogates in the landed oligarchy" (293). In line with Pope, Octavio Paz calls the Mexican the embodiment of both the violator and the violated due to the violence committed, sexual and otherwise, during the Conquista (33). Paz explains that "la Chingada...ante todo, es la Madre. No una Madre de carne y hueso, sino una figura mítica" that upholds Mexican archetypes of the primordial Mother, and by extensión, Father (31). This Mexican myth of identity illustrates that *la Chingada* and her violator—the colonial Adam and Eve, if you will—are responsible for the genesis of the Mexican race.<sup>19</sup> Their firstborn, Martín Cortés, is traditionally positioned as the mestizo who marked the beginning of miscegenation, although we know that other mestizos (such as Gonzalo Guerrero's Spanish-Mayan children) were born before Cortés ever arrived.<sup>20</sup> In Comala, Pedro Páramo fills the same role as progenitor of a host of children. As a result, *Pedro Páramo* is easily read as "a variant of the Mexican myth of the illegitimate child, born of rape, eternally in the quest of his unknown father" (Harss and Dohmann 265). After all, Juan Preciado's purpose is immediately defined in the first line. "Vine a Comala," he declares, "porque me dijeron que acá vivía mi padre, un tal Pedro Páramo" (65). The disdain Juan feels toward his father is evident by the distance he creates using the phrase "un tal Pedro Páramo," and it mirrors the disgust with which Mexicans regard Cortés (65). Likewise, Juan's mother, Dolores, serves as a representation of *la Chingada*. Like La Malinche, she not only suffers *los dolores* of childbirth, but also the emotional pain of her abandonment by Pedro, who used their marriage solely for his own economic gain.

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<sup>19</sup> See *Cortés y la Malinche* (1926) by Mexican muralist José Clemente Orozco as evidence of such allusions to Adam and Eve in the Mexican tradition.

<sup>20</sup> See Chapter XXIX of Bernal Díaz del Castillo's *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* (written in 1576, but published in 1632). Guerrero was the victim of shipwreck in 1511, which led him to be captured by Mayans. He fully assimilated into their culture and was named a cacique among them. By the time Cortés arrived on American soil in 1519, Guerrero had already married a Mayan woman and had three of her children.

Cortés himself is also a symbol of both religious syncretism and racial mixing because he serves as an intersecting point between two traditions. Although Rulfo refrains from overt racial commentary in *Pedro Páramo*, miscegenation remains a subjacent element of Mexican identity, which he seems to affirm in his own commentaries on the novel. As Rulfo himself declares of his characters in *Pedro Páramo*, “No, no hay indios, sólo una vez, cuando bajan de Apango. Los demás son mestizos todos” (González Boixo, “Aclaraciones” 250). Although Jean Meyer denies the presence of a rich indigenous tradition in Jalisco (156), Alberto Vital argues that the novel’s preliminary title, *Una estrella junta a la luna*,<sup>21</sup> may indicate quite the contrary. He affirms the following:

Gracias a ese primer título es válida la hipótesis de que el núcleo originario de la novela tal vez sea el mito indígena de la presencia de los muertos entre los vivos, amparado por la figura de Xótotl y confirmado y revitalizado por la riquísima tradición oral sobre difuntos y aparecidos en el centro y el occidente de México. (120)

Vital also goes on to discuss the influence of Nahuatl in the toponymy of Jalisco, further evidencing the influence of indigenous culture in the region. Consequently, although there are no overt indigenous themes in the novel, it is apparent that the inheritance of indigenous tradition remains strong in Mexico. In fact, the near heterogeneity of the mestizo population in the novel may even point to a representation of Mexican identity as necessarily and inherently mixed, both racially and culturally.

The religious syncretism inherent in Rulfo’s novel may be subtle, but it is ever present as an important aspect of Mexican identity that derives from the Pre-Colombian era and the

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<sup>21</sup> For a more comprehensive explanation of the possible connection between this preliminary title and the Aztec god, Quetzalcoatl, see Víctor Jiménez’s “Una estrella para la muerte y la vida.”

Conquest. As Octavio Paz notes in his *El laberinto de la soledad*, the ancient Aztec tradition of religious palimpsest facilitated the Conquest—the Aztecs were also a conquering people who sacrificed their enemies in temples, temples which were built directly on top of previous religious sites. Similarly, “el catolicismo...es una religión superpuesta a un fondo religioso original y siempre viviente” (38). Hernán Cortés is also a symbol of religious syncretism because his identity is also linked to that of the Aztec god Quetzalcóatl, for whom he was mistaken upon his arrival to Moctezuma’s people. Just as the Aztecs took Cortés’s arrival as a fulfillment of their own prophecies of a white god returning to the earth (which noticeably points to a type of syncretism with the Christ figure and his Second Coming) they accepted evangelization fairly quickly. The indigenous peoples were accustomed to adapting their beliefs (Aztecs adopted some Mayan gods, for example), and so they converted to Catholicism without ever fully leaving behind their pagan traditions, simply absorbing Catholic deities and saints into their religious sphere. As a result of such religious syncretism, we see in *Pedro Páramo* that “las supersticiones se entremezclan con la doctrina oficial” (González Boixo, “Introducción” 35). For example, González Boixo demonstrates that the Aztec perspective lives on in the novel because “la tesis que Rulfo mantiene es que la salvación del hombre no puede ser individual, sino a través de la comunidad” (“Introducción” 32).<sup>22</sup> Likewise, Rulfo successfully intertwines Christian and indigenous religious myths in an attempt to balance national Mexican identity with universal appeal.

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<sup>22</sup> Ritualized human sacrifices to Huitzilopochtli, for example, were performed for the benefit of the entire community. In part, their purpose was to ensure the continued rising and setting of the sun.

## The Cross and the Mythic Mexican Creation Story

Firstly, we see Rulfian references to the Mayan creation story in the *Popol Vuh*, wherein gods called “Framer” and “Shaper” attempt to form men out of several materials, including clay. In this tradition, the formation of men out of clay is a failed attempt because the men do not hold their shape and crumble easily, just like Donis’s sister seems to in her home.<sup>23</sup> The first reference to the *Popol Vuh* appears when Donis’s sister claims “por dentro estoy hecha un mar de lodo,” and the correlation is fully developed when Juan refers to her as “aquella mujer hecha de tierra, envuelto en costras de tierra, se desbarataba como si estuviera derritiéndose en un charco de lodo” (111, 116). Drawing upon the same creation story, Miguel Rocha Vivas conceives the entire town of Comala as an *axis mundi*, an “espacio privilegiado,” because of its linguistic relation with the “el comal...caldero y vasija en donde se cuece ‘la leche esencial’ del maíz transformado en comida, en palabra—y en carne si pensamos en el origen de la humanidad” (288).

It is significant that these references to the genesis of man take place at a crossroad, which is reflected in the symbol of the cross as the World Axis or *axis mundi*, as Allen J. Christenson explains:

In Maya cosmology, the world tree represents the vertical axis, or *axis mundi*, which stands at the center of all things and passes through each of the three major layers of existence—underworld, earth’s surface, and sky. In addition to serving as the vertical

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<sup>23</sup> See the original account of the “The Creation of the Mud Person”: “Then was the framing, the making of it. Of earth and mud was its flesh composed. But they saw that it was still not good. It merely came undone and crumbled. It merely became sodden and mushy. It merely fell apart and dissolved. Its head was not set apart properly. Its face could only look in one direction. Its face was hidden. Neither could it look about. At first it spoke, but without knowledge. Straightaway it would merely dissolve in water, for it was not strong.” (*Popol Vuh*. Translated by Allen J. Christenson, Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, Dirección General de Publicaciones, 2012, p. 67)

pivot point of the cosmos, the world tree also oriented the horizontal plane of the world by extending its branches outward toward the cardinal directions. (105)

The equivalent cosmic center in the Christian tradition is the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve's creation story takes place. Due to its position at the center of the cross, the Garden of Eden is a place of ambiguity. Both the Serpent and God speak directly to Adam and Eve there, which posits the Garden as a place of coexistence between Hell, Earth, and Heaven, consistent with the role of an *axis mundi*. According to the Book of Genesis, four rivers or paths flow from this center: the Hiddekel (Tigris), the Gihon, the Pison, and the Euphrates.<sup>24</sup> These rivers correspond to the four cardinal directions, or the two crossing horizontal axes of the three-dimensional cross.

In *Pedro Páramo*, the Christian myth of Adam and Eve—brother and sister, and yet man and wife—is reflected in the figures of Donis and his sister, whose allegorical quality is enhanced by the sister's affirmation of "aquí he estado sempiternamente" (110). Before his death, Juan Preciado visits Donis and his sister, who live at a literal crossroads that is representative of this cosmic center known as the Garden of Eden. In a maddeningly ambiguous description of where different paths lead from the origin of the house, the sister tells Juan the following:

Hay multitud de caminos. Hay uno que va para Contla; otro que viene de allá. Otro más que enfila derecho a la sierra. Ese que se mira desde aquí, que no sé para dónde irá—y me señaló con sus dedos el hueco del tejado, allí donde el techo estaba roto—. Este otro de por acá, que para por la Media Luna. Y hay otro más que atraviesa toda la tierra y es el que va más lejos. (110)

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<sup>24</sup> See Genesis 2:10–14.

Such a description is consistent with Guénon's conception of the three-dimensional cross, which represents the six directions of space with God (and as I posit, the Devil) at the center (22). This positions the house as the literal center of the Earth, where God first placed the "Tree of Life" planted in the midst of the Terrestrial Paradise" (Guénon 54). This vertical axis of the tree, then, should serve as a more spiritual organizer of space, indicating a gaze toward heaven in its branches or toward the depths of hell as its roots extend downward. As Steven Boldy claims, "the archetypal dimension of these scenes...is shown by his [Rulfo's] mention of the vertical pole an *axis mundi* which rises from the house and which is patently derived from symbolic and anthropological thinkers" (121). The fact that Donis's sister indicates that the path upward through the hole in her roof has an unknown destination is significant. It highlights the impossibility of the people of Comala finding salvation—they seem to be cut off completely from heavenly influences. This condemnation is also reflected by the priest's rejection of the wishes of Donis and his sister. The two beg Padre Rentería to marry them and bless their incestuous relationship; when he refuses, they lament that "Ninguno de los que todavía vivimos está en gracia de Dios. Nadie podrá alzar sus ojos al Cielo sin sentirlos sucios de vergüenza" (111).

As the spiritual leader of Comala, Rentería should facilitate the connection between Earth and Heaven—but instead, it is he who severs it, leaving only the path to Hell open. Like many other townspeople, Dorotea hears from Padre Rentería that she will never get to Heaven. She perceives this as a spiritual door that is closed to her and tells Juan that "la [puerta] que queda abierta es no más la del Infierno" (124). Ironically, the only one who Padre Rentería pardons spiritually is Miguel Páramo, who has terrorized the town and raped Rentería's niece. Because Pedro Páramo promises a monetary reward in return for pardoning his son, Rentería consents,

although uneasily. Salvation is positioned as something that can be bought by economic and social capital, which leaves the rest of the town's inhabitants unable to attain such spiritual heights.

The vertical axis in Donis's home should serve as a sort of *axis mundi* that allows Juan Preciado to contact both the divine and infernal realms, but we must remember that Comala, once an earthly paradise as described by Juan's mother, Dolores, is now fallen, as echoed by the physical state of the *techo caído*.<sup>25</sup> This motif is also reflected by the falling stars that seem to plague Padre Rentería, perhaps as symbols of his own guilt or hubris (see, for example, pp. 91–92). Octavio Paz also makes a connection to a neglected paradise in *Corriente alterna*, calling Pedro Páramo “el fundador, la piedra, el origen, el padre, el guardián y señor del Paraíso” (18). When he crosses his arms at the death of his beloved Susana, he allows his “antiguo jardín” to dry up, ultimately becoming a place of “sed y sequía, cuchicheo de sombras y eterna incomunicación” (18). As Guénon emphasizes, the divine center at the crossroads “has become inaccessible to fallen man, who has lost the ‘sense of eternity’” (56). Because of the loss of divine communication, a sort of impotence invades all of Comala; it seems that “in Juan Rulfo's world, people do not make choices; their paths are laid out for them” (Franco 348).

### **The Modern Hero and the Juan Preciado's Mythic Descent**

As the distinction between regional and cosmopolitan novels wanes in the 1950s, we begin to witness the rise of a modern hero who stands in opposition to the rather two-dimensional heroes found in ancient epics. This modern hero is a figure that stands out as both regional and “complexo, multidimensional” and encompasses “certas oposições” that allow

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<sup>25</sup> For more information on Comala as a fallen paradise, see Fajardo Valenzuela's “*Pedro Páramo* o la inmortalidad del espacio.”

ambiguity to thrive in their stories, allowing more reader participation (Coutinho 64). Juan Preciado and Riobaldo are such heroes. They embark on heroic journeys to complete their respective missions—Juan to find his father and “*exigirle lo suyo*” and Riobaldo to avenge the death of Joca Ramiro, his chief, who has been killed by the villainous Hermógenes. Although Hellenic myths and epic themes, including references to Greek and Roman mythology and Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, have been widely discussed in the extant scholarship, it is apparent that both Rulfo and Guimarães Rosa also draw upon indigenous and Christian myths, including creation stories, in order to project their work onto the world stage.

García-Peña’s analysis of *Pedro Páramo*, for example, focuses on the Hellenic god of the crossroads, Hermes, whom she describes as a “dios alado y transitivo, volátil, ambiguo, guardián de las puertas que cierran y abren” (137).<sup>26</sup> Hermes “conduce las almas hacia el Hades,” and is therefore associated with the dead—his correspondence with Abundio, who guides Juan in his mythic descent to Comala, cannot be denied, just as we would be remiss to overlook a similar correspondence with Virgil, Dante’s guide to hell in his *Divine Comedy* (138). Their first meeting, which also indicates the first reference to the symbol of the crossroad, is narrated in the following manner: “Me había topado con él en Los Encuentros, *donde se cruzaban varios caminos*. Me estuve allí esperando, hasta que al fin apareció este hombre...” (67, my emphasis). They then descend to Comala, a town that Abundio describes as “sobre las brasas de la tierra, en la mera boca del Infierno” (67). The repeated indications of downward movement and increasing heat—until they reach “el puro calor sin aire”—make the descent towards hell unmistakable (67).

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<sup>26</sup> Utéza also briefly mentions Hermes in the context of Riobaldo’s encounter with the Menino at the Porto Rio-de-Janeiro (128).

Joseph Campbell discusses the classic descent as part of the hero's journey, explaining the following: "The hero adventures out of the land we know into darkness; there he accomplishes his adventure, or again is simply lost to us, imprisoned, or in danger; and his return is described as a coming back out of that yonder zone" (217). In Juan's case, he descends into Comala only to die there and become imprisoned by spiritual damnation. Campbell's "life-affirming threshold" (218) is crossed (in a perpendicular motion to the threshold, consistent with a vertical or spiritual ascension) upon returning from the hero's journey, but this never happens in *Pedro Páramo* because Juan is destined to fail. Hayes argues that Rulfo's "epic references demean" and "undercut" the success of Juan Preciado's mission. He calls the Rulfian epic a "foil which at once recalls ancient tales of struggle and glory, and tacitly compares them to the unredeemable moral poverty and impotence of the inhabitants" of Comala (282).<sup>27</sup> As a result of such impediments, it is clear that Juan Preciado's path back to the land of the living and/or heaven is completely truncated. This is consistent with our analysis of the cross in the novel, which we see as broken, a reflection of the fallen state of man. The conduit to heaven is no longer open for Juan.

### **Brazil: A History of Miscegenation and Religious Syncretism**

In contrast to the subtler traces of religious syncretism in Rulfo's Jalisco, Luis Gusmán observes a "sincretismo bárbaro" between Christian, indigenous, and African traditions in Brazil (28). This is the consequence of a history of Jesuit evangelism that encouraged syncretism and the more widespread acceptance of racial mixing between white, Portuguese colonizers and both indigenous and African slaves. Centuries later, Brazilian mestizos account for a sizable sector of

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<sup>27</sup> Donald L. Shaw notes "the frustration of the mythic quest" as a "recurrent theme" in Boom authors such as Rulfo, Onetti, Donoso, García Márquez, Fuentes, and Asturias (370).

the population, but Brazil also has the largest population of mulattos of any country in Latin America. Such a tradition of miscegenation has likewise affected the quite broad cultural and religious syncretism in the country. As Faustino Teixeira notes of religious traditions in Brazil,

A plasticidade dos modos de ser católico no Brasil é expressão de uma genuinidade brasileira, caracterizada pela grande ampliação das possibilidades de comunicação com o sagrado ou com o “outro mundo”. O que para o protestante tradicional ou católico romanizado seria expressão de pernicioso sincretismo ou superstição, para boa parte dos fiéis significa um modo de alargar as “possibilidades de proteção” [9]. (17)

Teixeira follows this observation with a telling quote from *Grande sertão: Veredas*, which illustrates Riobaldo’s enthusiasm for such religious mixing: “Muita religião, seu moço! Eu cá, não perco ocasião de religião. Aproveito de todas. Bebo água de todo rio... Uma só, para mim é pouca, talvez não me chegue...Tudo me quieta, me suspende. Qualquer sombrinha me refresca” (16, my emphasis). These numerous and intertwined religious themes are of utmost importance because Guimarães Rosa’s novel, as John Gledson states, is “primarily spiritual” and seeks to philosophize about the oft-ambiguous relationship between God and the Devil, which becomes increasingly ambiguous as religious traditions are superimposed upon one another (198). This focus on religion could also be conceived as regional, especially since religious and superstitious traditions tend to be more deeply rooted in rural areas; speaking specifically of the *sertanejos* of Minas Gerais, Luis Gusmán affirms that “*las religiones se graban...en el espíritu y en la carne*” (28, my emphasis).

The Jesuits, led by Manuel da Nóbrega, arrived in Brazil in 1549, and their evangelization efforts were decisive in shaping the concept of God and the Devil in the Brazilian imaginary. The Jesuits’ limited understanding of the religious beliefs of the Tupi people, the

most populous tribe that occupied the coasts of Brazil during Portuguese colonization, led to their arbitrary assignation of Tupã to the role of God and Jurupari to the role of Devil. As Luís da Câmara Cascudo emphasizes, this was a severely flawed correspondence because Jurupari was the most popular of all the indigenous gods, common among all tribes, and, like Jesus Christ, was “filho e embaixador do Sol, nascido de mulher sem contato masculino” (42).<sup>28</sup> Instead of being venerated as he should have been, however, he was grouped with the “deuses mais bárbaros, hediondos e depravados,” while Tupã was worshipped and prayed to in all religious ceremonies (Cascudo 51–52). Although this could be perceived as a deliberate attempt to demonize a popular religious deity, it would have been impractical for the Jesuits to make conversion more difficult for the Tupi, who needed to overcome other linguistic and cultural barriers.

The scope of religious syncretism in Brazil is further evidenced by a similar adoption of the African god Exú as a demonic figure in the Brazilian tradition (Gusmán 28). Exú’s connection to Riobaldo’s pact with the devil is elucidated by his role in native African religions; he is known as the king of the crossroads and a mediator of supernatural powers, consistent with Riobaldo’s conception of him and with the Hellenic myth of Hermes (Bião 30). As a result of these misguided assignations of religious deities to the realms of good and evil, it may not surprise us to learn that “naquele tempo a crença no poder do espírito maligno era tão grande, que Satanás representava na vida humana um papel quase tão importante como o do próprio Deus [escrevia Couto de Magalhães]” (Cascudo 52).

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<sup>28</sup> An association between Jesus and the sun is also noted by Octavio Paz in his *El laberinto de la soledad*. He states that according to indigenous myths, “Antes del nacimiento de Cristo, el sol—ojo de Dios—no calienta...En Teotihuacán los dioses también se enfrentan al problema del astro-fuente-de-vida. Y sólo el sacrificio de Quetzalcóatl pone en movimiento al sol y salva al mundo del incendio sagrado” (45).

This equal reverence for both God and the Devil seems particularly relevant when we reflect on Riobaldo's constant questioning of whether he made a pact with the Devil at Veredas-Mortas or not. Either he received power from the Devil to assume the role of *chefe*, cross the uncrossable Liso do Susurrão, and defeat his enemies, or God has been blessing him all along to accomplish these and other difficult tasks. Rather than see God on higher footing than the Devil, however, he conceives of them as equals, as two weighted halves of a cross. This duality is reflected in the crossroad itself, as evidenced in its description: "*As veredas eram duas, uma perto da outra...Elas tinham um nome conjunto—que eram as Veredas-Mortas. No meio do cerrado, ah, no meio do cerrado, para a gente dividir de lá ir, por uma ou por outra, se via uma encruzilhada*" (401, my emphasis). The "Veredas-Mortas" too is a paradox because *veredas* are typically alive in the sense that they are changing, flowing, leading beings to move along their paths. This fact becomes even more apparent when Riobaldo discovers that their true name is the Veredas-Altas, even though he has gone "muito para baixo" to discover them (97). As a result, the Veredas-Mortas serves as a metaphor for the binary opposition as a whole—it represents both God and the Devil, ascent and descent. Not only does this duality create ambiguity in Riobaldo's interpretation of his pact, but he also often questions his own loyalty to God, anxiously defending himself as he declares, "Saiba o senhor o que foi que fiz! Que fiz o sinal-da-cruz, em respeito. E isso era de pactário? Era de filho do demo? Tanto que não; renegó! E mesmo me alembro...que eu estava crente, forte, que, do demo...Mas com o arrojo de Deus eu queria estar; eu não estava?!" (553). This ambiguity is inherent in his setting as well—Riobaldo tells his interlocutor that the *sertão* is a place where "tudo é e não é..." (11).

### Riobaldo's Mythic Descent and the Crossroad as Crosscurrent

Riobaldo Tatarana recounts what Emir Rodríguez Monegal calls one of the most impressive “interminables monólogos épico-líricos de los narradores orales del interior del Brasil,” and by so doing, marks the Brazilian imaginary with his expedition through the *sertão* (54). Much like Juan Preciado's heroic journey, Riobaldo's “odisea” also begins at a crossroad: the Porto Rio-de-Janeiro (Vargas Llosa 107). Utéza calls this location a “passagem por excelência” because it is the point where the São Francisco meets a weak crosscurrent, or “fraco caudal” (128). As one of many “encruzilhadas fluviais” that Riobaldo encounters on his journey, it is important to note the symbolism of the perpendicular currents as depicted by the symbol of the cross (Utéza 136).<sup>29</sup> Consistent with Guénon's conception of the dual nature of the cross, the vertical line, as represented by the powerful São Francisco and the courageous Diadorim, composes the active element. The horizontal line, or the “fraco caudal,” is seen as representing the passive element, which serves as a metaphor for the fearful Riobaldo (34).<sup>30</sup> The Menino's dramatic entrance into his life fills him with a definitive yearning that would not be fulfilled until after his abandonment of Zé-Bebelo—as Alan Viggiano explains, “A partir daquele momento, em nenhuma emoção violenta, entrou para a jagunçagem” (23).

Bezerra de Meneses calls this first river crossing Riobaldo's “passagem absolutamente emblemática, travessia iniciática,” the beginning of his hero's journey (16).<sup>31</sup> His ultimate heroic

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<sup>29</sup> In another equally valid interpretation, Utéza uses the Oriental symbols of Yin and Yang to explain the dichotomy (136). Stephen Walden also argues that the Yin and Yang symbol, a concept derived from Chinese Taoism and Confucianism, is integral to understanding the conflicting themes of the novel (God and the Devil, good and evil, man and woman, fighting and peace, etc.) in his “*Grande sertão: Veredas: De dragão a brasilidade*.”

<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, we see an inversion of traditional gender roles in this episode because the vertical, active line is typically designated as masculine, while the horizontal, passive line is designated as feminine “by analogy with the human order” (Guénon 34).

<sup>31</sup> Utéza conceives of the crossing of the São Francisco as a spiritual journey in which the Menino and Riobaldo cross into a distinct realm, perform a ritual (the stabbing of another mestizo youth), and to return to the first bank of the “*mundo profano*” (129).

task is to avenge the murder of his chief, Joca Ramiro, committed by the *os judas*, which indicates a clear reference to Judas Iscariot's betrayal of Jesus. Riobaldo must confront a cruel, bloodthirsty fiend who has made a pact with the Devil: Hermógenes, whose name means "born of Hermes" in Greek. We can thereby position him as being "born at the crossroad" in his role of evil villain. Riobaldo sees no way to vanquish a man who has the Prince of Darkness on his side, so put himself on equal footing with his enemy, Riobaldo decides to "ir à meia-noite, na encruzilhada, esperar o Maligno—fechar o trato, fazer o pacto!" (410). Just as in *Pedro Páramo*, a classical, mythic descent to the underworld is reflected here, as Riobaldo travels downward to the crossroad. He describes his destination, saying, "mas muito para baixo, é um lugar. Tem uma encruzilhada. Estradas vão para as *Veredas Tortas*—veredas mortas" (97).

If we position Riobaldo's crossroad as an *axis mundi*, as we did for Juan Preciado, this mythic descent is underscored further. Riobaldo intends to contact the Devil in Hell, and he therefore appears to descend towards fiery depths, although he is unsure if his attempt is successful. After Diadorim's death, we see that the ambiguity of the crossroad continues. Riobaldo later finds out that the Veredas-Mortas are truly known as the Veredas-Altas, which disrupts the dialectic of up/down movement to create more ambiguity. This connotation of height could imply a connection with divinity rather than demons. Did Riobaldo descend towards the underworld or ascend in the direction of God? On the one hand, he appears to be able to ascend to greater heights when he meets his love and future wife, Otacília. As Riobaldo tells his interlocutor, "Otacília comecei a conhecer nas serras dos gerais, Buritis Altos...Fazenda Santa Catarina," and he quickly adds that "a Fazenda Santa Catarina era perto do céu" (188). Riobaldo further emphasizes that the correct, Godly path is upward when he remarks, "Qual é o caminho certo da gente? Nem para a frente nem para trás: só para cima" (94). Although Riobaldo is

endlessly plagued with ambiguities, it seems he can “escape his horizontal ambiguities by going upwards” and that this upward motion allows him to “transcend the life of impossible choices” (Dixon 149). He seems able to reach a higher plane than Juan Preciado, although the effects are not always lasting. On the other hand, he too associates Diadorim with the heavens, with birds, and with the stars in the sky—ultimately, he calls both of the two women in his life his “dois anjos-da-guarda” (188). Near end of book, following Diadorim’s death in the cross-shaped battle, Riobaldo seems to perceive a powerful shift in the vertical ordering of his world, stating that “o céu vem abaixando,” perhaps indicating that the true divine figure in his life has vanished (600).

### **Mapping the *Sertão* with God’s Hands**

As emblematic in Guimarães Rosa’s novel as the Amazon River is for Brazil as a nation, the São Francisco serves as the powerful vertical axis (as positioned within a two-dimensional place) that divides not only the entire *sertão mineiro* into two geographical spaces, but also Riobaldo’s life in two halves. He states, “O São Francisco partiu minha vida em duas partes” (310). As a result, the duality of the cross is literally mapped upon the Brazilian *sertão* with the São Francisco river as the axis that “divide o mundo em duas partes: o lado direito e o lado esquerdo...O direito é o fasto; nefasto o esquerdo” (Cândido 124). This corresponds with the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim tradition of “associating the right or right-handedness with God’s righteousness, goodness and power while the left is at best viewed with suspicion” (Chasteen et al. 627). Those who are disobedient to religious law and are therefore out of favor with God are typically depicted as being on his left hand, so it is not surprising that in *Grande sertão: Veredas*, the left bank of the São Francisco is associated with outlaws and *jagunçagem*, while the right

side is associated with government soldiers and the enforcement of the law. When Riobaldo and his men seek to cross to the left bank of the river to protect their leader, Medeiro Vaz, for example, their efforts are thwarted by the government. As Viggiano comments, although they were often accosted by soldiers on the right bank, “Os cangaceiros estavam sempre à vontade na margem esquerda do rio” (34). It is important to note, however, that the left- and right-hand sides of the São Francisco cannot be identified definitively, as the cardinal directions of east and west could be. The perspective of the mapper introduces ambiguity because his position as either northward or southward is key to the interpretation. The dialectic of north/south or up/down are also representative of looking upward towards God and Heaven or gazing downward toward the Devil and Hell—and because Riobaldo can never state his true direction of focus, we are consigned to ambiguity.

The duality inherent in the cross/crossroad is essential to the novel because Riobaldo is constantly doubting his loyalty to God and the truth of his pact with the Devil at Veredas-Mortas. Thus, the symbol of the cross is at once emblematic of the dialectic of God/Devil and problematic because it deconstructs the binary opposition through ambiguity. For example, even though Riobaldo declares that “chão de encruzilhada é posse dele [o diabo],” he still doubts which figure is helping him on his journey (436). Interestingly, this “strange dialectic” of religious symbolism, in which “opposites live within each other” is not uncommon. We see such a case in the biblical Lucifer, the Prince of Darkness, who is also known as the son of the morning or the light-bringer (Whone xii).

Dixon goes so far as to state that the motifs of the *vereda*, *encruzilhada*, and *redemunho/redemoinho*, which quite clearly communicate a crossing or disjunction, are “a unifying element of the work,” as paradoxical as it may seem (126). One such paradoxical

situation is Diadorim's death, which occurs during the climatic, cross-shaped final battle.

Riobaldo, speaking to his interlocutor, describes the scene in the following way: "Como é que vou dar...definei para o senhor? Só se a uso de papel, com grande debuxo. O senhor forme uma cruz, traceje. Que tenha os quatro braços, e a ponta de cada braço: cada uma é uma" (547). The anguish/enlightenment duality of the cross is again apparent here. Is this final battle the place of the devil, the site of Diadorim's violent and tragic death? Or is a place of triumph and higher knowledge, where Hermógenes is defeated and of Diadorim's identity as a woman revealed?

### **The Mediation of the Cross**

Overall, this motif of the cross/crossroad serves to emphasize the essential oppositional forces that work against each other to create conflict, movement, and mixing—such forces that are the focus and center of the world's creation stories, the impetus for racial and religious syncretism, and the basis for all myths, whether Christian, indigenous, or otherwise. The cross mediates such forces and allows them to thrive in their synthesis, deepening the richness of the narratives. Guimarães Rosa and Rulfo incorporate a multitude of crosses, which carry an almost magical primitive and religious symbolism. This allows them to order vertical and horizontal space in accordance with its spiritual association, as either heavenly or devilish. Through such associations, we can read *Grande Sertão: Veredas* and *Pedro Páramo* as spatially organized novels, dependent upon the regional settings in which they take place and the universal perceptions of the cross.

Ultimately, in both novels, we see this mythical pattern that corresponds with the protagonists' interactions with crossroads—whether at the beginning of their heroes' journeys, during their moments of most crucial decision-making, or even at the death of their beloved in

the case of Diadorim. But despite their role as mythic heroes, they are unable to return home, to find salvation or redemption. They inhabit the center of the cross—a liminal space that mediates the universal and the particular, the collective society and the individual—and ultimately, they find *no answers*. Although we expect that things will be resolved at the center of the cross, no such miracle occurs. Our protagonists remain both anguished and enlightened by their experiences, but are seemingly no closer to God, no closer to knowing the clear path to Heaven or to Hell. In the same way that the underlying tension between regionalism and universalism is never resolved, the conflict between God and the Devil must necessarily wage on in an eternal battle of good and evil, two weighted halves of a cross that can never be dissembled.

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## APPENDIX A: CONFERENCE-LENGTH VERSION

As the celebrated American author Flannery O'Connor (1925–1964) once observed, “The writer operates at a peculiar crossroads where time and place and eternity somehow meet. His problem is to find that location.” Her Latin American contemporaries Juan Rulfo (1917–1986) and João Guimarães Rosa (1908–1967) rose to that challenge quite literally in the 1950s. Their *obras primas*, *Pedro Páramo* (1955) and *Grande Sertão: Veredas* (1956), are centered around important crossroads that shape the journeys of their protagonists, although there is little extant scholarship in this vein. These crossroads are places where divine and infernal realms can interact with the physical world, where “time and place and eternity” literally intersect. O'Connor, as a regionalist writer herself, may have recognized the difficulty of maintaining local color while treating universal themes—but Rulfo and Guimarães Rosa used the cross to mediate the two competing ideals. In both novels, references to the crossroad motif allow the reader to transcend (although not eradicate) a geographical conception of setting. As a result, the reader recognizes the construction of what Diógenes Fajardo Valenzuela calls a mythic space, which intertwines national history with primordial creation stories, modern heroes, and ancient religious symbols (96).

The usefulness of the cross/crossroad as an analytic framework for both *Grande Sertão: Veredas* and *Pedro Páramo* cannot be overstated. As Caroline LeFeber Schneider discusses extensively in “The Prose of Place in *Grande Sertão: Veredas* and *Pedro Páramo*,” both novels are “written ‘spatially’ rather than temporally” (32). As a result, the extensive references to the cross in settings most crucial to the protagonists is very telling. Even the title of the Guimarães Rosa’s novel emphasizes the multitude of pathways—the ambiguous *veredas* that cross the *sertão mineiro*—which lead to the constant *travessia*, or crossing motion, of Riobaldo

throughout the narrative. He interlaces his self-identity with the crossroad, saying, “lugar meu tinha de ser a concruz dos caminhos” (419). Similarly, the town where Juan Preciado’s parents met, Comala, serves as “el lugar de la encrucijada laberíntica” on his journey to find his father (Fajardo Valenzuela 102).

Not only do the settings of the novels mark this theme of crossing and duality, but the narrative structures that Rulfo and Guimarães Rosa employ are markedly cruciform: each author divides his novel into two halves, placing at the center a point of crossing, a point of revelation where both anguish and enlightenment are possible. At the halfway point of Guimarães Rosa’s *Grande Sertão: Veredas*, Riobaldo indicates that his story, although jumbled, has been told to completion. The crux is signaled by the following commentary by Riobaldo to his interlocutor: “Ah, meu senhor, mas o que eu acho é que o senhor já sabe mesmo tudo—que tudo lhe fiei. *Aqui eu podia pôr ponto...*O senhor pense, o senhor ache. O senhor ponha enredo” (308–9, my emphasis). At this moment, we see that it is up to the reader to untangle the various narrative threads and weave them into a cohesive story. Diadorim’s climactic death (and the subsequent revelation of her identity as a woman) that will take place near the end of the novel has already been clearly delineated. However, Guimarães Rosa refrains from communicating it directly, using this halfway point to tease his reader into returning to the first half of the novel for answers to unresolved questions. Much like in *Pedro Páramo*, “The perception of chiasmus requires the mind to go in opposing directions. The reader proceeds without hesitation to the crux, but then he must read forwards and backwards at the same time” (Dixon 86). With this in mind, it is important to note that an infinity symbol is used to mark the end of the novel—this never-ending, figure-eight symbol not only represents this point of crossing, but also a constant “return to the point of origin,” a review of the past (86).

In *Pedro Páramo*, there is a distinct shift in narrators between the two halves, which indicates a marked separation. Juan Preciado serves as the first-person narrator of the first half, while the second part is dominated by a third-person narrator who tells the story of Pedro Páramo and those who cross paths with him during his life (“Introducción” 19). Due to the novel’s chiasmic structure, each half reflects the other in content through what Paul Dixon calls “dual motifs” (82). Consequently, Dixon posits that “the point of division for the pattern is the moment at which Juan Preciado becomes conscious of his death—the same point generally acknowledged by critics as a structural halfway mark for the novel” (Dixon 85). This revelation is not only Juan’s however—it is also the reader’s. This is the moment when we discover that Juan Preciado has been narrating his story for Dorotea, with whom he shares his grave in Comala, since the very beginning. Although the reader feels anguish at the failure of Juan’s quest to meet his father and “*exigirle lo suyo*,” he or she also feels a sense of enlightenment and increased knowledge about Comala and its phantasmagorical nature upon learning that Juan has also succumbed to its purgatorial depths.

As the distinction between regional and cosmopolitan novels wanes in the 1950s, we begin to witness the rise of a modern hero that stands in opposition to the rather two-dimensional heroes found in ancient epics. This modern hero is a figure that stands out as both regional and “complexo, multidimensional” and encompasses “certas oposições” that allow ambiguity to thrive in their stories, allowing more reader participation (Coutinho 64). Juan Preciado and Riobaldo are such heroes. They embark on heroic journeys to complete their respective missions—Juan to find his father and “*exigirle lo suyo*” and Riobaldo to avenge the death of Joca Ramiro, his chief, who has been killed by the villainous Hermógenes. Although Hellenic myths and epic themes, including references to Greek and Roman mythology and Dante’s *Divine*

*Comedy*, have been widely discussed in the extant scholarship, it is apparent that both Rulfo and Guimarães Rosa also draw upon indigenous and Christian myths, including creation stories, in order to project their work onto the world stage.

García-Peña's analysis of *Pedro Páramo*, for example, focuses on the Hellenic god of the crossroads, Hermes, who she describes as a "dios alado y transitivo, volátil, ambiguo, guardián de las puertas que cierran y abren" (137). Hermes "conduce las almas hacia el Hades," and is therefore associated with the dead—his correspondence with Abundio, who guides Juan in his mythic descent to Comala, cannot be denied, just as we would be remiss to overlook a similar correspondence with Virgil, Dante's guide to hell in his *Divine Comedy* (138). Their first meeting, which also indicates the first reference to the symbol of the crossroad, is narrated in the following manner: "Me había topado con él en Los Encuentros, *donde se cruzaban varios caminos*. Me estuve allí esperando, hasta que al fin apareció este hombre..." (67, my emphasis). They then descend to Comala, a town that Abundio describes as "sobre las brasas de la tierra, en la mera boca del Infierno" (67). The repeated indications of downward movement and increasing heat—until they reach "el puro calor sin aire"—make the descent towards hell unmistakable (67).

Joseph Campbell discusses the classic descent as part of the hero's journey, explaining the following: "The hero adventures out of the land we know into darkness; there he accomplishes his adventure, or again is simply lost to us, imprisoned, or in danger; and his return is described as a coming back out of that yonder zone" (217). In Juan's case, he descends into Comala only to die there and become imprisoned by spiritual damnation. Campbell's "life-affirming threshold" (218) is crossed (in a perpendicular motion to the threshold, consistent with a vertical or spiritual ascension) upon returning from the hero's journey, but this never happens

in *Pedro Páramo* because Juan is destined to fail. Hayes argues that Rulfo's "epic references demean" and "undercut" the success of Juan Preciado's mission. As a result of such impediments, it is clear that Juan Preciado's path back to the land of the living and/or heaven is completely truncated. This is consistent with our analysis of the cross in the novel, which we see as broken, a reflection of the fallen state of man. The conduit to heaven is no longer open for Juan.

Riobaldo Tatarana recounts what Emir Rodríguez Monegal calls one of the most impressive "interminables monólogos épico-líricos de los narradores orales del interior del Brasil," and by so doing, marks the Brazilian imaginary with his expedition through the *sertão* (54). Much like Juan Preciado's heroic journey, Riobaldo's "odisea" also begins at a crossroad: the Porto Rio-de-Janeiro (Vargas Llosa 107). Utéza calls this location a "passagem por excelência" because it is the point where the São Francisco meets a weak crosscurrent, or "fraco caudal" (128). As one of many "encruzilhadas fluviais" that Riobaldo encounters on his journey, it is important to note the symbolism of the perpendicular currents as depicted by the symbol of the cross (136). Consistent with Guénon's conception of the dual nature of the cross, the vertical line, as represented by the powerful São Francisco and the courageous Diadorim, composes the active element. The horizontal line, or the "fraco caudal," is seen as representing the passive element, which serves as a metaphor for the fearful Riobaldo (34). The Menino's dramatic entrance into his life fills him with a definitive yearning that would not be fulfilled until after his abandonment of Zé-Bebelo—as Alan Viggiano explains, "A partir daquele momento, em nenhuma emoção violenta, entrou para a jagunçagem" (23).

Bezerra de Meneses calls this first river crossing Riobaldo's "passagem absolutamente emblemática, travessia iniciática," the beginning of his hero's journey (16). His ultimate heroic

task is to avenge the murder of his chief, Joca Ramiro, committed by the *os judas*, which indicates a clear reference to Judas Iscariot's betrayal of Christ. Riobaldo must confront a cruel, bloodthirsty fiend who has made a pact with the Devil: Hermógenes, whose name means "born of Hermes" in Greek. We can thereby position him as being "born at the crossroad" in his role of evil villain. Riobaldo sees no way to vanquish a man who has the Prince of Darkness on his side, so put himself on equal footing with his enemy, Riobaldo decides to "ir à meia-noite, na encruzilhada, esperar o Maligno—fechar o trato, fazer o pacto!" (410). Just as in *Pedro Páramo*, a classical, mythic descent to the underworld is reflected here, as Riobaldo travels downward to the crossroad. He describes his destination, saying, "mas muito para baixo, é um lugar. Tem uma encruzilhada. Estradas vão para as *Veredas Tortas*—veredas mortas" (97).

We explain this mythic descent if we position Riobaldo's crossroad as an *axis mundi*, as in the case of Juan Preciado. Riobaldo intends to contact the Devil in Hell, and he therefore appears to descend towards fiery depths, although he is unsure if his attempt is successful. After Diadorim's death, we see that the ambiguity of the crossroad continues. Riobaldo later finds out that the *Veredas-Mortas* are truly known as the *Veredas-Altas*, which disrupts the dialectic of up/down movement to create more ambiguity. This connotation of height could imply a connection with divinity rather than demons. Did Riobaldo descend towards the underworld or ascend in the direction of God? On the one hand, he appears to be able to ascend to greater heights when he meets his love and future wife, Otacília. As Riobaldo tells his interlocutor, "Otacília comecei a conhecer nas serras dos gerais, Buritis Altos...Fazenda Santa Catarina," and he quickly adds that "a Fazenda Santa Catarina era perto do céu" (188). Riobaldo further emphasizes that the correct, Godly path is upward when he remarks, "Qual é o caminho certo da gente? Nem para a frente nem para trás: só para cima" (94). Although Riobaldo is endlessly

plagued with ambiguities, it seems he can “escape his horizontal ambiguities by going upwards” and that this upward motion allows him to “transcend the life of impossible choices” (Dixon 149). He seems able to reach a higher plane than Juan Preciado, although the effects are not always lasting. For example, Riobaldo associates Diadorim with the heavens, with birds, and with the stars in the sky—ultimately, he calls both of the two women in his life his “dois anjos-da-guarda” (188). However, near end of book, following Diadorim’s death in the cross-shaped battle, Riobaldo seems to perceive a powerful shift in the vertical ordering of his world, stating that “o céu vem abaixando,” perhaps indicating that the true divine figure in his life has vanished (600).

Overall, this motif of the cross/crossroad serves to emphasize the essential oppositional forces that work against each other to create conflict, movement, and mixing—such forces that are the focus and center of the world’s creation stories, the impetus for racial and religious syncretism, and the basis for all myths, whether Christian, indigenous, or otherwise. The cross mediates such forces and allows them to thrive in their synthesis, deepening the richness of the narratives. Guimarães Rosa and Rulfo incorporate a multitude of crosses, which carry an almost magical primitive and religious symbolism. This allows them to order vertical and horizontal space in accordance with its spiritual association, as either heavenly or devilish. Through such associations, we can read *Grande Sertão: Veredas* and *Pedro Páramo* as spatially organized novels, dependent upon the regional settings in which they take place and the universal perceptions of the cross.

Ultimately, in both novels, we see this mythical pattern that corresponds with the protagonists’ interactions with crossroads—whether at the beginning of their heroes’ journeys, during their moments of most crucial decision-making, or even at the death of their beloved in

the case of Diadorim. But despite their role as mythic heroes, they are unable to return home, to find salvation or redemption. They inhabit the center of the cross—a liminal space that mediates the universal and the particular, the collective society and the individual—and ultimately, they find *no answers*. Although we expect that things will be resolved at the center of the cross, no such miracle occurs. Our protagonists remain both anguished and enlightened by their experiences, but are seemingly no closer to God, no closer to knowing the clear path to Heaven or to Hell. In the same way that the underlying tension between regionalism and universalism is never resolved, the conflict between God and the Devil must necessarily wage on in an eternal battle of good and evil, two weighted halves of a cross that can never be dissembled.