The Wide and Silent Land: Environmental Imaginaries of the Plains in Latin American Literature

by

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Abstract

The dissertation traces the evolution of dominant environmental imaginations of the Latin American plains as depicted in literary texts. It offers the close readings of texts in various genres, targeting the descriptions of plains geographies. I argue in favour of establishing an epistemology of the plains that dissolves the emphasis on national boundaries, whilst placing in relief the physical contours of biomes. Inspired by Lawrence Buell's assertion in *The Environmental Imagination*—that our "environmental crisis involves a crisis of the imagination the amelioration of which depends on finding better ways of imaging nature and humanity's relation to it"—my research seeks to piece together the salient environmental imaginations that are manifested in canonical texts in the hopes of better understanding how dominant imaginaries of the plains emerged within the Spanish and Portuguese-speaking Americas. By revealing the dominant images of the plains in canonical literary works, this dissertation points to the existence of peripheral images that are veiled by the overwhelming visibility of dominant imaginaries.

To Gabriela, whose love completes my writing.

And to Latin America,

its land and people,

to them belongs this dissertation.

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Contents

Introduction

Antes que la peluca y la casaca
fueron los ríos, ríos arteriales:
fueron las cordilleras, en cuya onda raída
el cóndor o la nieve parecían inmóviles:
fue la humedad y la espesura, el trueno
sin nombre todavía, las pampas planetarias.
—Pablo Neruda, *Canto general*

In the epoch of the Anthropocene, the ecological damage suffered by many of the planet's biomes is a reality linked to a human praxis. It is humans that are responsible for clearing large sections of tropical rainforests, for altering the biodiversity of wetlands and mangroves, and for causing the desertification of plains all across the Earth: "From the depths of the oceans to the highest reaches of the atmosphere, the human impact on the environment is significant and undeniable" (Whitehead i). Humans have become a geological force capable of profoundly reshaping the environment. It is not simply a passing crisis—one that can be resolved with the implementation of technologies. Reaching far deeper, it has become a "profound alteration of our relation to the world" (Latour 15). Humans are both embedded in the environment and capable of transforming it, an aspect that has changed not only the ways they interact with the world, but also the way they imagine their place in the different environments they inhabit. Humans suffer the effects of climate change at the same time that they accelerate its effects with the burning of fossil fuels—all the while they narrate dystopian futures and strange, unwelcoming worlds.

Whether it be Homero Aridjis' narration of a macabre set of apocalyptic events in Mexico City in *Los perros del fin del mundo* (2012) or Jesús Carrasco's writing of an alternate future in which the Spanish plains are colonized by Germans in *La tierra que pisamos* (2016), contemporary writers are reconsidering the significance of ecological events at a much larger scale. Since the Palaeolithic Age, humans have modified their environments in many ways, but never at the scale that is now available.

In response to the aforementioned challenges, ecocriticism has emerged as a critical theory that "seeks to deepen our understanding of the intimacy of humans and nonhumans" (Cohen and Duckert,"Introduction: Welcome to the Whirled" 3). It brings together the contributions of many fields of study, from ecology to philosophy, feminism, environmental justice, and literature. It is a truly multidisciplinary approach that is now on its third wave, according to Joni Adamson and Scott Slovic in "The Shoulders We Stand On: An Introduction to Ethnicity and Ecocriticism" (6). Ecocriticism has veered beyond North American nature writing and British Romanticism, and turned to those other voices that Cheryll Glotfelty alluded to in her introduction to the *Ecocriticism Reader* in 1996 (xvii). Ursula K. Heise, for example, has argued for a global approach to ecocriticism (*A Sense of Place* 2). Edited anthologies and monographs such as Elizabeth DeLoughrey and Geroge Handley's *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* (2001), Beatriz Rivera-Barnes and Jerry Hoeg's *Reading and Writing the Latin American Landscape* (2009), Laura Barbas-Rhoden's *Ecological Imaginations in Latin American Fiction* (2011), and Malcolm McNee's *The Environmental Imaginary in Brazilian Poetry and Art* (2014) have all begun to explore those other voices in the Caribbean, Spanish America, and

Brazil. As Serpil Oppermann suggests, the "constant branching of ecocriticism into plural directions indicates a process of expansion" ("The Future of Ecocriticism: Present Currents" 17).

My research is firmly situated within this third wave of ecocriticism, striving to critically consider the environmental imaginations of Latin America through the nonhuman frame of its plains biomes. By "nonhuman" I follow the definition set out by Richard Grusin as those beings categorized as "animals, affectivity, bodies, organic and geophysical systems, materiality, or technology" (vii). This broad notion allows me to incorporate flora, fauna, rivers, mountains, and other components that constitute the topography represented in each of the texts. My decolonial and ecological re-reading of canonical texts so as allow the land to speak for itself beyond settler ideologies. Spurred by critics such as Rob Nixon in *Slow Violence and Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), Latin Americanists have begun to underscore the environmental values latent in literary traditions south of the Rio Grande. Jorge Marcone has published several important articles on the "ecological thinking" found in the works of José María Arguedas and José Eustasio Rivera. His articles "Fiebre de la selva: Ecología de la desilusión en la literatura hispanoamericana" (2007) and "Latin American Literature at the Rise of Environmentalism: Urban Ecological Thinking in José María Arguedas's The Foxes" (2013) offer the close readings of the cited authors through an ecocritical lens. Reading canonical texts against the grain, Marcone has contributed to the emergence of a Latin American ecocriticism. Barbas-Rhoden's *Ecological Imaginations in Latin American Fiction* is also a seminal work in Latin American ecocriticism, focusing on several overarching themes and places such as the Amazon, Costa Rica, and Tierra del Fuego. Her book is an important introduction to possible ecocritical readings in Latin America. Another important contribution to Latin American ecocritical scholarship is the

monograph by Scott DeVries titled *A History of Ecology in Spanish American Literature* (2013). His work is perhaps closest to my research in scope, since it reframes many of the genres in Latin American literature from an ecocritical perspective. Analyzing the *novela de la tierra*, *novela de la selva*, and *novela indigenista*, DeVries reframes the canon, while demonstrating how contemporary environmentalist writers such as Gioconda Belli and Homero Aridjis represent "a culmination from ecological moments of earlier texts" (297). His work is perhaps closest to my research insofar as it considers texts from a wide range of genres in Spanish American literature. The broad scope of Latin American ecocriticism has been to historically retrace the place of Latin American literatures and cultures in regards to the different environmental images present. As DeVries notes in his introduction, many of these works attempt "the articulation of a broad history of literary ecology in Spanish America" (3).

My approach differs to those of previous scholars in its emphasis on blurring the human and nonhuman categories that are very much a part of the "historical" readings of Latin American literature. Rather than attempt to chronologically fit texts into the emergence of an ecological fiction represented by a selection of contemporary writers, I focus on a geographical and ecological entity, so as to weave a different reading of Latin American literature, one that is invested in analyzing the different representations of plains geographies produced in the past two hundred years. Although Ardijis and Belli are important examples of environmental writers, they are nonetheless exceptional cases in the literary canon. More often than not, the Latin American canon presents ecocritics with texts that have a questionable position in relation to the environment. Writers such as Domingo Faustino Sarmiento and José de Alencar are clear examples of a colonialist ideology committed to the exploitation of the land and its peoples.

Instead of ignoring those texts that hold a questionable place as "environmental," I consider the various depictions of the plains, so as to shed light on how certain rhetorics have shaped the way humans imagine these landscapes. I am interested in furthering a critical understanding of how the images of the environment produced in literature can generate a starkly different ecological knowledge that may or may not support the preservation of nature. Sarmiento, for example, advocates a Eurocentric and colonialist logic in exploiting the *pampas* by imagining these plains as an abstract space. Readers of *Facundo* (1845) thus come to know the *pampas* biome as an immense extension awaiting the arrival of civilization.

Taking my cue from the important contributions of these ecocritics, I will focus on the tangled relation of literature and the environment in Latin America, attempting to offer a reading of texts that traces the enmeshing of the human and nonhuman. More specifically, I will engage with canonical literary texts from the late nineteenth century until the twenty-first century, recovering the environmental images of the plains found in novels, poems, and essays by writers throughout Latin America, including Brazilian writers and poets. Similar to the aims of a "veer ecology," my research "attempts to complicate understandings of human entanglement within a never-separable nature" ("Introduction: Welcome to the Whirled" 2). I have structured this dissertation so as to veer the reader toward the nonhuman in the form of plains topographies and biomes, to make explicit the presence of these lands that so often are muted. The choice of the plains as the environmental and geographical basis for my ecocritical readings is twofold: firstly it allows a transnational and ecological scope that challenges the generation of stereotypes of these biomes as lifeless and monotone, and secondly it points to the centrality of these biomes in Latin American literature, alongside others such as the rainforests in the *novelas de la jungla*

genre. My work subverts these stereotypes by piecing together their literary images and contrasting them with the environmental realities of each of those biomes. The plains are the focus of my close readings. I organize each chapter around one of five salient geographies: *Pampas*, *Altiplanicies*, *Llanos*, *Pantanal*, and *Sertão*. The analysis of the selected texts will help trace the environmental images of each of these geographies, whether it be through the portrayal of the land, the naming of different species of flora and fauna, or the depiction of climate. There are no elaborate titles or subheadings for each chapter, so as to not distract readers from the nonhuman basis of the close readings.

Here it is important to note an important distinction that will at times blur throughout the dissertation; that is, the difference between "real" and imagined geographies. To analyze the representations of the plains in literature is to focus on a set of imagined geographies that cannot simply be juxtaposed to real geographies. Otherwise we would be faced with the daunting task of exploring a text that has the same dimensions and contours as that geography that it describes, as Jorge Luis Borges provocatively suggests in his short story "Del rigor en la ciencia" (1946). No matter how exact, a map always leaves something out (Turchi 73). Similarly, no imagined geography incorporates the real geography completely. However, the relation between both is not so easily disentangled. To the extent that the imagined geographies are *representations* of real places in the world, they remain connected to real geographies. When Pablo Neruda speaks of Macchu Picchu in his *Canto general* (1950), he is describing a real place found in the high plains of Peru. His imagined geography is to a greater or lesser extent influenced by that real location. In technical terms, we would say that the language deployed by Neruda is not only figurative, but also referential. However, the inverse can also be the case. Imagined geographies can shape the

way we come to know those real places portrayed. This is the case, for example, in the depiction of the *pampas* by Sarmiento in *Facundo*. Although he refers to a real geography, he had never travelled himself to that particular region of Argentina. Inspired by other writers and explorers, he imagines that biome. Readers throughout Latin America and beyond have come to know that real geography through the depictions by Sarmiento.

The central aim of this dissertation is to manifest the complex entanglement between real and imagined geographies, exploring how real referents are present in literary texts and how the literary depictions of environments can also shape our ecological knowledge of those geographies. Literary images of the environment generate ecological knowledge—they influence the way we perceive those biomes. These images have important repercussions on social and environmental policies, as well as humans rights issues, especially given that they are the product of the intellectual and political elite. When prompted, most Brazilians will describe the *sertão* as a desert, when in fact the term may refer to a multiplicity of real geographies, none of which is a desert biome ("Biomas" n.p.). The same occurs when describing the *pampas* grasslands—some of the most biodiverse in the entire planet—as immense and desolate regions (Herrera et al. 486). These real biomes become veiled by the ecological epistemologies that emerge from dominant environmental images present in canonical literature. Although literature is an elite practice, its influence trickles down throughout culture. Canonical works of literature are taught in schools and are adapted into films, soap operas, and other forms of popular culture. The powerful environmental images present in canonical texts are repeated in mainstream culture. Moreover, some of these images are created by *letrados* that have a significant amount of power in shaping the laws and policies of the nation. As I trace the representations of plains in texts, I will often

identify the references to flora, fauna, and rivers, so as to recover the physical environments that are present, shedding light on the ecological knowledge that underlies such depictions.

I agree with Deborah Bird Rose that "the Anthropocene shows us the need for radically reworked forms of attention to what marks the human species as different" (55). Her essay titled "Shimmer: When All You Love Is Being Trashed" explores the unexpected symbiosis between species in Australia—between Aboriginal people, angiosperms, and flying foxes. It is a thought provoking examination of how the voices of the human and nonhuman collaborate to present a different environmental imaginary. More significantly, she recovers the voices of Aboriginal people in her work. Her article is more than an ecological history, for it redefines what it means to be human in relation to other species: "Let us make another recursion across the terrain of our species, this time trying to tell more truthful accounts than those that stress our wondrous superiority" (Rose 55). I too believe that the Anthropocene need not be understood as a tragic event, but rather as an opportunity to reconsider the many relations between species, including the broad range of human voices often oppressed.

This dissertation attempts to reframe our view of canonical literary texts, exploring the complex relations between the human and nonhuman, so as to value how we are part of the environment, but also separate insofar as we construct our ecological knowledge on how we imagine the different biomes in our planet and also physically alter their contours. It is not an ecological history of Latin America, but a literary geography of the plains through the texts of canonical authors. A literary geography displays "the need to map the spaces and places of literature" as a means to the "uncovering of formerly repressed narratives" (Tally J.R. and Battista 2). This dissertation is a cartography of the *dominant* environmental images of the plains

as an important first step to raising awareness to the presence of other voices that *are not dominant*. Insofar as it traces the contours of the plains through the imaginaries of canonical writers, it attempts "a disanthropocentric reenvisioning of the complicated biomes and cosmopolities within which we dwell" (Cohen and Duckert "Introduction: Eleven Principles" 5). I focus on recovering how the nonhuman is represented in literary texts, and not the other way around.

Rather than focus on the national literary traditions present in Latin America, I analyze different plains geographies. Basing each chapter on a particular plains topography, my intent is to guide readers toward a literary geography of Latin America. Rather than emphasize the different national traditions—an aspect that can never be completely absent—, this dissertation seeks to reveal the significance of different environments in literature. My environmental focus allows transnational continuities to emerge—representations of the plains that are shared by writers in different historical, linguistic, and national registers. It is in that sense that my dissertation is a project in environmental and comparative studies. Gradually a new perspective emerges, one that shows how the plains as a geography are central to the literary imaginaries of this rich and varied continent in which Spanish, Portuguese, and many other indigenous languages shape the ecological knowledge of its lands.

The focus on texts that constitute the Latin American canon also serves an important purpose in my dissertation, for it draws attention to the presence of dominant and peripheral environmental imaginaries. Canonical texts often shape the imaginaries of culture, far more than texts considered minor or even censured. By analyzing the ways in which the plains are represented in canonical texts, I begin a long yet necessary trajectory in reassessing the sources

of our environmental imaginaries in Latin America. Why is it that certain texts shape our knowledge of certain geographies more than others? What are those other environmental imaginaries, and how can they enrich our understanding of the environment? Here it is important to note that all the texts analyzed in this dissertation are to a greater or lesser extent dominant. Ultimately, they are all canonical texts. There is no single environmental imaginary, but rather a variety of representations of the world around us. I argue that we can begin to distinguish different environmental imaginaries by claiming that some of the portrayals are more dominant than others. However, canons are not always static. The manner in which they shift also affects the visibility of some images over others. Such shifts are mirrored in the emerging of certain environmental images, over others. This makes the work of ecocritics all the more important, for the critical analysis of the canon may help shift attention to other environmental imaginaries absent or considered peripheral.

Priscilla Solis Ybarra's *Writing the Goodlife: Mexican American Literature and the Environment* (2017) traces the ecological writings of Chicanas and Chicanos, many of which are set in the plains that constitute the border between Mexico and the United States of America. These writers develop a very different environmental imaginary of the land than Mexican canonical authors, such as Juan Rulfo or José Emilio Pacheco. I focus on canonical texts not as a means to legitimize their dominance over other peripheral imaginaries, but to focus attention on the differences and possible contrasts that may help reconsider the importance of the ecological images of other writers, as is the case of Chicanas and Chicanos. Analyzing the dominant environmental imaginaries opens up a space for researchers to compare and discover alternative imaginaries that can only enrich our knowledge of the environment. Questions of class, race, and

gender can and do shape the knowledge about the environment, offering situated knowledges that shed light on other valuable perspectives.

The first chapter explores the most dominant of all imaginaries of the plains in Latin America, that of the *pampas*. Its dominance is largely due to the strong presence of Argentine literature in the canon—particularly the ability of the *Gauchesca* genre in capturing the imagination of readers beyond Latin America. Although the canon of writers that engage with the *pampas* is extensive, including Sarmiento, Ricardo Güiraldes, Leopoldo Lugones, Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, and Erico Veríssimo, I will concentrate on two important texts that portray the *pampas* as an immense and abstract land: *Facundo* by Sarmiento and *Radiografía de la Pampa* (1933) by Martínez Estrada. Both text are salient examples of the generic images of the plains that are often found in canonical literature. Moreover, they clearly manifest a colonizing epistemology of the land, one that effaces the autochthonous flora and fauna, as well as its indigenous inhabitants. *Facundo* does so by inverting the pastoral trope of escape, while incorporating the portrayal of the land as wilderness. *Radiografía* takes this a step further and generates a geometric conception of the *pampas* that accentuates the image of a vacant desert. This chapter sets up one of the overarching themes of the dissertation: the contrast between imagined and real geographies in literature.

The second chapter analyzes the representations of the *altiplanicies*, highlighting the images of an inhospitable land where the telluric land reminds us of the precariousness of life in the form of the *chicalote* flower or preying condor. I will offer the close readings of three narratives: *Los perros hambrientos*(1939) by Ciro Alegría, "Luvina" (1953) by Juan Rulfo, and "Páramo" (1969) by João Guimarães Rosa. More than any other environmental imaginaries of

the plains, the images in these texts accentuate a ruined landscape and an asphyxiating atmosphere. I will argue that the negative aesthetic present in these narratives exemplifies a dark ecology that turns our attention to the frailty of the environment and the consequences of a prolonged climate crisis, such as a drought. This chapter foregrounds another important aspect of the environmental imaginaries of the plains in Latin America, for it emphasizes the negative aesthetic that is often a part of the images of the plains as desolate places.

The third chapter is dedicated to the *llanos* located around the Orinoco river basin. I examine what I term the predatory ecologies that are manifested in *La vorágine* (1924) by Eustasio Rivera and *Doña Bárbara* (1929) by Rómulo Gallegos. These two novels present a varied number of predator encounters between humans and animals that reconsider our place in the ecology of the plains and the significance of human praxis in the emergence of endangered species in the Orinoco. Also, the way we imagine predators—especially in the plains where there is a lack of shelter—is intimately tied to issues of gender and nature. The predatory ecologies that are present in both novels also shed light on the portrayal of the land as wilderness, a place that is a constant threat to humans. The literatures of the plains portray these biomes as places where predator and prey are in a constant struggle for survival.

The fourth chapter concentrates on what is considered by specialists to be an ecological sanctuary: the Pantanal wetlands. This *sui generis* biome—the largest wetlands in the world—has received the attention of several poets, such as Manoel de Barros. I will trace an important aspect of the environmental images of the Latin American plains that is the significance of scale in portraying these wide lands. Offering close readings of poems by Francisco Corrêa and Manoel de Barros, as well as the short story "Entremeio — Com o vaqueiro Mariano" (1947) by

Guimarães Rosa, I will argue that these images gradually evolve from abstract to the microscopic lens of Manoel de Barros. I use the term "evolution" in the same way as biologists, not as a teleological construct that points to a process of culmination and perfection, but as a mechanism that explains shifts and changes (Mayr 132; Moretti 121). His poetry enumerates the small creatures of the Pantanal, which creates images of ecological mutualism. This chapter reveals another significant aspect of the environmental imaginaries of the plains; that is, the constant evolution of these images and the emergence of new dominant representations of the plains. The Pantanal has recently begun to gain the attention of established writers and artists, emerging as a dominant imaginary in Brazil. By mapping out the evolution of its environmental imaginaries, I shed light on how our modes of representing the environment change with time, leading to the rise of new dominant modes.

The fifth and final chapter examines the most salient environmental imaginary of the plains in Brazil: the *sertão*. This last chapter raises questions as to the role of dominant imaginaries in generating a knowledge of that region that shrouds its real geographies. It also underscores the significance of climate in preserving the *caatinga* biome. I will analyze the works of José de Alencar, Euclides da Cunha, Graciliano Ramos, and João Cabral de Melo Neto. Their texts best reveal the evolution of this imaginary from a generic portrayal of the interior of Brazil to a specific biome in the northeast of Brazil. Its evolution makes manifest the nature of environmental imaginaries as opposed to the real geographies they often refer to. This last chapter concludes my analysis of the environmental imaginaries of the plains by clearly demonstrating how these portrayals are constructs that shape our knowledge of the land. The

geographically ambiguous term “sertão” attests to the power of an imagined geography over the land itself.

It is my hope that each of these chapters stimulates readers to become aware of the latent ecological knowledge that emerges from the different portrayals of plains biomes in literature. Only when we realize how the imaginaries of those biomes affect how we come to know them can we begin veering toward other ways of being in the world—to accept the possibility that ours is not the only way of imagining/knowing the planet. This then is my contribution to the growing field of ecocriticism, a reframing of how we understand the nonhuman environments of Latin America, so as to become aware of dominant imaginaries that conceal alternative epistemologies of these plains biomes. It is my hope that these “wide and silent lands” will gain a voice that is neither human nor nonhuman, but rather a chorus of both.

Las Pampas or the Geometries of Plains

Mas quando voltavam para São Vicente, levando suas presas e achados, o que deixavam para trás era sempre o deserto—o imenso deserto verde do Continente

-Erico Veríssimo, *O Continente*

Perhaps one of the most widely referenced environments in Latin American literature, the *pampas* are generally considered to be a large plain that extends throughout Argentina, Uruguay, and southern Brazil. The word "pampa" is derived from the Quechua language, meaning "plain."[1] In Argentina alone, it covers approximately 720,000 km^2 and includes a variety of grassland vegetation ("The Pampas" n.p.). It is also "one of the most highly threatened biomes in the world," given its extensive exploitation for agricultural purposes and overall degradation of the land (Herrera et al. 486). In Brazil, it is considered by geographers to be a separate biome found in the interior of the state of Rio Grande do Sul ("Biomas" n.p.). Constituted of mostly grasslands and small shrubs, the Brazilian *Pampa* is also a vulnerable biome due to the "natural fragility of the soil, combined with the climatic conditions" (Wurdig Roesch et al. 182).

These unique grasslands have inspired countless writers and musicians, especially in Argentina and Uruguay, where they prompted the emergence of *gaucho* literature and the *milonga*. The list of established writers that have penned poems, narratives, plays, and essays on *gauchos*—with the *pampas* as a setting—is extensive and diverse: Domingo Sarmiento, Esteban Echeverría, José Hernández, José de Alencar, Eduardo Gutiérrez, Ricardo Güiraldes, Ezequiel

[1] According to the *Diccionario Español Quechua* (DEQ), the Quechua term "pampa" or "phampa" as an adjective connotes "flat" or "plain," as well as "common" and "universal" ("phampa"). Both meanings of the term suggest regularity, whether referring to the overall flatness of a terrain or to a common attribute shared by many individuals. As a noun, the term "pampa" means "ground" and "flat terrain."

Martínez Estrada, Roberto Bolaño, Leopoldo Lugones, Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar, Erico Veríssimo, João Simões Lopes Neto, and Eduardo Galeano are some of the most notable authors that have written about these plains. They are not just canonical authors, but canonical male writers. As such, the *pampas* constitute an important part of the male literary canon, making them an invaluable entry into the environmental imaginaries of the plains of Latin America. The way these plains have been imagined in literature also clearly manifests the presence of dominant environmental images that diverge from the ecological realities of a given biome.

In this chapter I will target two works of literature that are significant in how their depictions of the *pampas* depart from the real geographies of the biome: *Facundo* by Sarmiento and *Radiografía de la pampa* by Martínez Estrada. Both essays have had an influential legacy in Latin America. The representations of the plains in both texts are ideological constructions that efface the specificity of the land in favour of generic concepts such as immensity and extension. Each presents the land not as a real place, but as an abstract space. Once emptied of those elements that constitute its ecological elements, the *pampas* are then portrayed as a desert that resists the endeavours of civilized man. I am interested in exploring these aspects of the environmental imaginaries present in the two texts, for the depictions of the plains as an abstract space and as a desert exemplify the way literary images can create an ecological knowledge of a biome that does not respond to its biological and climatological context. The *pampas* are neither a geometrical plane, nor a desert landscape. Yet these images popularized in canonical literary works are widespread and have contributed to the devaluation of such a unique biome as the *pampas*. In Brazil, for example, these plains were not officially recognized by the federal government until 2004 and are currently suffering a loss of biodiversity at an alarming rate

(Santos et al. n.p.). It is important to note that we cannot directly assume that the environmental images constructed by Argentine writers would necessarily influence those of their Brazilian counterparts. Notwithstanding, there are similarities in the depictions of the *pampas* beyond national boundaries.

The choice of the two texts from such a wide range of authors is due to the intimate connection between *Facundo* and *Radiografía*, especially in regards to the role that the *pampas* play in both essays. Carola Hermida argues that *Radiografía "*se propone como una continuación o actualización del *Facundo*" ("is presented as a continuation or actualization of the Facundo"; 110). Martínez Estrada establishes an intellectual dialogue with Sarmiento, both in the themes that organize his book and in the language deployed. Moreover, the two essays attempt to decipher the effect that nature has on Argentines (Feustle 447). Sarmiento's essay hardly needs an introduction, for it is considered one of the most important books in Latin American literature. Doris Sommer argues, for example, that *Facundo* is one of the foundational narratives in Latin America (63). Many introductory courses on Hispanic literature begin with Sarmiento's book. It is also doubly important, for it initiates the tradition of *gaucho* literature in Argentina (Ludmer 10). Its importance in Latin American literature simply cannot be overstated. Although I am not interested in discussing its place in the literary canon, I would add that *Facundo* is one of the most important texts in the environmental imaginaries of the plains in Latin America. Many of the themes set out in its portrayal of the *pampas* reverberate in other writers of the plains. Sarmiento was writing at a time of political instability in Argentina years after its independence from Spain, a period of unrest that ended with the rise of Juan Manuel de Rosas as governor of Buenos Aires in 1829. It is a period of national consolidation in Argentina. Written only a few

years after the Wall Street crash of 1929 and the Argentine coup by José Felix Uriburu, Martínez Estrada's *Radiografía* is a continued exploration of the "problem of extension" that had been set out in *Facundo*. The author sees reflections of Sarmiento's times in the economic and political upheavals of Argentina in the twentieth century. Both Sarmiento and Martínez Estrada turn their attention to the plains, so as to attempt to decode the disorganization of Argentina as a nation. The contrasts between the rural lands and the urban centres of each province are explained through the pressing influence of the *pampas*. Pollmann suggests this overarching theme in both essays: "En este país [Argentina] que, geográficamente, se ve, por las pampas, dividido en dos países de los que uno, Buenos Aires, puede considerarse sumamente civilizado, 'europeo'; mientras que el otro no cuenta para nada" ("In this country [Argentina] that, geographically, is because of the pampas seen as divided in two countries of which the one, Buenos Aires, can be considered very civilized, 'European;' while the other is not valued at all"; "Introducción" xix). In building an image of Argentina as a modern nation, Sarmiento and Martínez Estrada also create a series of environmental images of the *pampas* that strip them of their specificity. Through a Eurocentric lens, they see only an empty land. Their portrayal of the plains manifests —more than any other writers of the Latin American plains—a conscious construction of a dominant ecological imaginary that masks the real geographies of the biome.

Critically re-reading *Facundo* is a task not exempt from difficulties. Much has been written on the intricacies of this ambivalent and at times contradictory book. From an ecocritical standpoint, I argue that Sarmiento manages to both incorporate and inaugurate an environmental imagination of the plains that echoes in other writers of the plains in the Latin America. He is an author well aware of his audience, writing at the crossroads between the Americas and Europe.

Aarti Madan explains that Sarmiento presents a "marketable geography" geared toward European immigrants, drawing from Alexander von Humboldt's geographic discourse ("Sarmiento the Geographer" 261). Madan opens a line of inquiry into *Facundo* that examines the influence of geography and territory in Latin American literature. Inheriting the Humboldtian emphasis on "writing the land," Sarmiento inspires his peers to "writing the nation" ("Sarmiento the Geographer" 260). Taking my cue from such an approach, I will focus on another source that shapes the manner in which Sarmiento writes about the *pampas*—that of the pastoral tradition. *Facundo* appropriates many of the pastoral and wilderness images that James Fenimore Cooper deploys to describe the American Great Plains in *The Prairie* (1824), while at the same time translating them into a tension between civilization and barbarism—a dichotomy of interest to the Spanish American *letrados* invested in constructing national projects. In other words, Sarmiento translates the pastoral mode into a narrative of wilderness that plays into his "marketable geography" insofar as it legitimizes projects of modernization and immigration in rural Argentina. To do so, he imagines the *pampas* far different from its ecological context. In *Facundo*, they become an immense and empty landscape, a desert that awaits the arrival of civilization. This imagined geography of the *pampas* is a rhetorical and political device that constructs a powerful environmental imaginary. Madan reminds us that "the discourse of emptiness is a metaphor—in other words, a metaphor for land ripe to be populated" ("Sarmiento the Geographer" 270).

At the beginning of the second chapter in *Facundo*, Sarmiento makes explicit the influence of Cooper in his conception of the Argentina:

> El único romancista norteamericano que haya logrado hacerse un nombre europeo, es Fenimore Cooper, y eso, porque transportó la escena de sus descripciones fuera del círculo ocupado por los plantadores, al límite entre la vida bárbara y la civilizada, al teatro de la guerra en que las razas indígenas y la raza sajona están combatiendo por la posesión del terreno. (76)
>
> The only North American novelist that has managed to make himself a name in Europe is Fenimore Cooper, and that was because he transported the scenes of his descriptions beyond the small circle of plantation owners, at the limit between the barbarous and civilized life, to the theatre of war in which the indigenous races and the Anglo-Saxon race are fighting for the possession of the land.[2]

Sarmiento is considering the value of Cooper's books in terms of the success they had in Europe. The way the North American writer represents the "scenes" that are "at the limit between barbarous and civilized life" is of interest to Europeans. Cooper recreates the bucolic landscapes of plantations and translates them into a "theatre of war," into a polemics between different peoples. What the pastoral mode is lacking, if it is to be deployed in the American continent, are the struggles to take control of the land from the indigenous inhabitants. It is tension—rather than pastoral tranquility—that is attractive. Sarmiento thus learns a valuable lesson from the writings of Cooper that shapes his discourse of the *pampas.* If he is to successfully generate a "marketable geography," he must retell the drama that unfolds in Argentina as rooted in the struggle for the "possession of the land." He must translate the portrayal of a serene nature

[2] The translations of *Facundo* and *Radiografía de la pampa* are the author's.

common in European pastorals into depictions of a brute wilderness where "indigenous races" and European colonizers engage in battle for the possession of the continent.

This raises two ecological issues that are present in the environmental images of the *pampas*. Firstly, the value of the plains resides in their possible appropriation by those civilized Europeans immigrating to Argentina, as opposed to the rights of the indigenous peoples to a land that they have inhabited for far longer. How would the indigenous peoples imagine the *pampas*? Secondly, Sarmiento seems to envision the land as a battlefield motivated by economic interests. Its value is subordinated to its successful exploitation by landowners. Its significance lies in how these lands will help "write the nation" as modern and industrialized, not so much in their beauty in and of itself. These ecological issues—the marginalization of the indigenous inhabitants as mere antagonists and the sole economic value of the land—are recurrent in the literatures of the plains in Latin America. This is not surprising, for the agricultural practices in the continent have since the Conquest focused on the extraction of resources and the establishment of large plantations and cattle ranches in plains topographies.

So as to persuade readers of the importance of incorporating modern agricultural practices in rural Argentina, *Facundo* inaugurates an alternative to the pastoral mode, one that exploits what Leo Marx argues as the contradiction between ideas of the American landscape:

> If America seemed to promise everything that men always wanted, it also threatened to obliterate much of what they already achieved […] Not that the conflict was in any sense peculiar to American experience. It had always been at the heart of pastoral; but the discovery of the New World invested it with new relevance, with fresh symbols. (46)

The New World presents a different landscape than that of Europe. It is at once attractive, so much so that the impossible journeys to its shores were built on the desires of men in the Iberian peninsula to discover riches beyond their imagination. Sarmiento, for example, writes that the plains are "un oasis montañoso de pasto" ("an oasis of rolling fields"; 148). *Facundo* often portrays the land as an exotic Orient (Beckman 37). Sarmiento also imagines the American continent as a threatening land, one filled with dangers—a wilderness. Again he writes the following: "Masas de tinieblas que anublan el día, masas de luz lívida, temblorosa, que ilumina un instante las tinieblas, y muestra la pampa a distancias infinitas" ("Masses of darkness that cloud day, masses of livid light, trembling, that illuminates for an instant the darkness, and reveals the pampa in the infinite distance"; 79). The "infinite distances" of the *pampas* set an ominous horizon, one that instills fear even in the *gauchos* as they camp out at night. These two conflicting images of the New World constitute the binary between civilization and barbarism that appears time and again in *Facundo*.

Exploiting that tension between an "oasis" and an ominous land, Sarmiento transforms pastoral images into those of a wilderness. The links between pastoral and wilderness images have not gone unnoticed by scholars. Garrard, for example, explains that "Wilderness narratives share the motif of escape and return with the typical pastoral narrative, but the construction of nature they propose and reinforce is fundamentally different" (*Ecocriticism* 59). Although scholars continue to debate what defines the pastoral as a genre—what are the tropes that give it

a coherence throughout the Classical period up until Romanticism[3]—the trope of escape and return is pertinent in *Facundo*. Its retelling of the life of Facundo Quiroga plays out the "motif of escape and return" and transforms the idealized nature of pastoral into that of a threatening wilderness. By "wilderness" I mean the image of a nature that is not domesticated. Garrard, for example, defines the idea of "wilderness" as "nature in a state uncontaminated by civilisation" (*Ecocriticism* 59).

The tension between the idealization of a virgin landscape and the promise of progress through industrialization is at the core of the American pastoral during the eighteenth century. Based on the ambiguous relation between the city and the countryside, North American writers manifest the pressures of technological progress upon the landscape. They represent the countryside while incorporating the "symbol of the machine" (Marx 193). Withdrawal from the city is now but one stage in the pastoral journey to the countryside: "It begins in a corrupt city, passes through raw wilderness, and then, finally, leads back toward the city" (Marx 71). A dialectic that seems filled with contradictions shapes this new mode of pastoral.

Sarmiento quite possibly inherits from Cooper both the idea of wilderness as defining the landscape of the American continent and also the image of the empty plains to be accessed by pioneers and settlers. In the *Leatherstocking Tales* (1823-1841), Cooper narrates the life of frontiersman Natty Bumppo in the American wilderness. Composed of several books, the tales tells of Bumppo's experiences living away from cities. In them, the journey to the wilderness of

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[3] Paul Alpers' definition of the pastoral mode is enlightening. He suggests that "we will have a far truer idea of pastoral if we take its representative anecdote to be herdsmen and their lives, rather than landscape or idealized nature" (22). Terry Gifford also indicates the importance of herdsmen in defining the pastoral genre (1). This points to a subtle ecological problem in pastoral narratives and poems, for whereas critics such as Jonathan Bate in *Romantic Ecology* (1991) have read into its depictions of landscape a defence of nature, others such as Lawrence Buell in *The Environmental Imagination* (1996) have questioned its ideological ambivalence in legitimizing the colonizing projects of the New World.

the West is central. The son of Anglo-American parents, Bumppo is raised by Native Americans. His adventures imagine the life of pioneers, struggling to survive and finding in the woods a place to call home. In many ways these tales manifest the settler culture's "wish fulfilment inherent in the use of allusive rhetoric to empty and to fill new world environments" (Buell 73).

This is mostly clearly seen in *The Prairie* (1827), a book that forms part of the *Leatherstocking Tales*. In it Cooper begins by writing that American pioneers drew from society "seeking for the renewal of enjoyments which were rendered worthless in his eyes, when trammelled by the forms of human institutions" (11). The wilderness offers a place away from "human institutions," for it is an untamed land that is not yet contaminated with the anxieties and perversions of modern life. It is a place of "renewal," a place to start anew. This idea of a renewed life is also accompanied with abstract images of the plains as an empty land. The protagonist of the novel is "Pressed upon by time," for "The sound of the axe has driven him from his beloved forests to seek a refuge, by a species of desperate resignation, on the denuded plains that stretch to the Rocky Mountains" (Cooper viii). He seeks "refuge" from the encroaching civilization in the form of the "axe" cutting down "his beloved forests." The pastoral trope of retreat is latent in the motivations of Bumppo as he flees to the Great Plains. Unlike the other books in the series, *The Prairie* depicts the plains in abstract terms. The reader is often presented with landscapes that contain "forests" and "rivers," yet little else to establish the specificity of the land:

> In the little valleys, which, in the regular formation of the land, occurred at every mile of their progress, the view was bounded on two of the sides by the gradual and low elevations which give name to the description of prairie we have mentioned;

> while on the others, the meagre prospect ran off in long, narrow, barren perspectives, but slightly relieved by a pitiful show of coarse, though somewhat luxuriant vegetation. (Cooper 14)

The preceding passage speaks of "valleys," "land," "elevations," "prairie," and "vegetation" to describe the natural scene on which the narrative takes place. Aside from the term "prairie," the language seems geographically abstract, as if the narrator was a surveyor commenting on "elevations," "prospect," and "perspectives." Instead of describing the types of vegetation or trees that populate the Great Plains, the text evokes a generic landscape. Moreover, the term "prairie" is also not ecologically specific, for its previous mention in the book refers to its origins in the French language (Cooper vi). William Kelly argues that *The Prairie* represents the Great Plains as a "vacant landscape" (88). This abstract approach to describing landscape is also present in Sarmiento and Martínez Estrada, both of which will imagine the *pampas* as surveyors little interested in its ecosystem or biodiversity.

Sarmiento incorporates Cooper's abstract depiction of the land, although the wilderness is not so much a place of escape, but rather a place to flee from in search of civilization. He inverts the trope of escape by using the life of Facundo Quiroga as an indictment of the dangers of the wilderness. The character Facundo represents the anarchy of the countryside: "Facundo Quiroga enlaza y eslabona todos los elementos de desorden que hasta antes de su aparición estaban agitándose aisladamente en cada provincia" ("Facundo Quiroga connects and links all the elements of disorder that until before his appearance were stirring separately in each province"; 47). His biography provides a testimony of the problems of Argentina after its independence, an account of how the immense wilderness is not a place of respite as in European pastorals, but

rather a geography of disorder that needs to be tamed. Sarmiento represents the *pampas* as an obstacle to the influence of civilization. It is in that sense that they are a site of resistance to the values of an industrial society. Whereas Cooper emphasizes the significance of the wilderness as a place free from the anxieties and contradictions of urban life, Sarmiento sees in the *pampas* a land that has not been domesticated by European values. The plains are also a site of banditry—a place where *gaucho* leaders such as Facundo Quiroga or Juan Manuel Rosas roam free—and constitute a threat to "the entire state-formation process in Buenos Aires" (Dabove 63). Withdrawal from urban centres is a symptom of anarchy, fatal to the construction of Argentina.

Facundo is the son of a shepherd of the plains, a rural character that begins his military campaigns in the provinces and eventually makes his way into the city (132). Always threatening, the wilderness is a savage landscape that offers no respite. It is in the cities that Facundo finds safety and repose. In chapter five, Sarmiento begins his narration of Facundo's life with an episode in which the hero finds himself in the plains between the cities of San Luis and San Juan without his horse. As he enters the wilderness, the growls of a "tiger"[4] can be heard in the distance. Facundo is forced to run for his life, finding a low-lying tree to climb while the plains tiger circles his prey. In a final moment of the encounter, feral cat and *gaucho* lock eyes: "La postura violenta del gaucho, y la fascinación aterrante que ejercía sobre él la mirada sanguinaria, inmóvil del tigre, del que por una fuerza invencible de atracción no podía apartar los ojos, habían empezado a debilitar sus fuerzas" ("The violent posture of the gaucho, and the

[4] It is interesting to note that the term "tiger" to denote large felines in South America is recurrent in other writers of the Latin American plains. At times it denotes the predominant puma (which is the most widespread feline of the Americas), and at other times it refers to the jaguar. Most likely, Sarmiento is referring to the puma, for the jaguar is only present in a very limited area of Argentina, at the border between Brazil and Paraguay.

terrifying fascination that he exerted over him the sanguinary and still gaze of the tiger, from which an invincible force of attraction he could not look away, had begun to weaken his strength"; 129). Recognizing himself as prey, Facundo feels completely vulnerable. The misnomer "tigre" reveals his lack of knowledge of the feline species that inhabits the pampas, for there are no "tigers" in South America. The "tiger" he most likely is referring to is the puma or cougar. The specificity of the plains is covered with an orientalist perspective that describes the land using tropes generated by European to depict the Orient—the tiger is after all an indigenous species in India. Faced with this predator, Facundo becomes aware that there is no possible retreat to the plains. Rather, cities are the only "oasis of civilization" left to humans (66). Savage and terrible, the wilderness of the plains is a landscape from which humans are forced to withdraw. No idyllic landscapes of the *pampas* are depicted in *Facundo*, for the plains are a hostile environment from which civilized men must find repose in urban centres.

Important to the reversal of the retreat from the city trope is the portrayal of the *pampas* as a desert. Civilization and barbarism shape a dialectic antagonism that takes place "in the pampas of Argentina," as the subtitle of *Facundo* suggests. Indeed the problem of Argentina is to be found in the physical contours of its surrounding land: "El mal que aqueja a la República Argentina es la extensión: el desierto la rodea por todas partes" ("The sickness that the Republic of Argentina suffers is that of extension: the desert surrounds her on all sides"; 56). The plains are seen as a problem that necessitates the influence of civilization. The opposition between civilization and barbarism—between cities and wilderness—is translated into an antagonism of space, a tension between the surrounding plains and the urban centres represented by the city of Buenos Aires. Those plains that surround the capital are a "desert," a desolate and oppressive

wilderness: “El desierto las circunda a más o menos distancia, las cerca, las oprime; la naturaleza salvaje las reduce a un estrecho oasis de civilización enclavados en un llano inculto de centenares de millas cuadradas” (“The desert surrounds them at a greater or lesser distance, fences them in, oppresses them; the wilderness reduces them to a narrow oasis of civilization pinned in an uncivilized plain of hundreds of square miles ”; 66). Sarmiento deploys the terms “desierto,” “naturaleza salvaje,” and “llano” as synonyms in the phrase. All three are interchangeable, which reveals the environmental imaginary of the *pampas* as a “desert,” “wilderness,” and “plain.” Unlike Cooper, here the wilderness is not a place to escape the violence of urban life. The *pampas* are an inhospitable place that threatens civilized and industrious society.

Sarmiento’s insistence on one of the attributes of the *pampas* engages the readers in a representation of the biome that emphasizes space and scale. The following passage is very illustrative: “Allí la inmensidad por todas partes: inmensa la llanura, inmensos los bosques, inmensos los ríos, el horizonte siempre incierto, siempre confundiéndose con la tierra, entre celajes y vapores ténues, que no dejan, en la lejana perspectiva, señalar el punto en que el mundo acaba y principia el cielo” (“There the immensity is everywhere: immense the plains, immense the forests, immense the rivers, the horizon always uncertain, always blurring with the land, between faint clouds and vapours that do not allow, from a distant view, to identify the point at which the world ends and the sky begins”; 56). The size of the plains is repeatedly described as “immense,” deploying anaphora as a means to insist on the sheer scale of the territory. According to Madan, “Sarmiento appeals to the Humboldtian notion of immensity as he rewrites the Argentine land” (“Sarmiento the Geographer” 264). Notice how no specific description of the

biome is forthcoming in the passage. The passage cites "llanura," "bosques," and "ríos," all of which are generic terms in referring to landscape. Many places across the planet could fit the description of having "plains," "forests," and "rivers." None of the flora or fauna of the *pampas* is depicted—none of the more than 3,000 different plant species native to the biome (Medianeira Machado et al. 22). The land is instead presented in geometric and generic terms: immensity, horizon, and distance. If the *pampas* are a desert, it is not due to the lack of vegetation or an arid climate. They are imagined as a desert because of their immense size that makes them resistant to the development of an urban industry.

The depiction of the plains as a barren desert plays on a mythology of exclusion, where the land and its inhabitants are marginalized as the Other so as to bolster the urban lifestyle. Just as in the pastoral tradition, Sarmiento's readers are urbanites. The devaluation of the *pampas* as desert serves to generate an asymmetry between the wilderness and the city. This image enacts the interest of nineteenth-century *letrados* "making a determined effort to integrate and dominate entire national territories, to domesticate Nature" (Rama 60). Dabove further argues that the depiction of the *pampas* as a desert deploys a "politics of landscape" invested in "the birth of a moral-political community" (64). Represented as a desert, the plains become the outskirts of civilized urban centres. As borders, they become contested sites or resistance. The campaigns against the indigenous population take place in those desert lands that surround the "oasis" of civilization. Described as wastelands or deserts, these lands manifest the geopolitical ambitions of *Facundo*.

Published in 1933, *Radiografía de la pampa* constitutes a turning point in Martínez Estrada's work as a poet and essayist. It was during the years prior to its publication that he

began to recognize that Argentina was facing many of the challenges described in *Facundo* (Feustle 446). At the time he was a relatively unknown post office worker in Buenos Aires, having published only a few books of poetry, of which only *Argentina* (1927) garnered attention from critics. Yet Dinko Cvitanovic suggests that there is an important continuity between Martínez Estrada's poetry and prose (331). The Argentine author writes with an acute philosophical pessimism when considering Argentina and South America. He is particularly preoccupied with what he sees as the "vastness of the land" and its effects on the psychology of its inhabitants (Martínez Estrada 64). This preoccupation is not unlike that of Sarmiento in *Facundo*, so much so that they both examine the "problem of Argentina" by tracing the geographical contours of the land in tandem with the cultural manifestations of the nation.

The title of Martínez Estrada's book expresses some of its motifs in regards to the possible environmental images of the *pampas*. By "Radiografía" he proposes an examination that goes beyond the superficial, beyond the surface of a phenomenon ("Génesis e intención" 451). It also suggests a philosophical methodology that seeks the elements that lie at the root of a problem.[5] It attempts to reveal the osseous structures of the *pampas*; that is, the core problem of Argentina—much the same way a physician might request an x-ray of a patient. The image of the physician performing a medical examination also points to the assumption that there is something wrong with the patient that is Argentina. The *pampas* thus become the body of the nation, a body that is fractured beneath the surface. When examining the continent as a whole, Martínez Estrada writes that "Sobre estas tierras del Atlántico y el Pacífico, no sería posible

[5] This is part of the Latin American genre of "ensayo de interpretación." This genre is popular among many Latin American writers, including José Enrique Rodó, José Carlos Mariátegui, and Octavio Paz. These essayists delve into issues of national and cultural identities in the Americas.

contemplar el mapamundi sin sentir ancestrales escalofríos a lo largo de la médula, donde las edades geológicas han dejado inscritas las peripecias de la forma humana" ("On these lands of the Atlantic and Pacific, it would not be possible to contemplate their cartography without sensing the shivers along the marrow, where the geological ages have left inscribed the vicissitudes of the human form" 89). The symptoms of the "human form" reach down into the very "marrow" of the land. Notice how the author anticipates an important ecological notion, that of the Anthropocene. Human events are carved into the osseous structures of the land. Hence a radiography of the *pampas* displays those cuts and fractures that explain the pains suffered by Argentina. It is by considering the visible symptoms of the plains that Martínez Estrada attempts a diagnostic of the underlying sickness.

His examination also incorporates history, tracing the root of the problem from the arrival of Spanish colonizers until contemporary events. Each chapter is a single radiographic image at a given time during the history of the continent. The reader is offered different snapshots of the skeletal organization of the land. It is in that sense that it is similar to a genealogy of sorts, which is not surprising, given his interests in Friedrich Nietzsche's[6] later philosophy present in, for example, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (Cvitanovic 347). Each x-ray image of the *pampas* maps the origins of Argentina's ailment. Just as Nietzsche was invested in isolating the origins of Western values by establishing their genealogy, so does Martínez Estrada outline the evolution of a suffering Argentine society by compiling the x-ray images of the land.

This brings us to the latter half of the book's title—"de la pampa"—, which seems to indicate the importance of geography in *Radiografía*. This is yet another shared element with

[6] Martínez Estrada was well acquainted with Nietzsche's work, having published several articles on the German philosopher, as well as a monograph titled *Nietzsche* in 1947.

Facundo. As we have already seen, Sarmiento argues that the problem of Argentina is linked to its "extension" in the form of deserts that surround the entire nation (56). The characteristics of the land are important in the disorganization of the country and its constant oscillations between civilization and barbarism. Martínez Estrada also invokes the *pampas*, and he does so by using the lower case and singular form "pampa." This indicates that he is using the term broadly to portray plains regions in Argentina, from the Patagonia all the way to the Andean mountain range. His radiography is broadly directed at the plains geographies of South America, not just Argentina. The "problem of extension" is thus projected to the entire continent. However, geography is not as prominent in *Radiografía*, as it is in *Facundo*. A quick survey of the chapters reveals its abstract and philosophical framework: "Trapalanda," "Soledad," "Fuerzas primitivas," Buenos Aires," "Miedo," and "Seudoestructuras" are the titles of the six chapters included in *Radiografía*. Two of the chapters—"Trapalanda" and "Buenos Aires"—refer to cities in Argentina, one is a mythical city in the Patagonia and the other is the capital of the nation. The other chapters have titles that refer to categories in existential philosophy and psychoanalysis. It would seem, then, that geography is not as central as the title suggests.

Pollmann argues that Martínez Estrada is not interested in documenting the geographies of the *pampas*, but rather in deploying them as "a metonymy of Argentina" ("Génesis e intención" 451). Martínez Estrada writes that "Los espacios físicos y psicológicos son, entre los individuos, cambiantes y vacíos, porque no se puede pensar en el espacio sin pensar en el alma, ya que la extensión despoblada es como verdad sensible, soledad" ("The physical and psychological spaces are, between individuals, changing and empty, because space cannot be considered without thinking about the soul, since the unpopulated extension is as an experiential

truth, solitude"; Martínez Estrada 65). The plains represent the psychological space of Argentina, as a symbol to be populated with the anxieties of an emerging nation. Insofar as they have no value in themselves, the *pampas* are merely a vehicle for his discussion. Martínez Estrada is not committed to representing real geographies of the land, for the *pampas* are a psychological and imaginary landscape of Argentina. He *constructs* an imaginary of the plains on the foundations of *Facundo*. This is an important aspect of the environmental imaginaries of the *pampas*, for it sets up a *tabula rasa* of the plains on which to construct a series of images that subordinate the biome to other ideological interests.

Although there are important instances in which the ecological specificities of the pampas emerge in the text—especially that of the *ombú* tree that I will consider later on—, *Radiografía* offers an abstract and geometric portrayal of the pampas where the land is imagined in terms of its extension and size. This creates at times a negative view of the plains, and at other times it presents the *pampas* as a site of ecological resistance. Martínez Estrada writes the following passage that expresses this ambivalence towards the land: "Por dentro de todos y por sobre todos está la naturaleza: ese campo liso, monótono, eterno. Y el ser humano vive en su superficie una existencia de geometría plana" ("Within and above everyone is nature: those flat, monotonous, and eternal fields. And human beings live an existence of flat geometry on its surface"; 74). In the first phrase, "nature" is considered as omnipresent. It is all around us and inside everyone. Interestingly, it is also "above everyone," suggesting that it is superior to human beings. There seems to be a vertical hierarchy. Nature overpowers humans. After the semicolon, the reader is presented with an image of that "nature" that is "Within and above everyone," an image that presents a "flat, monotonous, and eternal fields." The description of plains as "flat" and

"monotonous" is commonplace in the literatures of the plains. The former emphasizes what is often the most salient aspect of such topographies—their lack of variation in elevation or relief. The latter points to a negative value ascribed to the land, that of not offering perceptual stimulation and becoming repetitive. These two adjectives are not surprising, yet the last one is striking. An "eternal" land evokes a place with divine properties. When linked to the idea of a nature that is "Within and above everyone," it is difficult not to imagine a metaphysical entity similar to the Christian God or perhaps the Platonic Realm of Ideas. The *pampas* that Martínez Estrada is imagining are not a physical environment, but rather a metaphysical idea that is not far detached from geometric ideals. His portrayal of the land is literally filtering it from all its specificities, so as to arrive at abstract notions that hardly resemble it. These plains are merely a "surface" on which humans "live an existence of flat geometry." In other words, the pampas are not considered a place—a location that is filled with meaning and symbols that populate our imaginations—and instead become an abstract surface upon which to play out the tensions between civilization and barbarism in Argentine national identity.

Radiografía begins with the provocative statement that raises the important question as to the role of images in experiencing the land: "El nuevo mundo, recién descubierto, no estaba localizado aún en el planeta, ni tenía forma ninguna. Era una caprichosa extensión de tierra poblada de imágenes" ("The new world, recently discovered, was not yet located anywhere on the planet, and did not have any form either. It was a capricious extension of land populated by images"; 5). Aside from the radically colonial and Eurocentric premise of the "new world" being "recently discovered," what is particularly pertinent in the cited passage is the fact that the land is abstracted of any autochthonous elements. It is a formless space, a "capricious extension of

land." The use of the word "extension" connects Martínez Estrada's essay to Sarmiento's *Facundo*. Martínez Estrada adds the adjective "capricious," which suggests the fickle features of the American continent. There is a latent feminization of the land in the use of the adjective, for it is subject to the imaginations of the men that arrive at its margins as colonizers. Martínez Estrada writes that "Sobre una tierra inmensa, que era la realidad imposible de modificar, se alzarían las obras precarias de los hombres" ("On an immense land, that was a reality impossible of modifying, would emerge the precarious works of men"; 6). Unstable and capricious, the land is worked on by "men."

It is the land as an "extension" that is most recurrent throughout the essay. I would argue that the *pampas* are not just a "metonymy" but also a surface upon which Martínez Estrada projects the problems of Argentina. The following passage reveals this geometric imagery of the *pampas*:

> Aquí el campo es extensión y la extensión no parece ser otra cosa que el desoblamiento de un infinito interior, el coloquio con Dios del viajero. Sólo la conciencia de que se anda, la fatiga y el deseo de llegar, dan la medida de esta latitud que parece no tenerla. Es la pampa; es la tierra en que el hombre está solo como un ser abstracto que hubiera de recomenzar la historia de la especie—o de concluirla. (7)

> Here the country is extension, and the extension does not seem something other that the unfolding of an infinite interior, the traveler's conversation with God. Only the conscience of walking, of fatigue, and the desire of arriving, give a measure to this latitude that seems not to have one. It is the *pampa*; it is the land in which man is

> alone as an abstract being that would have to begin anew the history of the species—or to conclude it.

The term "extension" is a term that is firmly anchored in a spatial and geometric conception of landscape. The rich philosophical references in the text manifest Martínez Estrada's intellectual influences (Cvitanovic 347). Martínez Estrada also sees himself as an untimely critic of the problems of Argentina at the turn of the twentieth century. They also reveal the abstract manner in which the *pampas* are portrayed. These plains are not so much a region, but an ontological space where the being of the Argentine man is faced with the challenge of beginning or concluding the "history of the species."

This geometric imagining of the plains is linked to the possession of the land, much the same way that Sarmiento expressed in *Facundo*:

> El afán de ocupar en poco tiempo todo el territorio, de recorrerlo, de galoparlo, diseminó un número pequeño de gente en muchas leguas. De esa posición galáctica de los pueblos surgió una necesidad intrínseca que daría su norma a la vida argentina; la extensión, la superficie, la cantidad, el crédito. El latifundio fue la forma de propiedad adecuada al alma del navegante de tierra y mar, y la forma propia del cultivo y del aprovechamiento del suelo. (42)

> The desire to occupy the territory in a short period of time, of roaming through it, of galloping through it, disseminated a small number of people over many leagues. From that galactic position of the peoples emerged an intrinsic need that would create the norm of Argentine life; the extension, the surface, the quantity, the credit. The

> latifundia was the adequate form of property for the soul of the navigator of land and sea, and the very form of cultivation and exploitation of the land.

The words used portray Argentine life are very pertinent: "extension," "surface," "quantity," and "credit." These abstract concepts are all anchored in the forms of "exploitation of the land." The Spaniards actually gave the name "Argentina" because they believed in the silver they believed was found in that region. It is significant that the explanation as to why latifundia type of estates emerged in Argentina is based on these abstract concepts. Martínez Estrada will go as far as to argue that the land was converted into a "metaphysical value" (14). Quite literally, the land is stripped of its materiality and turned into something that can be economically manipulated, into "credit." It is an "intrinsic need," one that forces Argentine society to imagining its surrounding lands as a metaphysical space.

This is central to understanding the role of dominant environmental imaginaries. Martínez Estrada is constructing an image of the *pampas* that revolves around abstract ideas and notions, not on the specificity of the biome. His readers come to know these plains as if they were "extension" and "surface," not as a grassland or a particular topography. Much the same way Sarmiento acknowledged Cooper's genius in representing the landscape of the Americas as a battle for possession of territory, so does Martínez Estrada reveal a similar representation of the *pampas*. These plains have been imagined since *Facundo* as a scenario on which the drama of the possession for the land plays out, one in which the land is just a "surface" that can be manipulated and altered for economic returns. Having their physical presence stripped away, the plains lose their real ecologies in favour of Eurocentric values. An abstract surface can be exploited, modified, measured, and sold without any real consequences beyond its economic

value. Precisely, this emptying of the plains leads to its portrayal as a desert, an image that is far removed from its ecological characteristics. Even if it is a dominant geography in Argentine culture, no such "deserts" ever existed (Rodríguez 85).

When describing the life of "pioneers," Martínez Estrada explains that their incessant attempts at conquering nature were motivated by the vacant plains: "Y en realidad era la pampa vacía que le hostigaba a caminar o detenerse" ("And it was the empty *pampa* that harassing them to march or cease"; 41). Notice the adjective "vacía" used to describe the *pampa*. That metaphysical space of extensions, quantities, and surfaces can only be "empty." The same way geometric planes are "empty," so are the *pampas*. Moreover, the plains are negatively described as "harassing" pioneers into action. What little agency these lands ascribed is basically used to harass and force humans. It is in this sense that they are undomesticated lands. Untamed yet vacant, the *pampas* are a geometric wilderness. Such emptiness is later linked to being described as a desert. Martínez Estrada writes that "Despoblación y desierto son correlativos de la superterritorialidad; y viceversa" ("Unpopulated areas and deserts are correlative of superterritoriality, and vice versa"; 65). As in other passages of *Radiografía*, the language used to describe the region is often scientific, which further accentuates its abstract dimension. Described as a "desert" and "unpopulated," the *pampas* are then considered "correlative" to large extensions of land. Just as in *Facundo*, the language deployed makes the depiction of the pampas a "marketable geography," one that is built on the rhetoric of an empty land. When encountering pseudoscientific explanations such as the preceding passage, the reader is impressed with the rigorous tone. It does not attempt to be grand and sublime in the Humboldtian tradition of geography, but rather presents itself as a clinical probing of the ailments that can be found

beneath the surface of the *pampas*. The last phrase of *Radiografía* bears witness to Martínez Estrada's approach as a physician of culture: "Tenemos que aceptarla con valor, para que deje de perturbarnos; traerla a la conciencia, para que se esfume y podamos vivir en salud" ("We have to accept it with courage, so that it ceases to perturb us; become conscious of it, so that it will disappear and we might live in good health"; 256).

There is one striking instance in the book that introduces a reference to a specific tree found in the pampas, the so ombú or *Phytolacca dioica* tree. Indigenous to that biome, it is an evergreen tree that grows a large canopy of a diameter of close to 15 meters. It is widespread throughout subtropical regions in the south of Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Argentina (Pirondo et al. 69). Interestingly, the term "ombú" has not been linked to Guaraní or any other indigenous language (Pirondo et al 69). Martínez Estrada writes the following passage about the relation between the ombú and the pampas as deserts:

> El árbol de esta llanura, el ombú, tampoco es oriundo de ella. Es un árbol que sólo concuerda con el paisaje por las raíces; esa raíz atormentada y en parte descubierta, dice del viento del llano. Las ramas corresponden al dibujo de la selva. Bien se ve que es de tierra montuosa, quebrada. Ha venido marchando desde el norte, como un viajero solitario; y por eso es soledad en la soledad. Se vino con un pedazo de selva al hombro como un linyera con su ropa. Lo que rodea al ombú se expresa en signos de otro idioma; grande y sin igual, necesita del desierto en torno para adquirir su propia extensión. (71)

> The tree of these plains, the ombú, is not native to these lands. It is a tree that only fits in the landscape through its roots; that tormented root and partially exposed, speaks of the wind in the plains. The branches correspond to the drawing of the jungle. One can see that it is from a hilly and fractured land. It has marched from the north, as a solitary traveller; and that is why it is solitude within solitude. It came with a piece of the jungle on its shoulders, as a vagrant carrying his clothes. What surrounds the ombú is expressed in the signs of another language; large and without equal, it needs the desert around it to acquire its own extension.

Rather than explain that the tree is native of the plains in Argentina, Martínez Estrada chooses to describe the ombú as a "vagrant" that arrived in the *pampas* from the jungles to the north. He is factually wrong, since the tree is native to the region. In its lush foliage and large canopy, it seems not to fit into the deserted landscape of the plains. However, its "exposed" and "tormented" roots are representative of the harsh landscape. This comparison sets up the desolate image of the *pampas*. The personification of the ombú is ambivalent, for it imagines the tree both as a "solitary traveller" and a "vagrant." It is also considered "large and without equal." Perhaps the tree is like a colonial settler who has arrived from far away, only to settle in these empty lands. In other words, the ombú is depicted as a foreign settler, at once effacing its role as an indigenous species in the biome and justifying the presence of colonizers attempting to survive in that seemingly forlorn land.

Notice, however, that aside from the name of the tree, the reader is not offered much of a description of the tree itself, which is very striking when seen in the plains. The personification of the tree is dominant throughout the passage. The last phrase also elicits the theme of

possession of the land in abstract terms. The ombú needs the desert to "acquire its own extension." It seems like the tree is playing out the Argentine problem of the vastness of the land and the struggle for its possession. It manifests the correlation between the pampas as desert, the lack of human population, and "superterritoriality." And when Martínez Estrada describes in more detail the ombú, it is devalued as "thick," "tough," and "worthless" (71). This contrasts with the traditional use of the tree, one that reveals its value as an ecological resource. The inhabitants of Ibará, for example, use the trunk and branches of the tree as fuel and bleach to clean clothes (Pirondo et al. 71). Although this might not have been known by Martínez Estrada, it reveals how the representation of a particular species of flora can run counter to its ecological niche.

The geometric wilderness of the pampas thus sustains the image of the plains as a desert, a negative portrayal of the biome that is an abstract construction that responds to Martínez Estrada's philosophical interests in sustaining a dialogue with Sarmiento. Both writers construct and establish an environmental imaginary that contrasts with the ecological and geographical realities of the biome. Neither describes the *pampas* as a rich grasslands, a unique ecosystem that is threatened by its overexploitation by ranching and agricultural enterprises. Instead they build an image that emphasizes abstract notions of space, such as extension, horizon, surface, and immensity. *Facundo* begins stripping away the materiality of the ecosystem by reversing the pastoral trope of retreat, transforming the landscape into a threatening wilderness similar to a large desert. Drawing from Cooper and Humboldt, Sarmiento imagines the plains so as to legitimize the campaign of civilization in modernizing the rural regions of Argentina. The possession of the land becomes the core struggle of the nation he envisions—an issue that

translates into the problem of extension. *Radiografía* takes the abstract representation of the pampas to its radical consequences, inheriting from Sarmiento the problem of extension and imagining a geometric wilderness on which the most predominant aspects of the land are its superterritorial surfaces.

The environmental imaginaries of these two texts clearly demonstrate how the images of the plains established in both are abstracted from the real geographies they name. The *pampas* as a desert is an ideological construction that devalues its ecological value, while it legitimizes the possession and exploitation of the land. Moreover, it generates a dominant mode of knowing that biome insofar as readers of *Facundo* and *Radiografía* recreate its landscape as an empty space and desert. Both texts have deeply shaped the way other writers and poets have depicted the plains, many of which continue to describe these flat topographies as immense deserts. The plains as deserts are perhaps one of the most recurrent images in the literatures of the plains, one that appears in the depictions of the *sertões*, *altiplanos*, and *llanos* of Latin America. It is an invaluable entry into the tension between imagined and real geographies in our construction of an ecological knowledge of these varied and biodiverse biomes.

Las Altiplanicies or Where the Chicalote Grows

> Tal vez vengan el hambre y la peste, pero pasarán los días, vendrán las lluvias y las heladas, llegarán de nuevo los calores. Y el altiplano continuará su marcha horizontal a lo largo de los siglos y de las cordilleras.
>
> -Raúl Botelho Gosálvez, *Altiplano*

The *altiplanicies* have a significant place in the environmental imaginary of the plains in Latin America, especially in Mexico, where the Sierra Madre mountain range levels off into the elevated central plains, and in South America, where the Andes open into the *altiplano*. I will specifically target those two regions—the Central Mexican plateau and the Andean *Puna*—while focusing on the works of three important writers in Latin America: Ciro Alegría, Juan Rulfo, and João Guimarães Rosa. Although physically similar to other flat geographies, the depictions of these plains in Latin American literature present some distinctive nuances which allow for a comparatist approach that bridges national boundaries and emphasizes the shared environmental images of the *altiplanicies* throughout the continent.

From an ecological perspective, these elevated plains often have a cold climate, given their altitude. I will consider the terms "altiplanicie" and "altiplano" as denoting a topography of high land or high plain. Both words are geographically rich, for they refer to a variety of regions throughout Latin America. For example, the Central Mexican plateau is commonly named the "altiplanicie mexicana." This high plain extends between the Sierra Madre Oriental and Sierra Madre Occidental mountain ranges, varying in elevation from 1000 to 2000 metres (Merrill 83).

The term "altiplano" also denotes a specific region in South America. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* describes the "altiplano" as a "high plateau" in the Andes mountain range in Peru and Bolivia ("Altiplano"). These high plains in the Andes are also known by their Quechua name "Puna," a name that indirectly refers to altitude sickness or *soroche*. In Peru, the *Puna* is found at elevations above 3,900 metres, where temperatures are "below freezing at night and seldom rising above 16°C by day" (Hudson 68).

I will examine the environmental imaginaries of the altiplanicies through the close readings of Alegría's *Los perros hambrientos*, Rulfo's "Luvina" in *El Llano en llamas*[7], and Guimarães Rosa's short story "Páramo" which appeared in *Estas estórias*. These three narratives depict the precariousness of life in the high plains. They place humans, animals, and plants in inhospitable locations, where the struggle to remain alive is a testimony to never taking the environment for granted. They offer a very different picture of the land, one that manifests a negative aesthetic different from other dominant images of the plains. The image of an eroded and cold land is an environmental depiction that acutely reminds readers of the often ambivalent yet intimately tied relations between living beings, especially to the weather of the region. It reveals the precarious existence of humans in the *altiplanicies*, but also the recalcitrant anthropocentrism in seeing the land as lacking value when it is not suitable for human habitation. These environmental images seem to sway between the need for respecting the powerful

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[7] The first translation of the book *El Llano en llamas* in Brazil by Eliane Zagury was titled *O Planalto em Chamas* (1977). Theresa Katarina Bachmann argues that while such a translation sustains the "reference" of the original, it also loses the alliteration of the title (400). I would moreover argue that the translation offers an interesting insight as to the geographic imaginary of the plains in Rulfo's collection of short stories, one that supports interpreting the flat lands in *El Llano en llamas* as "high plains." In Brazil the term "planalto central" also refers to the region where the capital, Brasília, is found. In fact, most of the plains regions in Brazil are considered "planaltos" or "high plains". Except for the Pantanal, the Amazon river basin, and the coastal plains in Rio Grande do Sul, the plains found in Brazil are elevated, although not nearly as elevated as the high plains in the Sierra Madre and Andean mountain ranges.

presence of nature and the hubris of devaluing a biome because of its lack of resources for human use.

The depictions of the *altiplanicies* in *Los perros hambrientos*, "Luvina," and "Páramo" raise our ecological awareness by foregrounding the horrifying aspects of the environment that threaten the lives of humans, animals, and plants. The haunting aesthetic of these narratives makes humans aware of their precarious place in the environment. It reveals how all living beings are enmeshed in the world, dependent on each other and the climate for survival. It also manifest the inherent anthropocentrism depicting the high plains as "ruined." Eroded as they may be, they are but the product of the climatic conditions of such high elevations. In *Los perros hambrientos*, for example, the awareness that the prolonged drought affects each and every one of the beings found in the high plains generates a despondent atmosphere that ironically binds humans and canines in the same tragic fate. In "Luvina" and "Páramo" the narrative has unexpected shifts that create an asphyxiating atmosphere for the human protagonist walking through a landscape of ruins. The pessimistic narration of events opens up a crack through which the reader is obliged to come to terms with what Morton suggests is the task of ecological thought, "to figure out how to love the inhuman: not just the nonhuman (that's easier) but the radically strange, dangerous" (*The Ecological Thought* 92). In my close reading of the three texts, I will bring out the these ambivalences in their environmental imaginaries—their attempts to encounter the nonhuman through literary depictions of the high plains.

Alegría's entry into the Latin American canon came about with his ambitious novel *El mundo es ancho y ajeno*, which in 1941 was the winner of the prestigious contest hosted by the Farrar and Rinehart publisher in conjunction with the Panamerican Union. His award-winning

novel is often considered by critics to be Alegría's best work, as discussed by Cornejo Polar in his prologue to *El mundo es ancho y ajeno* (xviii). Not much is known, however, about a Bolivian writer who also participated in the Farrar and Rinehart contest that same year, submitting a book set in the Andean high plains and dealing with themes that are very similar to those that appear in Alegría's book. This largely ignored writer is Raúl Botelho Gosálvez, and the novel he submitted is titled *Altiplano* (1940). Unlike his Peruvian counterpart, Gosálvez did not even merit the mention of the adjudicating committee of the contest (Botelho Gosálvez 7). Some critics even went as far as to denounce the novel as plagiarizing Alegría's earlier novel *Los perros hambrientos* (Vargas-Barón 77). Although both *Altiplano* and *Los perros hambrientos* share similar themes—especially in regard to the issue of indigenous rights—the main aspect that distinguishes them, from an ecocritical perspective, is the documentary fashion with which Gosálvez portrays the high plains. The first chapter of *Altiplano* is entirely dedicated to describing the region and its indigenous traditions. It has strong regionalist overtones as the narrator describes the northern and southern regions, as well as the different seasons of the Andean *Puna* (12-20). Although *Los perros hambrientos* also emphasizes the importance of the natural environment in the lives of indigenous communities, the book is not documentary in its portrayal of the high plains. I can only speculate as to how this difference might have affected the results of the contest, sidelining *Altiplano* in Latin American fiction of the twentieth century. The coincidence of two writers focusing on the same geographic referent who nevertheless enjoyed varying degrees of success suggests the presence of other voices whose environmental imaginaries are relegated to the periphery.

Alegría himself confessed that his *opera prima* is based on a chapter of his previous novel: "Allá por el año 1938, residiendo en Chile, escribía mi novela *Los perros hambrientos*, y estaba por titular uno de los capítulos 'El mundo es ancho y ajeno', cuando se me ocurrió que había una novela allí" ("Back in 1938, while residing in Chile, I was writing my novel *Los perros hambrientos*, and I was about to title one of the chapters 'Broad and Alien is the World,' when I realized that there was a novel to be written from that chapter"; *El mundo* 5). The chapter to which Alegría is referring to is the eleventh one titled "Un pequeño lugar en el mundo" ("A Small Place in the World"). Scholars such as Cornejo Polar have pointed out the similarities in narrative structure between *El mundo es ancho y ajeno* and *Los perros hambrientos* (xv). Another aspect that connects both novels is the portrayal of nature as an imposing and merciless force (Cornejo Polar xviii; Villanes 54). I analyze Alegría's *Los perros hambrientos*, because its acute focus on the oppressive environment of the *altiplanos* most clearly highlights the image of a dismal and ruined environment. It is in this novel that the environment becomes a powerful agent in the form of an impending drought. The environment is portrayed as oppressive and telluric. My ecocritical analysis follows in the steps of Jorge Marcone, whose article on the ecology of *Serpiente de oro* (1936) sets up a nuanced discussion of the role of the jungle biome as a place of encounter with nature. Marcone analyzes the "political ecology" of narratives of the Amazon, especially Alegría's first novel that takes place in the Peruvian border with the jungle (299). He argues that the "returns to nature" are also projects of exploitation, of extraction of natural resources—an aspect that displays their political dimension (300). Do the depictions of the altiplanicies as a ruined and eroded land not the result of a "political ecology" that values a biome for its resources?

Los perros hambrientos narrates the life of human communities in the Andes as the drama of a prolonged drought unfolds over the land. It is original in its narration of events, offering the perspectives of human characters and of the dogs that accompany them. Although there is an overarching thread to the story that can be traced through each of the chapters, the narrator often embeds stories within stories, seemingly wandering from the central plot, yet at the same time drawing from the oral culture of the Incas in the way it tells the story (Villanes 74-79; Larrú 53; Zubizarreta 162). The narrative takes place somewhere in the Andean *Puna* and recounts the struggles of an indigenous community as it faces the impending drought. Central to the book are the melancholic depictions of landscape which create a mood of despondency. The very first passage of the novel sets the sombre tone of the environment in the Andes, while provocatively altering a seemingly pastoral landscape: "El ladrido monótono y largo, agudo hasta ser taladrante, triste como un lamento, azotaba el vellón albo de las ovejas conduciendo la manada. Esta, marchando a trote corto, trisca el ichu duro, moteaba de blanco la rijosidad gris de la cordillera andina ("The monotonous and long bark, acute to the point of drilling, sad as a lament, beat on the white fleece of sheep and steered the flock. The flock, trotting through the dry grasses, would paint of white the grey bellicosity of the Andean mountain range"; 7). An aural experience prompts the beginning of the book. It is not a pleasant sound, but rather a barking that is "acute to the point of drilling." Rather than begin with a visual cue of landscape, the narrator chooses to describe the sounds of a dog barking. This creates an eerie atmosphere, one in which "monotonous," "long," and "drilling" sounds fill the air. The first phrase also is difficult to imagine, for the sensorial images are contrasting, jutting out against each other. The bark is "monotonous" and "acute," two adjectives that are hard to conceive.

The language deployed is erudite, almost baroque in its choice of words, such as "vellón albo" instead of "lana blanca" or "trisca" instead of "pisar." The recurrence of "dr" and "tr" sounds in the passage accentuates the "drilling" barks that echo: "ladrido," "taladrante," "triste," "trote," and "trisca." The barking "lashed" the sheep that are grazing in the fields. Almost hidden in the rough sounds and stark contrasts of the passage is a Quechua term that refers to a particular type of flora found in the high plains, the "ichu." The DEQ identifies the term as a simple grass of the Andean high plains that is often grazed by South American camelids such as the llama or alpaca ("ichu"). It reveals a latent appreciation of the indigenous knowledge of the land. The adjective used to describe this specific flora is "duro," once again emphasizing the harshness of the environment.

The one visual cue that is offered in the passage derives from the contrast of light tones, from the white of the sheep and the grey of the mountains. The image begins as if about to offer a tranquil landscape, for the sheep "would paint of white" ("moteaban de blanco") the Andes. That image, however, is quickly disrupted by the foreboding view of the "grey bellicosity" of the mountains. It is a tense environment. It is not only conflicting, but is also latently sexualized by the term "rijosidad." Something that is "rijoso" is said to be restless and also lustful. Succinctly, the narrator of *Los perros hambrientos* chooses an ambiguously sexual term that suggests the larger theme of drought in the high plains in terms of fertility and barrenness. The land is not abundant, but ominous and sterile—a wasteland. By establishing a stark contrast between serene pastoral cues and a haunting vision of the Andes, the narrator deconstructs the image of a peaceful and bountiful landscape. What at first might seem like a bucolic painting of nature—

with its flock of sheep spattered as with a brush on a canvas—transforms into an uneasy and charged environment where the mountains loom grey in the background.

Even the shepherd Antuca manifests her despondency when the dog stops barking and she suffers an "inmenso y pesado silencio" ("immense and heavy silence"; 8). Life in the Andes high plains is dependent on its climatic circumstances, awaiting for what never seems to arrive. Each day the shepherds watch "la convulsionada crestería andina, el rebaño balante, el cielo, ora azul, ora nublado y amenazador" ("the convulsed Andean crest, the bleating flock, the sky, now blue, now cloudy and menacing"; 10). Just as monotonous as the barking at the beginning, so does daily life drag on between tending the flocks and keeping an eye for the distant sky that changes tonality. Shifting from "blue" to "cloudy and menacing," the sky is charged and dynamic. The mention of the "convulsive Andean crest" suggests a figurative link between the land and a particular bird, one whose crest is a sign of violence. This link will become more pronounced later on in the narrative, when the connection between the Andean condor and the high plains emerges as the representation of the inhospitable environment that preys on the living corpses humans and dogs alike. When the narrator explores the life of Antuca, a brief and seemingly cursory commentary is introduced toward the end of the first chapter, one that reminds the reader of the contrast with pastoral idylls: "Así son los idilios en la cordillera" ("Thus are the idylls in the mountain range"; 12). The notion of the idyll is connected to that of the classical pastoral genre, especially since Theocritus's *Idylls.* Along with the term bucolic, the idyll has been linked to the pastoral during the Hellenistic period (Garrard *Ecocriticism* 35). Alegría's phrase suggests that the Andean range is an idyll, altering the tradition context of the pastoral from fields to the mountain ranges of South America.

As the narrative progresses, the oppressive tension foreshadowed in the opening passage looms heavily in the depictions of landscape. It is in the same chapter that inspired *El mundo es ancho y ajeno*—chapter XI titled "Un pequeño lugar del mundo"—that the environmental imaginary of the high plains emerges with force:

> El cielo, a esas horas, estaba despejado. Demasiado bien sabían los indios de lo que se trataba, especialmente el Mashe, cuya ancianidad había, como es natural, visto mucho. El viento cruzaba dando potentes aletazos y graznando como una ave mala. La puna erguía sus negros y altos picachos en una actitud de acecho hacia el Norte, hacia el Sur, hacia Occidente y Oriente. Por ningún lado cuajaba el mensaje de la vida. (115)

> At that time, the sky was clear. The natives knew all too well what it was about, especially Mashe, whose old age had, as is natural, seen much. The wind crossed, giving off potent wingbeats and cawing like a malignant bird. The *puna* straightened up its black and high peaks in a stalking stance toward the North, toward the South, toward Occident and Orient. Nowhere did life's message congeal.

The passage begins with a concise depiction of a "clear" sky. By announcing the lack of clouds, emphasis is placed on the weather; more specifically, it highlights the impending drought. The indigenous community looks to the sky for clues as to their future coexistence. They are aware of their dependence on the environment. Introduced in the third sentence is the recurrent image of the wind across the *Puna*. The image exudes hostility. The wind is imagined as a bird that may only bring suffering as hinted at by a powerful beating of wings and its foreboding cawing. The

use of the suffix -azos instead of the regular ending -eos in the word “aletazos” emphasizes the violence with which the wind crosses the land.

Although no specific bird is named, it is most likely a condor, a bird that was considered sacred by the Incas and is a predominant species of the New World vulture in the Andes. According to the *Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia,* the Andean condor or *Vultur gryphus* is one of the “largest of the living birds” with a wingspan of almost three metres, able bring down large prey such as deer (“Condor”). In fact, the DRAE explains that the Spanish word “cóndor” is derived from the Quechua “cúntur” (“condor”). Its presence in *Los perros hambrientos* is a reminder of indigenous language and knowledge in the environmental imaginary of the high plains. At the beginning of the narrative, the condor is introduced as a bird of ill omen by one of the indigenous characters named Mateo (29). Here the menacing metaphor of the wind as a condor is accentuated in the sentence that follows in which the *Puna* is portrayed as a predator “stalking” its prey everywhere in the region. Transformed into a condor itself, the high plains “straightened its black and high peaks” to hunt for its prey. In the original text, there is a play with the words “erguía” and “picachos” that fosters the link between the bird of prey and the *altiplanos*. The verb “erguir” may mean to “straighten up” or “stand up,” although it is often used to describe the “straightening of the neck” (“erguir”). Not unlike a condor as it “straightens up” and opens its wings, so does the *Puna* straighten itself before taking flight. Notice that the “peaks” are black, just as the plumage and beak of the condor. Moreover, the word “picachos” is similar in sound to that of “pico” (“beak”) and “penacho” (“plumage”). The identification of the Andean plateaus with the preying condor reaches its most violent climax in the scene where Mateo’s son Damian dies of hunger, while the dog Mañu defends his corpse from a stalking

condor: “El cóndor abría el pico y estiraba el cuello lleno de rabia también, pero luego recobraba su actitud normal y permanecía, ante los ladridos, con la dignidad precisa de un ser que domina los aires” (“The condor opened its beak and straightened its neck, also filled with rage, but then regained its normal behaviour and remained with the dignity of a being that dominates the air, even in the face of the dog barking”; 149). Here the difficult and tense relation between the predatory bird and domesticated canine is representative of the vexed relationship between the land and the human. The confrontation between condor and dog—domesticated by humans—places in stark relief the ominous presence of the *altiplanicies*. To humans, the high plains are a source of struggle that makes their lives all the more precarious.

The shift from what might have been a pastoral landscape into a nightmarish world of death is found toward the end of the novel, when the narrator describes at length in an intensely poetic passage the effects of the drought upon the high plains. The arrival of long days without rain—“inexorable and oppressive”—affects both “humans and animals” (127). It is the common suffering that binds all creatures of the *altiplanicies*. The prolonged drought foreground the large scale of their environmental crisis, making everyone aware of the agency of nature. The narrator explains that “Toda la naturaleza profería las fatales palabras de la sed y la muerte” (“All of nature voiced the fatal words of thirst and death”; 127). Through this natural catastrophe, the *altiplanos* are given a voice through which to express its woes and reach all of its constituents that are enmeshed within it:

> ‘No llueve’, gimió un agonizante hilo de agua desde lo más profundo de un cauce. ‘No llueve’, repitieron los alisos de las orillas, dejando caer sus hojas y contorsionando sus brazos. ‘No llueve’, corearon las yerbas, desgreñándose,

> amarilleando y confundiéndose con la tierra. Hasta el caserón de la hacienda llegó la voz. 'No llueve', admitieron los altos y severos eucaliptos que lo rodeaban, haciendo sonar sus hojas con un ruido metálico. (127)
>
> 'It does not rain', groans an agonizing thread of water from the deepest riverbed. 'It does not rain', repeat the trees of the river banks, letting their leaves fall and contorting their arms. 'It does not rain', chanted the grasses, becoming dishevelled, yellowing and becoming blurred with the ground. Even in the big house of the estate arrived the voice. 'It does not rain', admitted the high and severe eucalyptus trees that circled it, making their leaves resound with a metallic noise.

The anaphora "No llueve" that prompts each of the phrases in the passage is like an echo that reverberates the voice of nature as it extends throughout the region. Not unlike the barking at the beginning of the narrative, here the repetition drills into the land. Four times is the simple phrase repeated, and each time it becomes all the more resounding. Although their suffering is voiced through a human language, the repetition of the short phrase only adds to the oppressive atmosphere. The drought has arrived in full force.

The land expresses its suffering as a haunting chorus of streams, grasses, and trees. The personification of nature displays human agony. Trees suffer by "contorting their arms" and grasses become "dishevelled." Most haunting of all is the image of the solemn eucalyptus trees —which symbolize death—as they surround the estate and make "their leaves resound with a metallic noise." A deathly procession that encroaches upon a human household holds one final ritual. No matter how distanced these wealthy mestizos might be from the rest of the indigenous

communities and the harshness of life in the *altiplanicies*, nature slowly closes its grip. There is no escape, only the awareness that the drought binds everyone and everything together in an uncanny relation: “Perros y gentes se aglutinaban todavía en la desgracia” (“Dogs and people were bound even in the tragedy”; 135).

And finally the passage follows with the ironic contrast between what could have been a pastoral landscape, yet is actually a deathly cemetery of the high plains: “Un sol bruñido resplandecía en un bello cielo azul. Se vivía bajo una cubierta de cristal que hubiera sido alegre de no haberse tenido la visión de la tierra. Ésta comenzaba a pintar por encañadas y laderas, por lomas y bajíos, con yerba muriente y esqueletos de árboles, una desolada sinfonía en gris” (“A polished sun shone in the beautiful blue sky. Life continued beneath a crystal ceiling that would have been joyous had it not consisted also of a vision of the land. The latter began painting by ravines and mountain sides, by hills and plains, with dying grass and skeletons of trees, a desolate symphony in grey”; 127). Beginning with a “polished sun” and “beautiful blue sky” only serves to contrast with the “desolate symphony in grey” that ends the passage. The shift from what “would have been joyous” to a dying landscape expresses the sombre tone of the novel. The *altiplanicies* are a horrifying land that preys upon the living. Whereas the pristine sky opens to a sublime vista, the high plains paint a depressing world—nature’s canvass is smeared with “dying grass and skeletons of trees.” As Villanes explains, the principal drama of *Los perros hambrientos* is the land, “generous and good when it rains, yet cruel” if it does not rain (52). These images of the high plains produce an awareness of the scale of an environmental crisis and its effects on humans, animals, and vegetation.

The effects of a ruined landscape upon its inhabitants is also a theme in Rulfo's short story "Luvina," which appeared in the collection of short stories titled *El Llano en llamas* in 1953. The story captures what Carlos Blanco Aguinaga suggests lies at the core of Rulfo's narratives, "[la] tensión angustiosa entre la lentitud interior y los relámpagos de violencia externa" ("[the] anxious tension between the interior slowness and the external lightning of violence"; 25). The external landscape of the story freezes time in the narrative, isolating the physical tension between telluric forces and humans in the high plains. This is accomplished by framing the different diegetic levels so as to present the narrator as a witness to static scenes. In "Luvina" the narrator describes events that occurred in the preterite to an absent interlocutor, deploying demonstrative adverbs such as "allí" and "aquí" to juxtapose and contrast the extra diegetic space from that in the narrative itself. These shifting juxtapositions draw the reader's attention to Luvina as a place where time is diluted in the telluric and climatic images of landscape presented. For example, the narrator explains that "Allí todo el horizonte está desteñido; nublado siempre por una mancha caliginosa" ("There the entire horizon is faded; always clouded by a dense stain"; 103). Later on the demonstrative adverb is used to prompt a description of the land: "allí hasta a la tierra le hubieran crecido espinas" ("there even the earth would grow thorns"; 104). The use of the demonstrative adverb is gradually more present in the story, as a crescendo that haunts the narrator. "Allá viví. Allá dejé la vida…Fui a ese lugar con mis ilusiones cabales y volví viejo y acabado" ("There I lived. There I left my life…I went to that place with all my illusions and returned old and exhausted"; 105). The telluric elements protrude in the narrative, constructing an environment that haunts the narrator with the sensation of imminent danger.

The narrator explains to an interlocutor that Luvina "Me sonaba a nombre de cielo aquel nombre. Pero aquello es el purgatorio. Un lugar moribundo donde se han muerto hasta los perros y ya no hay quien le ladre al silencio" ("It sounded like a heavenly name. But that place is purgatory. A moribund place where even the dogs are dead and no one is there to bark at the silence"; 111). Place becomes central in Rulfo's short story, as the narrator recounts his passing through that "purgatory" that is closer to a sepulchre than an actual city. The entire story is a growing awareness of the suffering of the land and its people in the elevated geography of Luvina. Notice also how the role of silence is different from the depictions of Alegría in *Los perros hambrientos.* In the latter, the barking of dogs fills the solitudes of the high plains, whereas in "Luvina" the silence remains unbroken and oppressive.

However, the question remains as to what geography that oppressive place refers to in the story[8]. In an interview from 1973, Rulfo offers several interesting clues as to the geographic imaginary that is present in his writings. When asked about the setting of his novel and short stories, he responds that "I need to situate myself in a determinate place" and then adds that the regions on which his stories take place are where outlaws shelter themselves, "between the *altiplano* and the western *Sierra Madre*" (Antolín 15). José Carlos González Boixo goes further and argues that Rulfo's approach to writing begins by "geographically placing his characters," presenting readers with "references that give veracity to the radiography" of the land and its

[8] In October 20, 2017, I had the opportunity to attend the *Inauguration of 100 Years of Juan Rulfo and 40 Years of CECAM* in Oaxaca, Mexico. It opened with an exhibition of Rulfo's photography of the *Mixteca* communities in the high plains of Oaxaca and the presentation of a translation of "Luvina" into the *Zapoteco* language, suggesting that the location of the story was indeed that region of Mexico.

characters (14). Several of the stories in *El Llano en llamas*[9] begin with a depiction of the landscape, framing the narrative within a concrete geographical context. "Luvina" is particularly striking in this respect, for the first sentence plunges the reader in a description of the place where the story takes place: "—De los cerros altos del sur, el de Luvina es el más alto y el más pedregoso" ("—Of the high hills in the south, that of Luvina is the highest and rockiest"; 102). The first clause immediately introduces a geography reference, that of "cerros altos" found in the "south." A *cerro* is usually a topographical elevation that is not as pronounced as a mountain, usually softened at the top. Notice, however, that the word "south" is purposefully ambiguous. Taken as a specific cardinal direction, it could mean a multiplicity of places, from South America to the South of Mexico.[10] The ambiguity of the term is not meant as a determinate marker, but rather as a spatial metaphor recurrent in his narratives between that those places found at the summit as opposed to the bottom, between the high and lowlands—between the heavens and the underworld.

In *Pedro Páramo,* for example, the city Comala is found downhill from where the initial narrator is located (Rulfo 180). There is a constant shifting between these binaries, so much so that Jean Franco suggests that the "topography" of Comala "serves as heaven, as hell, as purgatory, and as the real world" throughout the narrative (767). Built on spatial juxtapositions and oppositions, the narrative leads the reader to an awareness of how the nonhuman elements of

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[9] According to Sergio López Mena, the title *El Llano en llamas* already contains a geographical reference. Notice that the word "Llano" is capitalized, alluding to "a place with that name south of Jalisco" (xxxii).

[10] At the opening of a commemorative photographic exhibition of Juan Rulfo in Oaxaca titled *100 años con Rulfo y 40 de CECAM*, I had the opportunity to corroborate that the short story "Luvina" is set somewhere in the high plains of Oaxaca, México. The exhibition was curated by the inheritors of Juan Rulfo.

the story displace characters. Characters are forced to negotiate different spaces in the narrative, whether it be arriving to the valley where Comala is found or entering the city of Luvina in the highlands. In other words, there is a conscious emphasis on sombre images in Rulfo's narratives. He tends to depict "dark environments" that are "blurred realities" (López 173). The settings of his stories portray lands where organic life is hardly sustainable. Although, what at first might seem like a hellish setting, can also become a paradise of sorts (Franco 767). "Luvina" enacts such spatial juxtapositions; for example, in the opposition between the high plains filled with a wind that "rasca como si tuviera uñas" ("scratches as if it had nails") and the place where the narrator tells his story, a place where the "rumor del aire" ("murmur of the air") moves leaves softly (103). Although the term "nails" is used to describe the wind, it need not be an anthropomorphic portrayal. According to the DRAE, "uña" is a part of the "animal body" that appears in the extremities of fingers ("uña"). Often in Spanish, the term can refer to animal claws as well as human nails. I would further argue that the term accentuates the animal aspect of the wind, as a wild creature preying on humans. The inhabitants of Luvina are tormented in the narrative by the ubiquitous wind, much the same way the "murmur of air" sets the telling of the story at the bar. Notice how the term "murmur" is actually anthropocentric insofar as it derives from human sounds, whereas the wind's "nails" offer a nonhuman contrast.

The first passage of "Luvina" is worth citing, for it offers a drawn-out depiction of the high plains that are central to the story. It is also an exceptional passage in Rulfo's writings in terms of its length and detail (Martínez 123). It sets the harsh atmosphere of the entire narrative:

> —De los cerros altos del sur, el de Luvina es el más alto y más pedregoso. Está plagado de esa piedra gris con la que hacen cal, pero en Luvina no hacen cal con ella

> ni le sacan ningún provecho. Allí la llaman piedra cruda, y la loma que sube hacia Luvina la nombran Cuesta de la Piedra Cruda. El aire y el sol se han encargado de desmenuzarla, de modo que la tierra de por allí es blanca y brillante como si estuviera rociada siempre por el rocío del amanecer; aunque esto es un puro decir, porque en Luvina los días son tan fríos como las noches y el rocío se cuaja en el cielo antes que llegue a caer sobre la tierra. (102)
>
> —Of the high hills of the south, that of Luvina is the highest and rockiest. It is plagued by that grey stone with which they make lime, but in Luvina they do not make lime from it, nor do they put it to any good use. There they call it crude stone, and the hill that climbs to Luvina is called Crude Stone Hill. The wind and the sun have caused the hill to crumble, so that the ground there is white and shining, as if it was always showered with morning dew; although this is just a way of talking, because in Luvina the days are as cold as the nights, and the dew congeals in the sky before it manages to fall upon the ground.

The images of "grey stone," "lime," "crude stone," and "ground" reinforce the harshness of the land. The ground "crumbles" through the action of the sun and the wind, so that it looks grey and white as when limestone is scraped. Particularly powerful is the image of "crude stone" which elicits both the notion of a rock untouched by humans and also that of a rough-edged stone. It is both primordial and ominous. Notice also that the depiction of landscape is devoid of human components, except the human narrator who holds a much closer relation to the land than the omniscient narrator in *Los perros hambrientos*. It is a cruel environment in which the appearance

of “morning dew” is just a figure of speech to grasp the raw aspect of the ground. The reigning forces of the passage are the “ground,” the “cold,” the “sun,” and the “wind”—an emphasis on the nonhuman. Carlos Huamán López, however, suggests that here nature is personified, “exercising acts exclusive to man” (59). He argues that the “destructive cooperation” of the air and sun is indicative of this anthropomorphic aspect in the narrative. Yet claiming that destruction is purely a human act naively renders the natural environment as benign, a perspective more akin to pastoral idylls. I would argue that in the cited passage the nonhuman landscape bursts, not as personified but rather as “raw” and unrestrained, almost violent in its depiction as “crumbling.” It pushes the nonhuman to the foreground, actively silencing the narrative voice. By silencing the narrator I mean that his voice seems gradually embedded into the land described.

Desolate and harsh, the *cerro* becomes the agent of the story. Lucy Bell identifies this dissolving of the storyteller as one of the characteristics of Rulfo’s “short-story form” which “is erected as a ghastly void that must be fleshed out, both by characters or settings (that gain a life force of their own) and by the reader (who co-operates in their revival)” (“The Poetics” 822). The high plains are not a mere backdrop, but instead are an active telluric force that shapes the narrative contours of “Luvina.” In other words, the setting of the narrative is dominant, to the point of becoming the protagonist of a story lacking a plot with a defined climax or conclusion (Leal n.p.). This silencing of the narrator and the corresponding emphasis on the telluric elements of landscape opens up a space for the “revival” of that ruined world in the imagination. Humans cannot observe nature from a neutral position, but are enmeshed in the environment from the

very start. The dismal aspects of landscape open up an awareness of how humans are enmeshed in the environments they inhabit.

This muting of the narrative is evident from the opening of the story. The paragraph begins with a long dash that precedes dialogues in Spanish. Immediately the reader is made aware that somebody is describing the landscape to an unknown interlocutor, yet the length of the single dialogue raises suspicions as to whether a dialogue or monologue is taking place. Critics suggest that what begins as a dialogue is really just an interior monologue; that is, there is no real interlocutor to which the narrator is directing his or her speech. Huamán López explains that the narrator doubles, insofar as he or she "thinks and speaks aloud" to an "unreal" listener in the narrative (58). Fares suggests that the juxtaposition of differing voices presents narrative time as static, as if anchored in space, so that the reader can transit through it over and over again (57). A multiplicity of voices suspends time, giving way to the more pronounced role of space. Even more interesting is José Manuel Cuesta Abad's interpretation of the intersection between dialogic and monologic elements in "Luvina." Cuesta Abad argues that the story is essentially a monologue with certain dialogic elements—such as the dash as a marker of dialogue—that transmits a "mimetic effect" in the narrative (143). If a monologue internalizes landscape, the "dialogic monologue" places the reader "at an equidistant point between the psychic interior of the character and the meaning (or lack of meaning) of the factual world" transmitted in the story (Cuesta Abad 143).

The dialogue markers in the narrative reinforce the role of the narrator as an observer and witness. In the cited passage, the narrator seems hardly present. He or she is content to simply describe the landscape as is, without much interruption. The one moment in which the narrator

breaks the depiction is with the jarring "aunque esto es un puro decir" in which the pastoral image of the ground covered in morning dew is quickly dissipated with a blunt "el rocío se cuaja en el cielo antes que llegue a caer sobre la tierra." And this precise interruption of the depiction of the landscape is all the more fitting of a neutral observer, quickly clarifying any idealized notions of the land in Luvina. The narrator makes himself visible only to cross out what seems a poetic overstepping in the rendering of the high *cerro,* and then steps back so as to continue the description: "…Y la tierra es empinada. Se desgaja por todos los lados en barrancas hondas, de un fondo que se pierde de tan lejano" ("…And the land is steep. It breaks off on all sides in deep ravines, of such a depth that it becomes lost"; Rulfo 102). Whether real or not, the supposed narratee transforms the story into a testimony, one in which the narrative seems to objectively present Luvina. In that same vein, Joseph Sommers explains that one of the elements of Rulfo's narrative method is the introduction of a narrator as "witness," so as to "create a tone of apparent objectivity" (731). As a detached observer, the narrator appears to simply report what he or she saw. As Aguinaga explains, in Rulfo's story "Nobody writes: someone speaks. And the vagueness of that one further underlines the blurring of the speaker" (19).

The "dialogic monologue" dissolves the narrator's voice in the depiction of the world being witnessed. Ana María López also argues that Rulfo's strategy is to turn readers into "witnesses" (184). As "witnesses," we listen to the narrator's observations as if they were objectively presenting Luvina. We are presented with a ruined landscape filled with the suffering of the environment and its inhabitants. As witnesses, we are held responsible for the situation. A witness is first and foremost he who hears a testimony from another, who can later attest to what the other said. Much the same way a witness of a crime has a moral obligation to seek out the

authorities, so are the readers of "Luvina" placed in a moral crossroads. Moreover, silencing the narrator allows for the telluric images of landscape to emerge in full intensity. The *cerro* is presented as an eroded land, one in which the stones themselves are useless. Natural elements such as the air and sun are active agents in the "geographic ruins" of Luvina. Yet in this desolate land, an image stands out against the rocky mountainsides, that of the *chicalote* plant. In a profoundly inorganic landscape of "crude stone" and "deep ravines," the presence of flora is singular:

> Un viento que no deja crecer ni a las dulcamaras: esas plantitas tristes que apenas si pueden vivir un poco untadas a la tierra, agarradas con todas sus manos al despeñadero de los montes. Sólo a veces, allí donde hay un poco de sombra, escondido entre las plantas, florece el chicalote con sus amapolas blancas. (Rulfo 102)

> A wind that does not even allow the *dulcamaras* to grow: those sad little plants that hardly survive spread over the ground, holding on with their hands to the cliff of mountains. Only at times, there where there is a bit of shade, hidden between plants, blossoms the chicalote with its white poppies.

The contrast between the eroded ground and the blooming of the *chicalote* is striking. Even in a ruined geography such as Luvina, there remains a hint of life in those white flowers. The *chicalote* clings to the cliff, struggling to survive in a desolate landscape as humans with hands desperately clinging to the earth. Even if the air and the sun scrape the rocky surface of the mountainside, the *chicalote* is an expression of resistance and survival. Even more compelling is

the contrast established between the scientific name "dulcamara" and the Nahuatl name "chicalote" in the passage. Not only does the thorny *chicalote* represent a resistance to the harsh conditions of the *altiplanicie*, but it also represents the struggle of language in referencing local flora insofar as it juxtaposed to the scientific term of another type of flower, the *Solanum Dolcamara*. The narrator is knowledgeable enough as to distinguish between the indigenous and scientific names of flora, not just as a neutral witness but as an observer committed to the land he is describing.

The differences between both types of plants is also significant. Whereas the *dolcamara* is delicate in its appearance, the *chicalote* is a thistle with a poppy. The latter is a persistent plant, almost threatening in its tenacity: "Pero el chicalote pronto se marchita. Entonces uno lo oye rasguñando el aire con sus ramas espinosas, haciendo un ruido como el de un cuchillo sobre una piedra de afilar" ("But the chicalote soon withers. Then one hears it scratching the air with its thorny branches, making a noise like that of a knife on a whetstone"; Rulfo 102). Its thorns are sharp as a knife, cutting through the wind that scrapes the land. Notice the appearance of death in the passage. The withering of the *chicalote* is the first manifestation of death in the story, one that emphasizes the precarious conditions of life in Luvina. Singular in its presence among the rugged terrain, it is an image of resistance against the telluric forces of the high lands and a reminder of how fickle life can be in such a harsh environment. The reader is challenged to consider the patent struggle for life. As Cynthia Deitering comments on the "postnatural novel," the narrative "reflects a world in which the air is in fact no longer necessarily life-sustaining" (201). Her comments on novels from the 1980s is fitting to the seemingly

inhospitable environment of “Luvina,” even if the story is not necessarily a postnatural novel. Even in death, the *chicalote* continues to resist, “scratching the air” as a knife sharpening.

There is something profoundly disquieting about the sensorial atmosphere in the story. The sounds perceived by the narrator are grating, like the withered *chicalote* sharpening against the air (Rulfo 102). A few paragraphs later, the wind in Luvina is described in full detail:

> Ya mirará usted ese viento que sopla sobre Luvina. Es pardo. Dicen que porque arrastra arena del volcán; pero lo cierto es que es un aire negro. Ya lo verá usted. Se planta en Luvina prendiéndose de las cosas como si las mordiera. Y sobran días en que se lleva el techo de las casas como si se llevara un sombrero de petate, dejando los paredones lisos, descobijados. Luego rasca como si tuviera uñas: uno lo oye a mañana y tarde, hora tras hora, sin descanso, raspando las paredes, arrancando tecatas de tierra, escarbando con su pala picuda por debajo de las puertas, hasta sentirlo bullir dentro de uno como si se pusiera a remover los goznes de nuestros mismos huesos. (103)

> You’ll see that wind blowing over Luvina. It’s grey. They say that’s because it carries volcanic sand; but the truth is, it’s a black air. You’ll see. It sets on Luvina, clinging to things as if biting them. And on many days it carries off the roofs of houses as if it were carrying off a straw hat, leaving the walls eroded, unprotected. Then it scratches, as if it had nails: one hears it morning and night, hour after hour, without rest, scraping walls, tearing pieces of the ground, scratching with its pointy spade

beneath the doors, until one feels it roiling inside oneself, as if it were trying to rattle the hinges of our own bones.

The wind scratches "as if it had nails" the walls, and an iron shovel strikes against the ground. These sounds reach into "our own bones." Their harsh attributes highlight the mineral landscape —the walls, ground, and metal—, an effect that is all the more distinct when juxtaposed with the sounds of a bubbling stream where the narrator is presently located while recounting his story. Here the wind is personified, as a human undertaker walking through the city in search of the dead. However, it is not so much the fact that the wind has certain human traits that is striking, but rather the metallic noises it makes. Fingernails that need not necessarily be human are heard "scraping walls" and "tearing pieces of the ground," creating an eerie atmosphere. The sounds elicit the presence of something feral attempting to enter through the stone walls. It is as if humans are the prey of some unseen predator that they can only hear as it comes closer to their shelters. Just as the eucalyptus trees in *Los perros hambrientos*, humans are cornered by the nonhuman presence of the elements. It is the nonhuman noises that jut out of the descriptions of the wind upon the ruinous city of Luvina.

The nonhuman presence of the high plains reaches its climax when the narrator interrupts his story to ask the children playing outside to keep quiet, before returning to Luvina and the lack of rain in the region which is not unlike that of *Los perros hambrientos*:

> …Sí, llueve poco. Tan poco o casi nada, tanto que la tierra, además de estar reseca y achicada como cuero viejo, se ha llenado de rajaduras y de esa cosa que allí llaman 'pasojos de agua', que no son sino terrones endurecidos como piedras filosas, que se

clavan en los pies de uno al caminar, como si allí hasta a la tierra le hubieran crecido espinas. (104)

…Yes, it rains little. So little or almost nothing, to the point that the ground, besides being dried and shrunken like old leather, is also filled with cracks and that thing that there they call 'pasojo of water,' which are but hardened pieces of ground that like sharp stones, they stab one's feet while walking, as if there even the ground had grown thorns.

Notice the recurrence of the word "tierra" ("ground" also "dirt" and "soil") in the sentence. It appears on two occasions, each attached to an image of drought and erosion. In the absence of rain, the narrator observes the contours of the ground. It is a dry and cracked earth, "like old leather." Moreover, the entire passage plays on the recurrent sound of the double "r" ("tierra," "reseca," "rajaduras," and "terrones") which suggests the roughness of the land. Even if there is a seeming mimetic element to the description, there is also a moral element to the way the narrator renders the landscape. The word "achicada" has several meanings. It means to "make smaller" or "reduce in size," but also to "belittle" or "humiliate." As it quite literally shrinks from the drought, the land itself is "humiliated" by the harsh climate. The same goes for the word "endurecidos," for it not only suggests the literal "hardening" of the ground, but also its "callousness" to the conditions of the high lands. The pain of the land is such that the final phrase evokes the suffering of Christ insofar as the path of rocks is like walking on "thorns." This suggest the passion of Christ as the necessary agony of the land in search of redemption. As the narrator mentions, the city is a "purgatory" (111). Luvina might be a "geographic ruin," yet it is a

place where the land itself agonizes, where the *chicalote* struggles to cling to the mineral surfaces, where the wind scrapes the lime off the stones and walls, and where the ground itself grows "thorns" that "stab" those who walk upon its paths. This is not an aseptic representation of landscape, but one in which the tormented environment is laid bare for the reader.

With the depictions of the *altiplanicie* on which the city is found, the brooding narrator of "Luvina" envelops the reader in the struggle that is taking place. It is important to note what Bell suggests in regard to the portrayal of the environment in *El Llano en llamas,* drawing inspiration from Nancy Tuana's concept of "viscous porosity": "Similarly, the 'environmental' issues relating to land, weather and natural disasters that proliferate in Rulfo's short fiction can neither be assimilated into, nor separated from, human issues" ("Viscous Porosity" 392). Even if the high plains are an oppressive presence that structures the narrative of "Luvina," the relation between the *cerro* and its inhabitants manifests the meshing of the environmental fate of humans and nonhumans. Not entirely separate, not yet completely embedded together, there is a complex entangling of the human and nonhuman. The wind preys on human inhabitants, at times like an undertaker and at others like an animal howling outside their shelters: "Lo estuvimos oyendo pasar por encima de nosotros, con sus largos aullidos; lo estuvimos oyendo entrar y salir por los huecos socavones de las puertas" ("We kept hearing it passing above us, with its long howls; we kept hearing it coming in and going out through the hollow concavities of the doors"; 107). Although thorny, the *chicalote* clings to the earth with "hands." The ruinous landscape and its ghastly inhabitants offer a testimony of how the precariousness of life on the *altiplanicie*—in the form of the *chicalote* clinging to the rocky ravines—contrasts with the apparent safety of the shop where the narrator tells the story.

I will now turn to Guimarães Rosa, best known for his *Grande sertão: veredas* (1956), a novel that attracted the attention of critics in Brazil when it was first published. Characterized as "working out of archaic rural settings," his writing establishes "modern texts with transcendental dimensions" (Perrone 22). The Brazilian literary critic Antonio Candido suggests that both Guimarães Rosa and Juan Rulfo inherit a "super-regionalism" that reaches beyond the mere documentary (161). Unlike their regionalist precursors, they are not invested in simply registering local scenarios. Both are reaching for universal values. Guimarães Rosa's short story titled "Páramo" presents an unknown Andean landscape that is also ruinous. Emphasis is placed on the significance of an eroded and abrasive land. Caroline LeFeber Schneider argues in a similar vein, when comparing Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* and Guimarães Rosa's *Grande Sertão*, that "both translate place into prose" (32). Her exploration of the two novels reveals interesting continuities that strike a chord in the comparison between "Luvina" and "Páramo," especially in regard to the notion of space espoused by both authors. LeFeber Schneider suggests that the novels by Rulfo and Guimarães Rosa construct space "through non-linear narratives and coercive invitations" (38). That is, the narrative does not follow a linear sequence of events, but as has been mentioned in the case of "Luvina," there are constant shifts between the present and the preterite in the telling of the story. The temporal shifts accentuate the differences between the ruinous landscape of Luvina and the serene place from where the narrator recounts his experiences. Also, the narrators in both "Luvina" and "Páramo" are uninvited guests in the cities they visit in the high plains. They seem to be obliged to suffer the oppressive atmosphere of those cities in the heights. I argue that, much the same way as the juxtaposition of contrasting spaces serves to engage the reader with the encroaching atmosphere of the high plains of

"Luvina," so does the contrast of spaces reinforce the oppressive environment of the Andean *altiplano* in "Páramo." However, the recurrent use of demonstrative adverbs and shifts from the preterite to present tense in the latter story serve to blur spatial and temporal distinctions, creating a disorienting sensation not unlike the *soroche* or altitude sickness felt by the narrator. The reader is left with a disquieting awareness of a dying environment, where death and sickness permeate the high plains.

The scope of Guimarães Rosa's acclaimed novel has had an impact on studies focused on his lesser known works: "No one has attempted to explain the reasons for the relative paucity of studies in Guimarães Rosa's other works, but certainly one of the attractions of this lone novel is its suggestive range" (Vincent 63). The posthumous story collection *Estas estórias* has not received much attention, even though several plans were found with the manuscript indicating the final organization of the book. The story "Páramo" stands out for several reasons. As was mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, it is the only story that takes place outside of the *sertão* in Guimarães Rosa's *oeuvre*. Set in an unknown Andean city, the landscape is quite distinct from his earlier work. Another aspect of "Páramo" has drawn the attention of critics: as Jon Vincent suggests, the seeming "proximity of the *estória* to the *história*[11]" is perhaps the "oddest note of the story," so much so that it stands out from all the other stories in the volume (135). In blurring the boundary between the two, the reader is unsure whether the story being told is just that, a story, or whether the events are true. Fiction and fact are intertwined, much the same way Rulfo transforms his narrators into witnesses that pretend to offer an objective and morally engaging retelling of events. Vincent goes on to explain that "the story is told with a

[11] Although this distinction is no longer widely used in Portuguese, the term "estória" corresponds to the fictional sense of a story and the term "história" refers to the factual dimension of "history."

straight face and the diction complements rather than contrasts with that seriousness," which adds to the effect of a "heavy atmosphere" (135).

An element that presents a similarity with Rulfo's story is the title. "Luvina" seems to refer to a place, a city found somewhere in the *cerros*. The fact that no article precedes the title suggests that it is a proper noun. The same could be said for "Páramo," which does not include an article. Both stories appear to embed themselves in a place right from the title. They seem to refer to a setting "locatable on maps and history," thus suggesting a "regional" dimension to the narrative (LeFeber Schneider 38). Yet Lefeber Schneider is quick to note that neither Guimarães Rosa nor Rulfo write as "a practice in documentary precision" (38). There are clues in the depictions of the land in both stories; for example, the presence of a *chicalote* in "Luvina" and the capitalized word "Cordilheira" in "Páramo." However, in Guimarães Rosa's case, the title is purposefully ambiguous. A Spanish reader will quickly recognize two references hidden in the title: on the one hand, a "páramo" is common word for an "elevated plain"; and on the other hand, it also is the last name of the character that forms the title of Rulfo's only novel *Pedro Páramo*. It is important to emphasize that even if the word "páramo" exists in Portuguese, the term "planalto" is far more common. According to the *Dicionário Priberam da Língua Portuguesa* (DPLP), the word "páramo" can also refer specifically to the "high lands of the Andes," although it is derived from the Spanish term ("páramo"). Hence it appears that Guimarães Rosa is at the very least playfully challenging readers to consider the geographic and cultural references within the title itself. The linguistic hybridity of his texts are well documented, from the neologisms deployed to the borrowing of words from other languages and the local lexicon of different regions (Fantini 45). "Páramo" is peppered with Spanish words and

phrases throughout, making it very plausible that the title is intended to elicit the suggested references.

Consider the diegetic framing of "Páramo," which blurs the temporal and spatial distinctions of the narrative in order to focus on its setting. The story begins in the first-person, directed at an unknown interlocutor, "Sei, irmãos, que todos já existimos, antes, neste ou em diferentes lugares" ("I know, brothers, that we already existed, before, in this or in other places"; "Páramo" 211). An important aspect in the cited text is the fact that there is an ambiguity regarding the tense of the verb "existimos," for although the adverb "já" suggests the action takes place sometime in the past, the lack of linearity to the narrative makes it plausible that the narrator is speaking in the present and past. The narrator also seems to address a community of monks, given the appellative "brothers" in the phrase. That supposed group of interlocutors will not make an appearance throughout the story. No punctuation marks are introduced to signal a dialogue of any sort. The absence of interlocutors and the various interruptions of the text with the appellative "brothers" indicates that the text is more than a simple monologue, perhaps a testimony to be read at a later date. At times a macabre musing and at others a silent meditation on the Andean landscape, the narrator reaches out to his or her readers, appealing to their judgment on what he witnesses as an asphyxiating environment: "O do ódio—um mundo desconhecido. O mundo que você não pode conceber. Todos se castigam. É terrível estar morto, como às vezes sei que estou—de outra maneira. Com essa falta de alma. Respiro mal; o frio me desfaz" ("That of hate—an unknown world. A world that you cannot conceive. Everyone punishes themselves. It is terrible to be dead, as I sometimes know that I am—in another way. With this lack of soul. I can barely breathe; the cold undoes me"; "Páramo" 223). Here the

narrator appeals directly to an unknown "you," almost supplicating for respite. The sentences are short, truncated almost, manifesting the lack of air the narrator experiences, the unbearable shortness of breath from altitude sickness. The dynamic between the narrator and the absent interlocutors is similar to that used by Rulfo in "Luvina," although Guimarães Rosa chooses not to focus as much on the "dialogic monologue" and instead prefers a narrator that is intentionally reaching out of the text with his or her pleading tone.

The narrator speaks of "hate" and "an unknown world" that is asphyxiating. The air of the Andean high plains is not life-sustaining, but is detrimental to the narrator, causing a different type of being "dead." And the reader suffers that sickness alongside the narrator, the anxious inhalations and exhalations as each sentence cuts gradually shorter. Using dashes mid-sentence generates the sensation of gasping for air, which serves to emphasize the oppressive atmosphere of a "world unknown." The broad reference to the "world" elicits the experience of multiple scales by the narrator. In another passage, the narrator exclaims "E sofro, aqui, morto entre os mortos, neste frio, neste não respirar, nesta cidade, em mim, ai, em mim; faz meses" ("And I suffer, here, dead among the dead, in this cold, in this not-breathing, in this city, in me, oh, in me; it has been months"; "Páramo" 225). Throughout the story, the words "cold," "dead," and "breathe" recur over and over. Just as in "Luvina" and *Los perros hambrientos*, the aural elements of the high plains accentuate a dismal environment, so does the lack of air sustain a dreadful landscape that seems incapable of sustaining life. The Andes "são cinéreos, irradiam tristeza" ("are ashen, irradiate sadness") and are a "prison" to its inhabitants ("Páramo" 213). The use of the word "cinéreos" instead of "cinzentos" is particularly striking, for it plays off the word "etéreo" ("ethereal") and "aéreo" ("aerial"). Sombre and ghastly in its portrayal of

landscape, Guimarães Rosa accentuates the disorienting state of the narrator in the Andes high plains.

As the narrative progresses, the narrator becomes more and more unreliable, an aspect that heightens the experience of place on multiple scales. We first catch a glimpse of the unreliable nature of the narration in the switch from a first-person to third-person perspective, only to return to the first-person in the span of three pages. After the initial preamble in which the narrator reflects on the fickle nature of life, he or she begins a story using the third-person perspective in which a "young man" is forced to travel to a "foreign city" ("Páramo" 212). Similar to the narrator in "Luvina" who moves to the remote city, so too this "young man" is displaced to some unknown location in the Andes. Yet a paragraph later, the narrator seems to slip, and accidentally returns to the first-person by saying that "Ah, entre tudo, porém, e inobstante o hálito glacial com que ali me recebi" ("Ah, in the midst of it all, thus, and notwithstanding the glacial breath with which I was there initiated"; "Páramo" 213).

At the end of the paragraph with the shift back to the first-person, the text introduces an ellipsis. As if the narrator finally notices the mistake that has been committed, the rambling is cut off. Also, the use of the ellipsis is reminiscent of Rulfo, especially in "Luvina" where it is used as a mechanism to deploy the "dialogic monologue." The recounting of events gradually becomes more anxiety-ridden, reaching a point where the narrator questions whether he or she is dead or alive (217). Similar to Arturo Cova in *La vorágine,* the narrator slowly succumbs to *soroche* sickness. The use of "aqui," "ali," and "lá" constantly by the narrator only blurs further spatial distinctions. Sometimes the narrator differentiates between "here" and "there" to speak of the unknown city in the Andes, as if he or she was present and distant simultaneously. As readers, we

are unsure if those demonstrative adverbs really refer to a remote spatial location or if the narrator is confusing where he or she is. Even the narrator confesses his inability to distinguish north from south (221). In a state of perpetual "insomnia," the narrator explains the following: "Mas ocorre-me, mais que mais, aquele outro estado, que não é de viva vigília, nem de dormir, nem mesmo o de transição comum—mas é como se o meu espírito se soubesse a um tempo em diversos mundos, perpassando-se igualmente em planos entre si apartadíssimos" ("But I experience, more often than not, that other state of mind, that is not vivid wakefulness, nor sleep, nor a common transition between the two—but it is as if my spirit was aware of itself at a time in diverse worlds, equally running through planes that are very distant from each other"; 221). Experiencing simultaneity and distance at once, the narrator loses all spatial anchoring as the *soroche* sickness takes hold.

Given the unreliability of the narrator—spatially and temporally confused during the meanderings through the Andean city in the high plains—it is the oppressive atmosphere that becomes the agent of the narrative. The world becomes hostile, filled with hate and cold. Telluric and glacial, the landscape infringes upon the narrator's aggravated mental state. "Páramo" introduces several passages that emphasize the uncanny aspect of the *altiplanicies:*

> Era uma cidade velha, colonial, de vetusta época, e triste, talvez a mais triste de todas, sempre chuvosa e adversa, em hirtas alturas, numa altiplanície da cordilheira, próxima às nuvens, castigada pelo inverno, uma das capitais mais elevadas do mundo. Lá, no hostil espaço, o ar era extenuado e raro, os sinos marcavam as horas no abismático, como falsas paradas do tempo, para abrir lástimas, e os discordiosos rumores humanos apenas realçavam o grande silêncio, um silêncio também morto,

como se mesmo feito de matéria desmedida das montanhas. Por lá, rodeados de difusa névoa sombria, altas cinzas, andava um povo de cimérios. (212)

It was an old city, colonial, of an ancient time, and sorrowful, perhaps the most sorrowful of all, always rainy and adverse, in rigid heights, on a high plain of the mountain range, next to the clouds, punished by winter, one of the highest capitals of the world. There, in the hostile space, the air was exhausted and scarce, the bells tolled the hours in the abysmal, with false halts of time, so as to open laments, and the discordant human rumours all but emphasized the great silence, a silence also dead, as if made from the colossal material of mountains. Around there, enveloped by a scattered sombre fog, high ashes, there lived a dark people.

The syntactical construction of sentences is filled with pauses, as if the narrator is running out of breath whilst describing landscape. In the first sentence, the city is described as "old," "colonial," "sorrowful," "rainy," "adverse," "in rigid heights," "on a high plain," "next to the clouds," and "punished by winter." Each descriptive clause stresses the harsh conditions of the *atliplanicie* where the city is found. The description is through a serial accumulation of details, becoming a gradually heavier burden. Also, the repeated use of "v" sounds accentuates the sharpness of the landscape described. There is a threatening aspect to the world in the high plains insofar as the climate is "adverse" and the land is "punished by winter." By describing the city as "sorrowful, perhaps the most sorrowful of all," the depiction reaches out beyond the text, referencing that other city filled with sorrow, Luvina. The land "there" is a "hostile space," one in which the very "air" is "exhausted and strange."

A contrast with the portrayal of the Andes in Alegría and Luvina in Rulfo, is the absence of sound in "Páramo." There is a "great silence" that is further emphasized by the human murmurs in the city. Guimarães Rosa constructs an oppressive atmosphere by emptying landscape of all sound and action, crystallizing time and space in a "dead silence" that haunts the narrator. The sense of a deathly environment is aggravated by the stillness of the landscape. The aural component seems to strike a chord in all three narratives discussed. Whereas in *Los perros hambrientos* it is the "long and monotonous" bark of a dog that fills the silence and in "Luvina" it is the "nails" of the scratching wind, in Guimarães Rosa's "Páramo" it is the "discordant" sounds made by humans that belong to a "dark people." Even if this last sound might be considered "human," it is only partially so, since the narrator experiences those voices as if they came from dead people. The nonhuman presence is still predominant in the aural experience, for the "rumours" come from what the narrator feels are corpses. The fact that cadavers are given human voices is also reminiscent of *Pedro Páramo*. One is oppressive through moving telluric forces and the other threatens with a deadly silence.

Yet another interesting moment in the text where there seems to be an intentional reference to Rulfo is when the narrator describes the Andean *páramos* as a windswept land that brings the cold into the city:

> E há, sobranceiros e invisíveis, os páramos—que são elevados pontos, os nevados e ventisqueiros da cordilheira, por onde têem de passar os caminhos de transmonte, que para aqui trazem, gelinvérnicos! Os páramos, de onde os ventos atravessam. Lá é um canil de ventos, nos zunimensos e lugubrúivos. De lá o frio desce, umidíssimo, para esta gente, estas ruas, estas casas. De lá, da desolação paramuna, vir-me-ia a morte.

> Não a morte final—equestre, ceifeira, ossosa, tão atardalhadora. Mas a outra, *aquela*. (213)

> And there is, soaring and invisible, the *páramos*—that are elevated points, the snowed and windy of the mountain range, through which the mountain paths must pass, that bring here, geli-winternals! The *páramos*, from where the winds cross. There, it is a doghouse of winds, in the whistlers and lugubrious howling. From there the cold descends, very wet, for these people, these streets, these houses. From there, of the *paramune* desolation, death would arrive for me. Not the final death—equestrian, reaping, bony, so overdue. But the other, that one.

Although the Andean city is saturated with a great silence, the *páramos* are a windswept landscape through which the cold descends. Thus even if there are hardly any sounds in the city, there is also a hostile wind, just like in Luvina. The neologism deployed in the passage attests to the constructing of a language to render the hostile environment. The cold winds that arrive from the *páramos* are not just icy, but are "gelinvérnicos," a fusion of "gelid" and "winter" that generates a cavernous sound. Those "gelinvérnicos" aggravate the sensation of the Andes as a cavernous prison. The exclamation mark punctuates the sentence immediately after the neologism. Scarcely used in the entire narrative, the exclamation mark heightens the intensity of the word. As if the construction of the word was not sufficient to attract the reader's attention, the exclamation serves as a warning that indicates the threat posed by the telluric forces of the high plains. The image of the "doghouse" to depict the winds rolling down to the city is haunting, for we imagine a group of howling dogs in the "whistlers" and "lugubrious howling" heights. We

can almost hear the winds approach from a distance, as dogs barking in a remote doghouse. It creates an atmosphere of imminent danger, something that is yet to arrive. However, as was mentioned earlier, the narrator is unreliable. When he or she attempts to locate places in space, there is always an element of uncertainty. What is said to be "there," may actually be "here." Perhaps the páramos are not so distant from the city. Perhaps the city is already in the páramos: "A cidade, fria, fria, em úmidos ventos, dizem que esses ares são puríssimos, os ventos que vêm dos páramos. Toda esta cidade é um páramo" ("The city, cold, cold, in wet winds, they say that those airs are very pure, the winds that come from the *páramos*. This entire city is a *páramo*"; 218). Here the reader is left to dwell on whether the narrator is quite literally considering the city as a *páramo* or whether it is a metaphor for the suffering that occurs. The ambiguity remains, for at that point in story, the narrator has given ample evidence of being unreliable, of confusing time and space, of questioning the boundary between himself and others.

The *altiplanicies* are a prison that prepares for that "other death" that slowly coagulates throughout the narrative in the form of the "Homem" ("Man") that follows the narrator. This place is a purgatory of sorts, an intersection between heaven and hell where its inhabitants suffer the pangs of existence. The in-between place is suggested at the beginning of the story, when the narrator evokes the images of the river Lethe as passage toward death (211). Similar to "Luvina," the passage or transition that gradually materializes through the landscape is one of Christian suffering. The land becomes a place of "muralhas de espinhos" ("rampart of thorns") in which the narrator experiences "o grande suplício" ("the great torture") and is forced to enact some sacrifices (225). Also, the gradual materialization of the "Homem" from having the "aspect of a corpse" to having "an air of a corpse" and finally to being "a corpse" reflects the passage

towards death. The nonhuman in the form of a corpse intrudes on the narrator, obliges him or her to flee through the streets and gain distance from that materializing of death: "Eu precisava, primeiro que tudo, de exilar para um total esquecimento aquele que um destino anterior convertera em meu lúgubre e inseparável irmão, em castigo talvez de algum infame crime nosso, mancomum: eu tinha de esquecer-me do 'Homem com o tudo de cadáver'" ("I needed to, first of all, exile into complete oblivion he who at some prior fate had been transformed in my lugubrious and inseparable brother, perhaps a punishment for some dishonoured crime of ours, complicit: I had to forget the 'Man with everything of a corpse'"; 224). The "Homem" makes present the nonhuman hostility of the environment, a reminder that the Andean landscape is hell bent on bringing death to the narrator. Its steady corporealization is an asymptotic approach of the nonhuman, an ominous presence that finally reveals itself as a corpse, a thing no longer alive. Notice the use of the word "irmão"—the first time after the beginning of the story. If the corpse is a "brother," then perhaps the absent interlocutors addressed at the start of the narrative as "brothers" are also those that have passed away, an effect that is strongly reminiscent of Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*. Precisely, the ecology espoused in both "Luvina" and "Páramo" makes explicit the continuities that exist between both texts in the manner in which landscape becomes an oppressive force that impinges upon human inhabitants and reminds them of the suffering of life against the backdrop of the telluric high plains.

In this chapter, I have argued that the *altiplanicies* as portrayed in Alegría's *Los perros hambrientos*, Rulfo's "Luvina" and Guimarães Rosa's "Páramo" reveal a dark aesthetic of landscape accentuates how life can be a luxury in the environments of the high plains. In Alegría, the central aspect of the narrative is the impending drought as it binds all entities—whether

human, animal, or plant—to the tragic fate of an inhospitable environment. The ironic awareness that dogs and humans all suffer equally the drought displays an ecology from which neither can escape. In "Luvina" and "Páramo," a negative portrayal the land is offered, one that aggravates the alienation of inhabitants faced with a "geographic ruin," a world that does not sustain life, but instead takes it away. All three narratives use aural cues to construct an oppressive atmosphere in which the human and nonhuman are enmeshed. Unlike other geographic imaginaries of the plains, the depictions of landscape in *Los perros hambrientos*, "Luvina" and "Páramo" are significant insofar as they stray from the traditional aesthetic values ascribed to nature as beautiful or sublime. These narratives challenge readers to come to grips with an environment that is not beautiful, harmonious or brimming with life. The high plains are portrayed as places where the horrific struggle for survival is quickly met with death, as is the case in the image of the withered *chicalote* or in the dying indigenous child preyed upon by the condor. Where the *chicalote* grows is not a welcoming environment—never a place of respite—but rather a world that violently puts in motion telluric forces that encroach upon humans. By presenting such ominous places, they offer a glimpse into other modes of representing the environment beyond pastoral and benevolent images, an alternative mode that challenges us to imagine the plains not as a virgin landscape to be domesticated, but as an horrific land that makes humans conscious of their precarious situation that is phrased at the end of "Páramo": "A cidade hostil, em sua pauta glacial. O mundo. Voltava, para o que nem sabia se era a vida ou se era a morte. Ao sofrimento, sempre" ("The hostile city, in its glacial rule. The world. I was returning, to what I knew not if it was life or death. To suffering, always"; 234).

Los Llanos or of Crocodiles, Pythons, and Humans in the Orinoco

Triste jaguar de las mitologías,
que al devorar el Sol se devoró a sí mismo,
que al convertirse en Tierra devoradora
devoró su sombra en el cielo nocturno.
-Homero Aridjis, *Poemas solares*

Considered one of the biggest crocodilians in South America, the Orinoco crocodile or *Crocodylus intermedius* inhabits "the Orinoco River and its tributaries in Venezuela and Colombia" (Balaguera-Reina 2). On average measuring more than four metres, it can easily be identified by its long and narrow snout as it skims the surface of waterways (Dinets 65). Unfortunately, it is a critically endangered species, one that was hunted extensively at the beginning of the twentieth century. According to specialists, "over-exploitation started at the end of the 1920s" (Seijas 60). Although the Orinoco crocodile had been hunted by indigenous peoples in the region, it was not until the rise of cattle ranching that the species was seen as a threat to human interests. Between 1929 and 1963, the *Crocodylus intermedius* was killed for its skin, especially in the region of Apure in Venezuela (Castro Casal 71). Its skin was considered a lucrative product to be sold in international markets. It thus was no longer just a threat, but also a profitable species to be exploited.

These circumstances appear in two important *novelas de la tierra* that are set in the Orinoco basin plains: *La vorágine* by the Colombian José Eustasio Rivera and *Doña Bárbara* by the Venezuelan Rómulo Gallegos. Both novels mention crocodiles and other important predators of the Orinoquía, offering a glimpse into their role in the *llanos*. Most of the Orinoco crocodiles "have been recorded from seasonal rivers (flood plain environments) in savanna ecosystems," although numbers continue to decrease well into 2017 (Balaguera-Reina 2). On the verge of extinction, environmental policies have for the past decades steadily increased its population in the Orinoco. The *Crocodylus intermedius* is a significant and emblematic predator of the *llanos*, the grasslands that extend from Colombia to Venezuela. More importantly, the presence or absence of the crocodile reminds us of the precarious interdependence of species within an ecosystem, a relation that is often manifested through predation. It is the disruption of predatory relations that can destabilize entire ecosystems, risking species extinction, as is the case of the Orinoco crocodile. How this endangered predatory species has been imagined is significant to how we as humans engage in its conservation. An animal seen as a threat or as a lucrative business is often hunted to extinction. As Ursula Heise suggests, "biodiversity, endangered species, and extinction are primarily cultural issues, questions of what we value and what stories we tell" (4). A decrease in biodiversity also makes us aware of our own vulnerability as animals within the same twisting predatory ecology: "Only animals can teach us that in the end, all organisms need a predator" (Nelson 137).

In this chapter I will examine closely the relation between predators and prey in *La vorágine* and *Doña Bárbara*, emphasizing how predation blurs the dichotomy between animals and humans. The two novels reveal the significance of predation in establishing a link between

living members of a given ecosystem, which in this case is the plains surrounding the Orinoco region. I will begin by briefly discussing the role of predation in the environment, bringing into dialogue the work of Haraway and Garrard, so as to gain a more nuanced understanding of how way we imagine animals preying on humans affects our representation of the environment. The presence of predators in the narratives challenge readers to reconsider anthropomorphism and zoomorphism, for it is in those threatening encounters between animals and humans that the demarcation lines that seemingly divide both are gradually confused. The imbuing of human characteristics to animals, and vice versa, blurs their distinctions and thus challenges readers to think outside the traditional binaries between the human and animal. This rings especially true in plains geographies where the landscape is often described as offering little shelter. From *gaucho* Facundo's narrow escape from the claws of a "tiger" in the pampas or the ominous presence of preying condors in the high plains, these flat topographies are often sites of vulnerability in which predation is foregrounded. After discussing the theoretical framework of predation, I will focus on *La vorágine* and *Doña Bárbara*, offering close readings of important passages that display the predatory relations in each novel.

From the plants that act as primary producers and consume nutrients from the soil, all the way to the carnivores that hunt other species, predation sustains ecosystems throughout our planet (Langerhans 177). As cattle graze on the banks of the Orinoco, they themselves are prey to the reptilian carnivores awaiting in the waters. A food web suggests more than a mere connection between organic beings, because it displays the fragile and shifting relations within a given ecosystem. To explore the interrelations between predators and their prey is to consider the ambivalent tensions that abound in the environment. Predation need not entail hierarchies. It

highlights the dynamic relations in a given ecosystem; that is, it manifests the precarious interactions between organisms. Robert Taylor identifies several definitions for predation, none of which is conceptually bound to a vertical representation of the relations between predators and preys in the food web: (A) "Predation occurs when one organism kills another for food," (B) "Predation occurs when individuals of one species eat living individuals of another," (C) "Predation is a process by which one population benefits at the expense of another," and (D) "Predation is any ecological process in which energy and matter flow from one species to another" (3-4). The four definitions of predation entail external interactions between organisms that hinge on life and death encounters. Predation sustains the diversity of an ecosystem insofar as it puts into action the flow of energy from "one species to another." Brian Langerhans explains that "Virtually every organism is perceived as a potential prey by some other organism" (180). Predation can thus be understood as a web or loop, an interconnection between species that is neither vertical nor horizontal. It can be as ambivalent as the predator that suddenly becomes a prey. This conception of predation also draws from feedback loops in biology, a theory which claims that a biological system is regulated by triggering responses that can either amplify a given disturbance or inhibit it (Cosentino 3). This framework allows for a reverse engineering of relations within a biological system. For example, Peter Chesson and Jessica Kuang have recently applied feedback loops to understand the contributions of predation to biological diversity (235). Ecocritic Morton also deploys feedback loops in his approach to ecological thinking, explaining that they refer to a biological system "of finitude and fragility" where "the politics of coexistence are always contingent, brittle, and flawed" (*Dark Ecology* 6). Organisms can at once be predators and prey, in a constant twisting of the food web.

Morton further suggests that "Thinking interdependence involves thinking difference" (*The Ecological Thought* 39). Ecological interconnectedness reveals shifting relations that are never entirely fixed, such as when a new species invades an ecosystem and creates a disequilibrium. Dynamic and open, biological systems are "subject to significant disturbance inputs from their environments" (Cosentino 1). Morton argues along the same lines when emphasizing the notion of "difference" or "negative" in his understanding of the connections between beings. His dark ecology is based on interconnectedness through negative feedback loops, a notion that is derived from biology. Negative feedback loops inhibit—rather than intensify—a given disturbance within a biological system. Whereas we may be tempted to consider nature as static and holistic, Morton's notion of the "mesh" is built on ambiguity and constant changes (*The Ecological Thought* 40). I argue that the predatory ecologies of *La vorágine* and *Doña Bárbara* make their readers keenly aware of this twisting coexistence and mutualism insofar as each narrative foregrounds predatory and violent encounters between animals and humans. What an ecocritical reading of these novels offers is the enmeshing that ensues from those violent predatory encounters. Granted readers and scholars have been aware of the violence present in these novels, yet what an ecocritical reading offers is a means to understand these confrontations from an ecological perspective that emphasizes the environmental connections between living beings, even when they prey on each other. These clashes reveal the disturbances in the food web caused by emergence of cattle ranching in the Orinoco basin. The two novels express the organic symbiosis in the Orinoco *llanos*, portraying the disruption of the precarious balance of living beings in that region. Whether it be the Tuerto crocodile hunting cattle in *Doña Bárbara* or the python yawning its mouth open at Arturo Cova

in *La vorágine,* these acts of predation elicit the interconnectedness between predators and prey, whilst also demonstrating the effects of increased human presence in the form of cattle ranchers.

Often representations of animals are attempts at imagining our relation to them. Citing Steve Baker, ecocritic Garrard emphasizes the existence of an "extensive 'rhetoric of animality'" in human culture (*Ecocriticism* 140). For example, whether a wolf is portrayed as a hostile or a social animal, reveals how humans perceive themselves in regard to that particular nonhuman other. Thomas Hobbes chooses to describe human interactions in terms of wolf predation in his *Leviathan* (1651), whereas primatologist Franz de Waal begins his *Primates and Philosophers* (2006) by emphasizing the social behaviour of wolves. Their differing representations of wolves indirectly display how they imagine interactions with animals. As is the case of Hobbes, the fear of animals is usually evoked through narratives of predation. Moreover, the depictions of animals often project asymmetrical dichotomies or "Great Divides" on the basis of the "principal Others to Man" (Haraway 9). Haraway suggests that the binary between humans and animals is entrenched in the fears of the other. The animal is capable of making humans uneasy. She further explains, "these 'others' have a remarkable capacity to induce panic in the centers of power and self" (*When Species Meet* 10). The human-animal binary is asymmetric. Insofar as the animal is considered inferior, any encounter on equal terms is a questioning of that hierarchy. The animal's gaze is unsettling, for it places humans back in the predatory loop. Meeting their gaze obliges us to reconsider our place in the world.

In his essay "Why Look at Animals?" John Berger explores the dialectic of the gaze between animals and humans, explaining that there is both a familiarity and something distinct in the look of the animal, which leads to "a power" being "ascribed to the animal, comparable with

human power but never coinciding with it" (3). This gaze is particularly significant in the representation of predation in narratives, for it draws from the difference that tenuously holds together prey and its hunter. *La vorágine* and *Doña Bárbara* present scenes in which humans and animals gaze into each other as predators and prey, enacting the ambivalence of the predatory cycle. To explore the predatory ecologies of narratives is to analyze those exchanges that display the familiar and different "power" that corresponds to animals as predators and prey.

Haraway is particularly relevant because her work explores the blurring boundaries between humans and animals. Her book *When Species Meet* (2008) explores the "contact zones" between species, analyzing the ways in which different organisms become "entangled" (4). Her approach emphasizes the external relations between animals and humans, and how such meetings between are ontologically significant. She asks "When species meet, the question of how to inherit histories is pressing, and how to get on together is at stake" (*When Species Meet* 35). Encounters between species—just as any encounter with the other—raises the problem of how to get along, how to relate with the other. Although Haraway is far more interested in meetings with domestic species, her approach is interesting to understanding the encounters between wild species and humans. Even if domestic species have been coevolving with humans for centuries, such a period of time is very small in the overall scheme of natural selection. Haraway's book is after all titled When Species Meet—the term "species" being central to her arguments insofar as it avoids human exceptionalism and incorporates all living beings. Whereas in the past encounters with wild animals occurred mostly in zoos, climate change has reduced natural habitats and increased meetings with wild animals near urban centres, as is the case, for example, with bears searching for food in city garbage dumps. Predation is one manner of

meeting between animals and humans in the wild. Understanding how we imagine predation in narratives is important to learning "how to get on together" when large predators cross paths with us near our cities and in the wild.

The significance of predation in *La vorágine* and *Doña Bárbara* reveals the close interdependence between species in the Orinoco *llanos*. I will focus on wild predators and feral animals, for they emerge as significant elements in each narrative, questioning the "Great Divides" cited by Haraway. Wild predators are those that have not been previously domesticated by humans, whereas feral animals are those that become wild after being domesticated. Encounters with both types of animals highlight the fragile links between humans and animals. Similar to the feedback loops of predator and prey communities in a given ecosystem—where the growth and decrease of either community triggers shifts in populations—so do the predatory ecologies narrated in *La vorágine* and *Doña Bárbara* manifest the susceptibility of such interconnections between animals and humans. I draw insights from Levi Bryant's "black ecology" which envisions interdependence as relations that "can always be broken, often with dire consequences" (303). Ecological interdependence is not just a mesh of links between constituents, but rather a dynamic interconnectedness that can break down. Biological feedback loops demonstrate the mechanisms through which organisms attempt to cope with disruptions in the environment. "What ecology should teach us, and what a melancholy black ecology foregrounds, is that relations are *precarious*" (Bryant 303). Bryant's argument challenges the common notion that interconnectedness is intrinsic to the natural world. Instead of taking ecological relations for granted, he explains that ecological praxis is constantly assessing relations between beings as external: "Everywhere ecologists draw attention to what happens

when entities are separated from relations they previously enjoyed and what happens when new entities are introduced into networks of existing relations" (Bryant 303). Ecosystems are constantly adjusting to changes. Describing ecological relations as precarious underscores the fact that these are not invariable, but are rather prone to changing. *La vorágine* and *Doña Bárbara* narrate the changes that took place in the Orinoco *llanos* and how these affected the relations between humans and animals. The rise in cattle ranching increased the population of possible prey for the *Crocodylus intermedius*, an event that set off the hunting of crocodiles by humans and their eventual exploitation for the commercial use of their skins. The interconnections between organisms in the Orinoco *llanos* were thus altered, generating disruptions in the ecosystem.

Another way that Gallegos and Rivera explore the complexity of human and nonhuman relations in the Orinoco *llanos* is through the use of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism. Animals are often personified, while humans are also assigned animal characteristics. A closer reading of these instances sheds light on the relations between animals and humans, for the attributes that separate them seem to collapse in their depictions. The predatory ecologies present in the novels generate these reversals between anthropomorphism and zoomorphism in tandem with ambivalent predatory encounters. Humans are sometimes considered predators, and at other times they feel as if hunted by animals. They are also sometimes described as wild animals. For example, the three Mondragones bandits that work for Doña Bárbara all respond to nicknames that refer to large feline predators: "*Onza, Tigre y León*" ("*Jaguar, Tiger, and Lion*"; 204). They are not given any other names throughout the narrative, outside of their feline nicknames which allude to their animality in contrast to Santos Luzardo's plans to civilize the plains. Humans

seem animals, and *vice versa*. I consider both the depiction of predatory relations and the anthropomorphism/zoomorphism of entities as the constituents of the predatory ecologies of the novels. How the relations between humans and animals are envisioned and their characterization shape the predatory ecologies of the narrative. These predatory ecologies are the encounters between humans and animals that can result in death by one or the other, revealing not just the fear of animals present in the environmental imaginaries of the plains, but also the enmeshed relations between both. Humans are predators and prey, much the same ways as other animals. The male protagonists in both novels struggle with this fact, becoming unnerved by the presence of the predatory other.

La vorágine tells the story of Arturo Cova, a young and educated man living in Bogotá, who decides to flee from the city with his lover Alicia, only to become lost in the Amazonian rainforest where he witnesses the horrors of the rubber industry and suffers bouts of hallucinations. The novel takes place in two distinct landscapes at the beginning of the twentieth century: the plains of Casanare and the Amazonian rainforest. Critics have mostly focused on the rainforest as the central landscape of *La vorágine*, especially given the beginning of the third part which includes the often cited prayer to the jungle (Ordóñez 51). It is not, however, the only geography that appears in the novel. The first part is entirely devoted to the plains, narrating some significant events that manifest the predatory ecology of the book. Inserted after the prologue is a fragment of a letter by Arturo Cova that opens the narrative referencing the plains: "el destino implacable me desarraigó de la prosperidad incipiente y me lanzó a las pampas" ("the relentless destiny uprooted me from incipient prosperity and launched me to the pampas"; 282). Rather than dismiss the role of the plains in *La vorágine*, I am interested in the predatory

encounters between humans and animals in that specific geography. Although the journey to the dark forests of the Amazon is central to the narrative, it is during the travels through the plains that the predatory ecology is introduced. Moreover, the region of Casanare is also one of the richest in flora and fauna in Colombia.

Set in the 1920s, *Doña Bárbara* tells the similar story of Santos Luzardo—a young lawyer who lives in the capital of Venezuela—returning to the lands he inherited from his family in the plains of Apure. He entertains plans to civilize the plains by establishing order and regain property rights from his neighbours, Míster Danger and Doña Bárbara. The former is an Alaskan who has found in the plains of Venezuela a place to live as an accomplice to the outlaws in Apure. He is a co-conspirator with Doña Bárbara throughout the narrative, helping steal cattle from the Altamira ranch inherited by the Venezuelan lawyer. Luzardo's arrival triggers a land dispute between ranchers, for the infamous Doña Bárbara is said to have unlawfully taken over control of the Barquereña ranch that belonged to Luzardo's father. As the primary obstacle of Santos Luzardo and his project to establish property claims, Doña Bárbara is a symbol of the "llanura bárbara, devoradora de hombres" ("barbarian plain, devourer of men"; 5). The depiction of the plains is feminine in the cited passage, identifying women with nature as a predatory threat to men (Magnarelli 38). At times the novel will deploy the masculine "llanos," although when eliciting the predatory elements of the plains, the feminine "llanura" is preferred. Such identification is central to how gender affects the predatory ecology of both novels.

La vorágine and *Doña Bárbara*—both published in the 1920s—are salient examples of *novelas de la tierra* or *novelas terrígenas*. In his seminal work titled *The Spanish American Regional Novel: Modernity and Autochthony*, Carlos Alonso explains that "the *novela de la*

tierra purports to write a literary text that incorporates the autochthonous essence" (66). The search for the "autochthonous" led writers to construct a cultural discourse that emphasized regional elements in narratives. To narrate the nation, writers looked to the local in constructing narratives and poetry, so as to legitimize Latin America in the face of European literatures. In *La vorágine,* for example, the region of Casanare and the Colombian Amazon are important landscapes, much in the same way that the plains of Apure are central to *Doña Bárbara*. Jennifer French explains that *La vorágine* "verbalizes the spatial configuration of the land" (132), that is, it expresses textually the contours of the land. The narrative sequence of the novel spatially follows the Río Negro meandering into the Amazon rainforest. Readers can trace the geography of Colombia through its references to rivers and cities found in the novel. There is a cartographic intent in the narrative of Cova's journey to the Colombian Amazon, an attempt to trace the contours of the land (French 132). Insofar as the novel verbalizes the specific topographies within its narrative, it attempts to mimic the land it portrays. To mimic is to attempt to appear to be that which is being imitated. The land is not a mere backdrop to the novel, but rather the subject that it attempts to mimic. By establishing geographic references that can literally be traced unto a map, the novel places a strong emphasis on representing Colombian topographies. Alonso also cites the "mimetic quality" that Gallegos professes of his writing in *Doña Bárbara* (109). In other words, the novel also carefully considers geography as central in its narrative. Both Gallegos and Rivera are attempting to verbalize or narrate the land—they attempt to bring the land to the forefront, mapping its contours. At its core, the Venezuelan author's novel is about a landowner struggling to place limits on his lands, an attempt at a cartography of Apure. Each author claims that his novel was conceived or written after travelling to the regions that serve as

the setting. Gallegos, for example, claims that during the writing of *Doña Bárbara* in April of 1927, he chose to visit the plains of Apure (3). We also know that Rivera visited Casanare during "his first legal case" and would later use his experiences in the *llanos* to write "the first section of *La vorágine*" (French 125). Depicting the plains geographies is thus a central motif of their search for the "autochthonous."

In his ecocritical reading of *La vorágine,* Germán Bula suggests that the *llanos* are a relevant topography that merits scrutiny (91-96). However, whereas Bula concentrates on "biophilia" as a central category in his analysis, my ecocritical reading focuses on the predation binds animals and humans in the plains of the Orinoco.[12] Rather than a harmonious convergence between humans and animals, I emphasize the precarious relations enacted through predation. When Santos Luzardo enters the Orinoco plains*,* sighting the haunting eyes of crocodiles in the river at sundown, he is thrown into a predatory loop that ambiguously situates him in a shifting role between predator and prey: "Centenares de puntos negros erizaban la ancha superficie: trompas de babas y caimanes que respiraban a flor de agua, inmóviles, adormitados a la tibia caricia de las turbias ondas" ("Hundreds of black points bristled on the wide surface: the snouts of many caimans and crocodiles that breathed on the water's surface, unmoving, lulled by the lukewarm caress of the dark waves"; Gallegos 12). Encountering the gaze of numerous specimens of *Crodoylus intermedius*, he is unsure whether he is the hunter or hunted, quickly deciding to reach out for his rifle. The fact that Santo Luzardo intends to use the firearm testifies to the threat he perceives from the reptilian predators. He is no longer outside the reach of predators, being himself a predator ready to strike. During this moment of uncertainty—this

[12] The plains that surround the Orinoco river basin encompass both the region of Casanare depicted in *La vorágine* and that of Apure in *Doña Bárbara*.

twisting and reversing of the predatory loop—the precarious relations between animals in the environment, one that can too easily break down, is manifested. Similarly, when Arturo Cova is surprised by an aquatic snake that is actually hunting him, he is visibly shaken by the sudden awareness of becoming part of the predatory cycles in Casanare:

> Partiendo una rama, me incliné para barrer con ella las vegetaciones acuátiles, pero don Rafo me detuvo, rápido como el grito de Alicia. Había emergido bostezando para atraparme una serpiente 'güío', corpulenta como una viga, que a mis tiros de revólver se hundió removiendo el pantano y rebasándolo en las orillas […] Con espanto no menor comprendí lo que le pasaba, y, sin saber cómo, abrazando a la futura madre, lloré todas mis desventuras. (296-297)

> Breaking off a branch, I leaned over to sweep the vegetation aside, but Don Rafo seized me, quick as the startled cry of Alicia. A gigantic boa, thick as a two-foot beam, had emerged, mouth yawning. It sank as I fired at it with my revolver, stirring the swamp violently, pulsing the water so the waves overflowed the swamp margins […] With anxiety as great as hers I realized what was the matter; and scarcely aware of what I was doing, I embraced the future mother and wept.

Unaware of the predator lying in wait in the swamp waters, Cova brushes a few branches away before coming face to face with a boa ready to strike. The encounter is so quick that Cova hardly has time to realize that he was prey to the boa.

In their journeys to the Orinoco plains, both male protagonists find themselves in a predatory cycle that challenges their urban lifestyles by making them aware that human

exceptionalism is an illusion quickly dissolved by predators. In other words, predation obliges them to become aware of their precarious interconnectedness with flora and fauna in the Orinoquía region. Relations with other organisms are dynamic and external. Encountering predators that consider humans as prey portrays the shifting relations between beings in a biological system. Whereas Luzardo and Cova come from an urban context in which relations are stable insofar as civility requires it, their travels to the *llanos* place them in an environment where the predatory ecology is constantly adjusting to disturbances. Survival depends on it.

La vorágine and *Doña Bárbara* do not just document the plains of Casanare and Apure, but obliges us as readers to question what occurs when species meet. Challenging the seeming superiority of humans, predation unravels the discrimination of the animal other. Those moments in which human characters gaze into the eyes of predatory or feral animals, feeling suddenly threatened, reveal the speciesist assumptions in such a dichotomy, a polarity that is recurrent in the literatures of the plains. After Arturo Cova witnesses the dismemberment of one of the cattle ranchers by a feral bull, he wants to escape what he perceives as the nightmarish and savage plains, expressing that it was necessary "volver a las tierras civilizadas" ("return to civilized lands"; 374). The bull will simply not be subdued by humans and actually kills one of them, to the horror of Cova:

> Aunque el asco me fruncía la piel, rendí mis pupilas sobre el despojo. Atravesado en la montura, con el vientre al sol, iba el cuerpo decapitado, entreabriendo las yerbas con los dedos rígidos, como para agarrarlas por última vez. Tintineando en los calcañales desnudos pendían espuelas que nadie se acordó de quitar, y del lado opuesto, entre el paréntesis de los brazos, destilaba aguasangre el muñón del cuello,

> rico de nervios amarillosos, como raicillas recién arrancadas. La bóveda del cráneo y la mandíbula que la sigue faltaban allí, y solamente el maxilar inferior reía ladeado, como burlándose de nosotros. Y esa risa sin rostro y sin alma, sin labios que la corrigieran, sin ojos que la humanizaran, me pareció vengativa, torturadora, y aún al través de los días que corren me repite su mueca desde ultratumba y me estremece de pavor. (373)
>
> Although disgust made my flesh creep, I could not avert my eyes from the remains. Thrown across the saddle, belly up, was the decapitated body, rigid fingers trailing the tall grass, as if to grasp it for the last time. Tinkling on the naked heels hung the spurs which no one had thought of removing; and on the other side, in the space between hanging arms, the stump of the neck, rich with yellow nerves like roots freshly plucked from the soil, dripped watery blood. The base of the skull and the jaw that projects from it were missing; only the lower jaw was there, twisted to one side, grinning hideously as if in sport of us. And that faceless, soulless smirk, with no lips to alter it, no eyes to humanize it, seemed to me vengeful, torturing; and even after these many days, that grimace comes to me from beyond the tomb and chills my blood with fear.

The haunting scene dwells on the mauled corpse of the rancher. Cova experiences both disgust and fear as he comes to grips with the fatal violence that the bull exerted on the body. Parts of the body are missing, making the corpse look non-human. Cova confesses looking at the "remains," but not a human body. The decapitated neck looks like "roots freshly plucked from the soil,"

while the hanging lower jaw has "no eyes to humanize it." Looking at the torn corpse, Cova experiences firsthand the encounter with the nonhuman other. Fear overwhelms him as he realizes that death is a moment away in the plains of Casanare. He is not just afraid of the hideous cadaver, but of the capacity for violence that the bull was capable. Although it is not an act of predation, the attack of the feral bull makes manifest the precarious relations between different organisms in the *llanos*. Cova's gradual awareness of his vulnerable situation as yet another being in the region, fighting to stay alive amongst humans and nonhumans, is precipitated by encounters with animals throughout the narrative. Although he never completely lets go of his privileged situation, the predatory encounters serve as a challenge to his anthropocentric view of the world. First was the impending strike of the boa, and then the death of the rancher by the bull. It is through these events that he becomes conscious of the blurring boundaries between the human and nonhuman. What at first was a living rancher becomes a hideous corpse that is more akin to "roots" and "remains."

The ferality of the bull complicates the twisting predatory ecology. According to Garrard, ferality is "the condition of existing in between domestication and wildness" ("Ferality Tales" 242). Feral animals inhabit an ambivalent role insofar they neither completely wild, nor domesticated. Ranchers in *La vorágine* and *Doña Bárbara* are involved in domesticating enterprises, whether it is the branding and herding of cattle or the breaking of horses. Ferality manifests the imposition of human superiority as it subdues animals to human interests. Those encounters with feral animals partly break down the "troublesome dichotomy" between wild and domestic animals that Barney Nelson identifies in *The Wild and the Domestic* (6). It is "troublesome" because the wild-domestic binary reflects the overall nonhuman-human

dichotomy. Wild animals are often seen as a threat to be kept at a distance from civilized life. The encounter with a domestic animal that suddenly becomes "wild" questions the validity of the wild-domestic binary. As the feral bull tramples the human cadaver in its rage, Cova no longer identifies it as a bull, but rather as a "bicho" ("creature") and a "bestia" ("beast") that poses serious threats to himself and his fellow ranchers (Rivera 370-1). As a feral "creature," it is no longer part of the cattle that they have been herding, but a "beast" that challenges human dominion over animals in the plains. Similarly, as Santos Luzardo watches the herding of feral cattle in the Apure plains, he envisions the scene as part of a larger scheme in the dichotomy between civilization and barbarism: "Sus nervios que ya habían olvidado la bárbara emoción, volvían a experimentarla vibrando acordes con el estremecimiento de coraje con que hombres y bestias sacudían la llanura, y ésta le parecía más ancha, más imponente y hermosa que nunca, porque dentro de sus dilatados términos iba el hombre dominando la bestia" ("His nerves, which had forgotten this wild emotion, tensed once more with it, vibrating in accord with the thrill of courage with which men and beasts shook the plain, and the plain seemed to him wider, more imposing and beautiful than ever, because within its dilated limits man made progress in dominating the beast"; 121). Domesticating feral animals plays a significant role in the plans for civilizing the plains. To domesticate is to civilize. To domesticate feral animals is to control them, to guide their "wild" tendencies toward the benefit of society. That is why ferality questions human exceptionalism and the "Great Divide" between humans and animals. Feral animals have become wild, have escaped the limits of civilization. Ferality challenges anthropocentrism, for it confuses the evolutionary narrative from a wild state to a civilized state. The civilizing enterprise of ranchers in both *La vorágine* and *Doña Bárbara* is the domesticating

of feral cattle, to bring them back in control as the property of landowners. Cova's reaction to the mauling of the rancher is to want to return to the city, to return to civilization. He is filled with dread at the subversion of the logic of civilization that so easily breaks down in the Casanare plains. For many, the emergence of cattle herding in the surrounding areas of the Orinoco basin during the twentieth century was a display of the powers of civilization spreading to the wilderness. As Luzardo envisions his role in the Apure plains, the ranchers' herding seems a testimony to how "man made progress in dominating beast." Ferality in both novels challenges the separation between the human and nonhuman, setting the stage for the predatory ecologies in which the protagonists inevitably find themselves in.

In the final chapters of *Doña Bárbara*, Santos Luzardo also falls prey to the "fiera ley de la barbarie" ("savage law of barbarism"; 212). He resorts to violence immediately after a tragic encounter between the rancher Remigio's grandson and a tiger of the plains (183). It is interesting to note that the so-called "tigre americano" ("American tiger") is common in literary texts of the plains, appearing in Sarmiento's *Facundo* and Alencar's *O sertanejo*, and refers to the largest American feline commonly known as the jaguar or *Panthera onca*. Not to be confused with another very common American feline named mountain lion or puma, the jaguar is easily distinguished by its black markings. The death of Remigio's grandson at the hands of the jaguar is yet another predatory event that questions the primacy of humans under the guise of civilization, triggering the violent outburst of Santos Luzardo as he takes off to confront the Mondragones and Doña Bárbara who reside in the ranch named *El Miedo*. The name of her ranch invokes the fear that the predatory ecology of the novel instils upon Santos Luzardo, who sees himself as the standard bearer of civilization. The wilderness that Doña Bárbara represents is a

source of fear, just as the *Crocodylus intermedius* is feared by cattle ranchers throughout the region. As Santos Luzardo leaves for the ranch *El Miedo*, he exclaims to his associate that "el atropello me lanza a la violencia y […] acepto el camino" ("the offense propels me to violence and […] I accept that path"; 193). His plan to lawfully civilize the plains dissipates as he is willing to hunt down the criminals and kill them with his own hands if necessary. It is the death of the child at the hands of the jaguar that precipitates Luzardo to become a predator himself. The attack on the child makes him fully aware of the predatory ecology that cannot be avoided in the Apure plains. Up until this point in the novel, Luzardo has attempted to resist participating in the predatory ecology, attempting to establish law and order through dialogue. Yet it is an act of predation upon a defenceless child that pushes him to become a predator himself, hunting the Mondragón brothers down. The boundaries between civilization and barbarism, culture and nature, and human and animal are blurred by these predatory events that undermine human domination.

Such predatory and feral encounters enact "acts of symbiogenesis" that "do not produce harmonious wholes" but rather put into place the "ingestion and subsequent indigestion among messmates, when everyone is on the menu" (*When Species Meet* 287). All species share the same mess hall which is planet Earth. No matter how much humans might attempt to single themselves out from the ecosystems they are embedded and enmeshed, the act of predation foregrounds their inevitable place in the world. They emphasize that those messy and precarious relations are the basis of ecology. The network of relations within the food web are never fixed, but are constantly shifting to adjust to disruptions. When a new species—as is the case with humans in the Orinoco basin—is introduced, there are shifts in the relations between organisms. Predation is central to

ecology insofar as it manifests these relations between animals in the food web. In other words, predation affects the energy flow within a biological system. According to Alison Stevens, predatory interactions are crucial "to maintaining the diversity of organisms that make up an ecological community" (36). *La vorágine* is in many ways a novel of the "ingestion and subsequent indigestion" that occurs in nature, as the jungle itself "devours" them all at the end (579). Arturo Cova is trapped in a vortex that slowly ingests his sanity as he travels ever deeper into the jungle.

A variety of predators make appearances throughout the book, such as the "caribes" or piranhas that are a threat to swimming in the waters (303). The piranha is one of the most widely known fish of the Amazon basin, mostly because of its occasional carnivorous diet. Another interesting carnivore of the Orinoco region is the "víbora mapanare" or *Bothrops atrox* that bites its own tail (379). This pit viper is extremely venomous, and is capable of mimicking its environment extremely well. The "cachirre" caimans or *Caiman sclerops* also populate the waters of the Casanare plains in the novel: "La laguneta de aguas amarillosas estaba cubierta de hojarascas. Por entre ellas nadaban unas tortuguillas llamadas 'galápagos', asomando la cabeza rojiza; y aquí y allí los caimanejos nombrados 'cachirres' exhibían sobre la nata del pozo los ojos sin párpados" ("The lagoon of yellow waters lay almost unseen beneath a mantle of fallen leaves. Between them swam small turtles called 'galapagos,' peering above water with their reddish heads; and here and there the small caimans named 'cachirres' floated through the scum with lidless eyes"; Rivera 296). Smaller than the Orinoco crocodile, these caimans feed mostly on fish. And finally, the panther is also cited as a predator in the *llanos*: "Y otra vez nos alejamos por el desierto oscuro, donde comenzaban a himplar las panteras" ("And again we went away

through the dark desert, where panthers were beginning to growl"; 366). It is during the night—when humans cannot see clearly—that the panthers growl in the distance. Again, these predators evoke fear in the ranchers, as a threat that they cannot entirely anticipate. Wild predators seem like an ever present threat that is hidden in the environment. The predatory encounters of the novels display the suddenness of the attacks. Most of these predators occur in waterways. The seemingly embryonic rivers through which Cova traverses in Casanare and which lead him to the Amazonian jungle are the recurrent setting of the predatory ecology of *La vorágine*. The riverways constitute the scenarios of predation, whereas the plains are the backdrop of feral encounters with animals. This juxtaposition of places reveals the gendered view of nature that is present in the two narratives and has not gone unnoticed by critics such as Magnarelli and French. I will concentrate on those issues later on, focusing first on some key predatory events before offering a more nuanced reading of the gendered depictions of nature and how these affect predation and ferality in the two novels.

An important aspect in the representation of predators in *La vorágine* is the glossary that Rivera includes at the end of the third edition published in 1926, a glossary that is later extended in the fifth edition of 1928. As Ordóñez suggests in her edition of *La vorágine*, the terms introduced do not always "coincide with common definitions" (Rivera 387). A careful perusal of the glossary indeed reveals that the definitions are rudimentary and brief. For example, the "Conga" is defined as "hormiga venenosa" ("poisonous ant") and the "Caribe" is a "cierto pez muy voraz" ("certain voracious fish"; Rivera 580). However, it is interesting to note that much of the vocabulary introduced corresponds to some of the flora and fauna of the plains and jungle in Colombia (Rivera 387-90). The list of regional names for animals and plants has a documentary

effect, even if the definitions undermine its appearance as authentic record of the linguistic and zoological abundance of the different geographies of Colombia.

We have seen some of the numerous predators that appear in the first section of *La vorágine* that corresponds to the Casanare plains, yet perhaps the single most significant predatory scene takes place at the very beginning of the novel, when Arturo Cova encounters an enormous snake with its wide mouth about to strike him, an event that foreshadows the gradual ingestion of humans by nature: "Había emergido bostezando para atraparme una serpiente güío, corpulenta como una viga, que a mis tiros de revólver se hundió removiendo el pantano y rebasándolo en las orillas" ("A gigantic boa, thick as a two-foot beam, had emerged, mouth yawning. It sank as I fired at it with my revolver, stirring the swamp violently, pulsing the water so the waves overflowed the swamp margins"; Rivera 296). Arturo Cova disturbs the waters of the swamp, wanting to clear the flora, completely unaware of the precarious situation in which he is placing himself. When he breaks the branch to "sweep" away plants on the water's surface, Arturo Cova is placing himself separate from the rest of his environment. Considering himself outside the predatory loop, he disturbs the vegetation as if he has nothing to worry about. He is quickly shaken out of the illusion of safety by don Rafa and Alicia's scream. The construction of the second sentence builds on the stark contrast with the preceding one. If Cova was the subject of the previous sentence, the second sentences opens quite literally with the "yawning" mouth of a boa in the water. The sentence begins with the verb construction "Había emergido bostezando" which is ambiguous as to who the subject of the sentence, whether a human literally yawning or the ominous snake. The inverted syntax also traces the predatory event whereby Cova becomes first aware of the action, prior to realizing that it is a boa. As an urbanite, he is not acquainted

with encountering snakes in the wild. It heightens the surprise of having a predator emerging from the waters. For a brief instant, the predatory ecology irrupts in the scene. Cova is now the prey, violently forced to reconsider his place in that environment. In fact, he is not in control of the situation. Interestingly, he compares the aquatic snake to a wooden beam, an inorganic thing that testifies to Arturo Cova's binary approach to the natural world. The snake is the other to his presence, which forces him to react by using his revolver. The suddenness of the event is all the more striking. In one sentence, the predator appears face to face with the protagonist—who is also a predator—and dips beneath the water leaving behind only a "stirring" and "overflowing" of water in the river banks. After the encounter and seeing Alicia visibly shaken, Arturo Cova breaks down and cries over everything that has happened since he left the city (297). It is this predatory event that makes him aware of his precarious situation in the *llanos*.

In his edition of *La vorágine*, Ordóñez suggests the name "serpiente güío" is used to refer to the common boa, whose scientific name is *Boa constrictor,* yet it is unclear whether Eustasio Rivera was referring to the larger species known as the "güío negro" or anaconda that inhabits the Orinoco alongside the Orinoco crocodile (94). Whereas the common boa is primarily found on land and tree branches, where it can easily hide from other predators, the glossary that Rivera provides at the end of his novel describes the "güío" as an "enorme serpiente acuática" ("enormous aquatic snake"; 388). The anaconda seems to better fit that description, since it is found mostly in waterways where it can move silently through the waters. I would argue that the author is actually referring to the "güío negro" or anaconda, a fearsome and salient predator of the Orinoco region that makes the scene all the more ominous. Precisely, the appearance of this emblematic carnivore highlights the predatory ecology of the novel. Nature is

not subdued or dominated, but remains "dynamic and vulnerable" (French 143). The scene leaves the reader with a sensation of vulnerability to what lies beneath the waters. The protagonist is thrown into the vortex of the predatory loop in the novel from this very first encounter.

Before finally entering the Colombian jungle, Arturo Cova witnesses another violent encounter with nature which he identifies as predatory. Before the end of the first section of *La vorágine*, Arturo Cova sees a great fire consume the plains, first identifying it with a "víbora mapanare" and later suggesting that it is quite literally "devouring" the flora and fauna it finds in its path: "La devoradora falange iba dejando fogatas en los llanos ennegrecidos, sobre cuerpos de animales achicharrados" ("The devouring line spread, leaving behind burning fires in the blackened plains and the scorched bodies of animals"; 380). His depiction of the event manifests his awareness of the twisting predatory loops that interconnect humans and nonhumans, organic and inorganic constituents of the *llanos*. Zoomorphism shapes his understanding of the vortex into which he is gradually being ingested. In broad terms, the entire narrative tells of Cova's gradual loss of reason as he travels ever deeper into the Amazon jungle. This journey in which he becomes mentally and physically lost in the environment is precisely the vortex that titles the book. Zoomorphism is thus one of the manifestations of that gradually blurring of the limits between what distinguishes Cova from the nonhuman other. The forest fire is a predator, one capable of consuming all organic life, including humans. Arturo Cova's awareness of the predatory ecology in his environment further pushes him to lose his sanity founded on urban rationality, so much so that after the fire of the plains, he cackles like "Satan" (Rivera 381). Feeling himself part of the predatory cycle of the *llanos*, he identifies himself with what he sees

as the demonizing forces of nature. It is important to note that the negativity he projects over nature is the reversal of his relationship with the nonhuman. Questioning Arturo Cova's human superiority, the predatory ecology of *La vorágine* challenges the dichotomies between humans and animals, especially given the seeming mental instability of the protagonist that struggles to insert himself in the precarious relations of all flora and fauna in the *llanos*.

The Apure plains in Gallegos' book are also shaped by ingestions and indigestions, principally in the form of Doña Bárbara who is described as the "devourer of men," but also in several other important predators such as the one-eyed crocodile of *Bramador* or the large aquatic snake—most likely an anaconda, given its description—that pulls an entire cow into the river towards the end of the novel. Other predators include the carnivorous fish "caribe" and "zumurrito," as well as the "temblador" or electric eel: "Son muchos los peligros de trambucarse y si el Viejito no va en el bongo, el bonguero no va tranquilo. Porque el caimán acecha sin que se le vea ni el aguaje, y el temblador y la raya están siempre a la parada, y el cardumen de los zamurritos y de los caribes, que dejan a un cristiano en los puros huesos" ("There are many dangers to be avoided, and if the Little Old Father isn't in the boat, no riverman feels safe. The caimans are watching for you without making a ripple, and the electric eel and the ray are waiting, and the flock of buzzards and the school of caribs is there, ready to strip your bones"; Gallegos 14). All the animals named in the passage are referred to as "dangers," indicating the perceived threat by the captain. It displays the fear of the wilderness that crystallizes in an exaggerated view of the number of predators surrounding them. Although the electric eel and the ray are predators, they would not prey on humans. As a relatively new species, humans seem

overwhelmed by the predatory ecology of the place, unaware and fearful of their place in the food web.

The "yacabó" or screech-owl also plays an important role as a predator whose screech announces the arrival of death: "De pronto cantó el 'yacabó'. Campanadas funerales en el silencio desolador del crepúsculo de la selva, que hielan el corazón del viajero" ("Suddenly the song of the screech-owl reached their ears, a knell to strike icy fear to the traveller's heart in the desolate silence of the savage twilight"; Gallegos 24). The suddenness of the screech-owl's nocturnal attacks on smaller prey are seen as ominous and foreboding. Predation instills fear in humans because to those unacquainted with a given predatory ecology, the attacks of hunting predators cannot be anticipated. Just as Cova's sudden realization that something is about to strike him from the water—before knowing exactly what it is—so does predation often evoke the nonhuman other hiding in the foliage before lashing out. In the "silence of the savage twilight," a wild predator is awaiting to strike a passerby.

Yet another predator that accompanies Míster Danger is the "cunaguara" or ocelot (*Leopardus pardalis*):

> Un día, como diese muerte a una cunaguara recién parida, se apoderó de los cachorros y logró criar y domesticar uno, con el cual retozaba, ejercitando su perenne buen humor de niño grande y brutal. Ya el cunaguaro lo había acariciado con algunos zarpazos; pero él se divertía mucho mostrando las cicatrizes y éstas le dieron tanto prestigio como las gacetillas. (Gallegos 85)

> One day, after he had killed a female ocelot which had recently borne cubs, he took the little ones and succeeded in rearing and taming one of them. He played and frolicked with this one, exercising the humor of the great brutal boy that he was. The cub had given him many a scratch already, but he enjoyed showing the scars, and these added to his prestige as much as the clippings.

This last predator reverses ferality insofar as it is a wild animal that is not quite as domesticated as Míster Danger expects, for he already suffered claw marks from his ocelot. Humans and animals found in the Apure plains are predators, hunting each other in a constant struggle. The narrative is constructed on the predatory tensions that abound, whether it be through animal encounters or in humans savagely preying on each other. Even the central conflict between landowners on the setting of limits to their lands is a manifestation of that same predatory ecology, one in which the land and its inhabitants are preyed upon.

The book is shaped by predation in its many forms. Alonso coins an interesting notion in regards to *Doña Bárbara*, that of a "zero-degree of nature" in which the land resonates a violence that serves as a means to measure "human activity" in the narrative (139). This suggests the role of nature as a baseline from which all other events in the narrative take place. Landscape is the "protagonista" ("protagonist") of the novel (Gallegos 4). Many of the predatory events are set in a "zero-degree of nature" insofar as humans and animals encounter each other face to face, obliged to cross gazes without knowing who is the prey and who is the predator. Similar to the way feedback loops function, the introduction of a new organism triggers reactions from the entire system. Humans enter a situation in which other organisms have to respond, whether it be preying on them or resisting them. The crocodile of Bramador is an alpha predator who must

react to the presence of cattle and humans in the region, much the same way humans and cattle must respond to the threat of a predator. It is an ambivalent relation, one that could go either way, since the biological system in which humans, cattle, and crocodiles are inserted is still adjusting to the new set of circumstances. The predatory ecology of the novel establishes a "zero-degree of nature" in which both animals and humans react to each other's presence. Similar to the first predatory scene of *La vorágine*, the encounter of Santos Luzardo with "el tuerto del Bramador" as he begins his journey to the plains is a significant challenge to human exceptionalism:

> Luego comenzó a asomar en el centro del río la cresta de un caimán enorme. Se aboyó por completo, abrió lentamente los párpados escamosos.
>
> Santos Luzardo empuñó el rifle y se puso de pie, dispuesto a reparar el yerro de su puntería momentos antes, pero el patrón intervino:
>
> —No lo tire.
>
> —¿Por qué, patrón?
>
> —Porque… Porque otro de ellos nos lo puede cobrar, si usted acierta a pegarle, o él mismo si lo pela. Ése es el tuerto del *Bramador*, al cual no le entran balas. (12)

> Then began to emerge in the centre of the river the crest of an enormous crocodile. He came completely afloat, slowly opening his scaly eyelids.
>
> Santos Luzardo grabbed his rifle and stood up, eager to make up for his prior shot, but the *patrón* intervened:
>
> "Don't shoot him."
>
> "Why, *patrón*?"

> "Because… Because another one of them might make us pay for it, if you do hit him, or he himself might if you miss. That is the one-eyed of *Bramador*, impervious to bullets.

The opening of the "scaly eye-lids" triggers Santos Luzardo, who then attempts to fire a rifle shot at the crocodile, only to be told by the ship captain to stop. The reasoning the captain proposes is that to attack the crocodile will only enact the predatory cycle, whether it be the large crocodile itself or others surrounding the boat. It will trigger a feedback loop by which the surrounding predators will be disturbed. However, the captain of the ship also projects human emotions upon the crocodiles, as if Luzardo's shot would rile up the revenge of the other reptiles. By claiming that they "might make us pay for it," the captain is anthropomorphizing the animals. Yet what is significant in the passage is that the captain—even from an anthropocentric perspective—is aware of the predatory ecology that shapes the Apure plains. Challenging an alpha predator entails a conflict much larger that the protagonist foresees. As a newcomer from the city, Santos Luzardo ignores the dangers of his environment. Interestingly, the captain uses the word "cobrar" ("pay for") in depicting the predatory relations with the crocodiles, using a language closer to that of a landowner negotiating the sale of property. There is an economy at play in the environment, one in which the struggle between organisms is part of the regulatory processes of the biological system. The energy that goes from one organism to the next shapes the food web. Whether the captain is trying to communicate the predatory ecology to the city dweller in terms he will understand or he is projecting a capitalistic image unto nature, the captain is making Santos Luzardo aware of the precarious interconnections that hold them all together, humans and crocodiles. There is always a threat of "ingestion and subsequent

indigestion" in the Apure plains. Moreover, this geography is not harmonious and free from struggle, for it is intersected with those places that enact a "zero-degree of nature."

The second encounter is far more threatening, for crocodile and humans face off in the waters of the river. The scene takes place on a Holy Thursday, when the ranchers spend the day fishing on the river banks and partaking in the tradition of "cleaning" the rivers of crocodiles that often prey on cattle (Gallegos 131). Culling crocodiles so as to reduce their threat to cattle—which are seen as property by the ranchers—manifests the precarious interconnectedness of humans, crocodiles, and cattle in the Orinoco plains. Zoologist Castro Casal explains in his historic review of the hunt for the Orinoco crocodile that the emergence of cattle ranching in Colombia and Venezuela possibly increased human conflicts with the reptilian predator, especially during the twentieth century when its skin was commercially valued (77). One of the largest predators of the Orinoco, the crocodile is crucial to the stability of the region's ecosystem. The balance between predators and prey is delicate, and whereas the culling of crocodiles need not be negative if the numbers of such a predator risk destabilizing the equilibrium of flora and fauna, their excessive hunting by humans has pushed the Orinoco crocodile almost to extinction. The scene narrates the excesses of human ranchers, and in hindsight serves to remind us of the precarious interconnections of all organisms within a specific region. That one of the largest predators in the Orinoco is almost extinct bears witness to how relations often break down, leading to the instability of life in ecosystems.

As ranchers partake in the culling of crocodiles, the "tuerto del Bramador" suddenly appears in the waters:

> Era aquel caimán contra el cual Luzardo había intentado disparar en el sesteadero del palodeagua, el día de su llegada. Terror de los pasos del Arauca, de sus víctimas—gentes y reses—se había perdido la cuenta. Se le atribuían siglos de vida, y como siempre saliera ileso de los proyectiles, que rebotaban en su recio dorso, se había formado la leyenda de que no le entraban balas porque era un caimán encantado. Su apostadero habitual era la boca del caño *Bramador*, ahora en términos de *El Miedo*, pero desde allí dominaba el Arauca y sus afluentes, haciendo por ellos largas incursiones, de las cuales regresaba con la panza repleta a hacer su laboriosa digestión, dormitando al sol de las playas del *Bramador*. (132)

> This was the crocodile Luzardo had tried to shoot in the resting grounds of the *palodeagua* tree, the day of his arrival. He was the terror throughout de Arauca fords, and the locals had lost track of his victims—people and cattle—. Centuries of life were attributed to the crocodile, and since he was never injured by bullets, which bounced off his thick dorsal scales, legend had it that he was impervious to them because he was cursed. His habitual resting place was at the mouth of Bramador Creek, now at the edge of *El Miedo*, but from there he dominated the Arauca river and its tributaries, performing long raids through them and returning with a gorged belly to complete his digestion, basking in the sun at the banks of the creek.

The passage describes at length the crocodilian animal, highlighting its predatory habits. Its ominous depiction, it is the "Terror" of the Arauca river, so much so that countless "victims" have fallen prey to its hunts. It is being personified as a criminal who "raids" the riverways and

escapes the shots of its enemies unscathed. It represents the law of the *llanos* insofar as it is the incarnation of the "bravura armada" ("armed ferocity"; 212). Its thick skin does not allow bullets to penetrate as it hunts on men and cattle throughout the region. Moreover, there is a superstitious element, referring to the supposed enchanted nature of the crocodilian. Castro Casal cites the believed "curative and mystic" properties of the Orinoco crocodile in the region (74). The scene seems to coincide with some of the common practices of ranchers in the Orinoco plains. For example, the use of the crocodile's teeth during Good Friday was believed to have medicinal values (Castro Casal 74). The mode of hunting the crocodile in the scene also reveals certain hunting practices deployed by ranchers. Castro Casal explains that one mode of hunting was directly confronting the reptile in the water in pairs: whilst one person would grapple the ventral area of the crocodile with iron hooks, another would lasso the snout so as to pull it out of the water (75). The dual attack on the one-eyed crocodile by María Nieves and *Pajarote* similarly depicts that hunting practice: they lie in wait in the river, hiding behind the vegetation as the crocodile surfaces (132). Before the fatal encounter between humans and crocodilian, there is an exchange of gazes that fully enacts the predatory ecology of the novel: "de pronto el saurio volvió la cabeza y se quedó mirando aquello que flotaba a flor de agua" ("suddenly the reptile turned its head and looked at that which was floating on the water's surface"; 133). Having exploited the fact that the crocodile only has one eye, they remained in its blind side, hidden from view. Yet the moment the tuerto of *Bramador* turns around to look with its good eye, human and animal face each other. In the meeting of gazes, the predatory loop is once again twisted, for the crocodile immediately becomes aware that it is now the prey, rather than the

predator. Every organism has a predator, and the tuerto of *Bramador* senses the danger that two humans in the water pose.

A reflection of Doña Bárbara as a predator, the one-eyed crocodile ingests its preys and returns to the lands of her ranch. Both Doña Bárbara and the crocodile are alpha predators in the Apure plains. Whereas the *tuerto* is anthropomorphized as a terrorizing bandit, Doña Bárbara is zoomorphized as ferocious animal that hunts throughout the surrounding lands of the Apure plains. Both crocodile and woman prey upon the land, performing "raids" into the lands of other ranchers. They are both ambivalent animals, always transitioning beyond the limits imposed by civilization. The crocodile lives on the very edges of *El Miedo*, raiding the vicinities only to return full-bellied. Doña Bárbara is also trespassing the limits of her property to steal cattle, returning to her ranch with newly-branded cows. This negotiation of limits sets up the ambivalent predatory ecology of the novel insofar as it suggests that relations between beings are external and depend on the contingencies of each event. Animals and humans are connected by the actions they take, generating disturbances and reacting accordingly. The *tuerto* and Doña Bárbara trigger Santos Luzardo's incorporation into predatory cycle of Apure: "y tomó el camino del Llano para precipitarse en la vorágine" ("and he took the path of the Llano so as to throw himself into the vortex"; Gallegos 25). Interestingly, the way Doña Bárbara is zoomorphized throughout the novel reflects the escalating predatory ecology of the novel. As a young girl called "Barbarita" and about to be raped by bandits, she is identified with the "gaván" (24). The *gaván* or *Jabiru mycteria* is a large stork with a characteristic black head and a red ring around its neck. The *gaván* is an emblematic bird found throughout South America, but especially in the Pantanal wetlands where it is called the *tuiuiú*. The scene draws an analogy between the hunt for

the "gaván" and Barbarita's falling in love for the first time. Just as the "gaván" attempts to fly away but is ultimately brought down by its hunters, so is Barbarita's first love "brutalmente apagado por la violencia de los hombres, cazadores del placer" ("brutally smothered by the violence of men, hunters of pleasure"; 24). It is an act of rape that reverses Barbarita's life, inserting her in the predatory cycle of the plains. She was once prey to men, only to later become the "devourer of men." It is only then that she begins to be identified with a predatory bird—the "gavilán" or hawk—through the movement of her eyebrows, marking her reversal in the cycle of predation (44). Her strategies towards Santos Luzardo are also compared to the movements of a snake hunting its prey (196). Yet it is her identification with the tuerto of Bramador that most clearly displays the constant shifts between anthropomorphism and zoomorphism that are the core of predation in the novel.

Doña Bárbara's subsequent predatory zoomorphisms raise an important issue regarding the gendered representation of nature. The ambivalence of the predatory loop is closely tied with the negative portrayal of women in *La vorágine* and *Doña Bárbara*. It is important to note that, as Sharon Magnarelli argues, the depictions of nature and women are dependent on the unreliable projections of Cova and Santos Luzardo (39). Nature is depicted through the eyes of male characters whose perspective is anything but reliable, seeing in the flora and fauna a threatening alterity they identify with the feminine (Magnarelli 38). The ominous reflection of women and nature reminds us of how the "Great Divides" are rooted in a male-oriented distinction (*When Species Meet* 10). Breaking down those binaries is a response to patriarchy, for it undermines the asymmetry of those "Others to Man" (*When Species Meet* 10). Cova—one of the most cited unreliable narrators in Latin American literature—dreams at one point that Alicia is walking

through “sabanas lúgubres” (“dismal plains”) only to become a snake in his hands when he reaches for her (310). Alicia’s transformation into a predator in Cova’s dream implies the binary between nature and culture, identifying women as predatory. She is not unlike the biblical Eve and the snake, corrupting Adam in the Garden of Eden. Women, animals, and land become a dangerous alterity to Cova. In *Doña Bárbara*, Santos Luzardo is openly attempting to impose his plans of civilizing the plains. As a self-interested landowner, the Apure plains are a business venture in which to exercise his male dominance over the land. He struggles to civilize the land, to bring order to the *llanos*. He wants to fence the land, expressing his intent in a masculine gesture by imposing “la línea recta del hombre dentro de la línea curva de la Naturaleza” (“the straight line of man inside the curved line of Nature”; 82). The portrayal of Santos Luzardo’s plans is overtly referencing the rape of Nature. Civilization is a masculine “straight line” that must be “inside” the “curved line of Nature.” His arrival on the plains is accompanied with the shriek of the yacabó owl, the same shriek that sounded during the rape of Barbarita at the hands of the bandits (46). From the very beginning, Santos Luzardo considers his entire enterprise as struggle against nature, and the biggest obstacle to his plans of civilizing the plains is Doña Bárbara, who is “criatura y personificación de los tiempos que corrían” (“creature and personification of the times”; 20). She is zoomorphized and personified into a “creature.” On the one hand, she is a product of her times, created by the context that surrounds her. She cannot help become what surrounds her. Yet she is a nonhuman, closer to the predators that abound in the plains. Yet she is also a “personification of the times,” embodying as a human the difficulties of civilization in that region. Her title also manifests her proximity to predators, for the “ñ” sound of “doña” mimics the sound of animal growls (“gruñir”), claws (“uñas”), and can hurt

(“dañina”). This textual performance of animality is close to Aaron Moe’s understanding of zoopoetics insofar as it “pantomimes” through an “attentiveness to animals” (15). Gallegos, however, is establishing a pejorative zoomorphism of Doña Bárbara, a pantomime that negatively values her predatory savagery as a vestige of the plains. As ambivalent as the predatory loop that Santos Luzardo now finds himself in, so does Doña Bárbara incorporate those sudden reversals between human and animal.

Her portrayal as the “Esfinge de las sabanas” (“Sphinx of the plains”), a mythological monster—a hybrid of a woman, a lion, and a bird—is one of the more striking zoomorphisms in the novel, intensifying her identification with predatory animals and the enigmatic ambivalence that the predatory ecology of the novel sustains. Even if Santos Luzardo “perceives doña Bárbara as a totally evil being,” there are numerous moments in which the narrative “suggests she is not really as malevolent as she is believed to be” (Magnarelli 45). There is a particular episode in which Santos Luzardo himself is conflicted with doña Bárbara’s ambivalence during the rodeo:

> La voz de doña Bárbara, flauta del demonio andrógino que alentaba en ella, grave rumor de selva y agudo lamento de llanura, tenía un matiz singular, hechizo de los hombres que la oían; pero Santos Luzardo no se había quedado allí para deleitarse con ella. Cierto era que, por un momento, había experimentado la curiosidad, meramente intelectual, de asomarse sobre el abismo de aquella alma, de sondear el enigma de aquella mezcla de lo agradable y lo atroz, interesante, sin duda, como lo son todas las monstruosidades de la naturaleza; pero enseguida lo asaltó un subitáneo sentimiento de repulsión por la compañía de aquella mujer, no porque fuera su

enemiga, sino por algo mucho más íntimo y profundo, que por el momento no pudo discernir. (120)

Doña Bárbara's voice, the instrument of the androgynous demon within her, was like the deep murmur of the jungle and the harsh lament of the plain, and had a peculiar timbre, which was the enchantment of men that heard it; but Santos Luzardo had not remained there to entertain himself with her. It was true that, for a moment, he had experienced the merely intellectual curiosity of looking into the depths of her soul, of exploring the enigma of that mixture of the pleasing and terrible, interesting, without a doubt, like all monstrosities of nature; but immediately he was overcome by a sentiment of aversion toward the company of that woman, not because she was his enemy, but because of something far more intimate and profound, that in that moment he could not discern.

Exchanging gazes as the ranchers' herd cattle, both Santos Luzardo and doña Bárbara sustain a brief exchange of words that is not unlike a predatory event. Doña Bárbara is dressed so as to impress her prey, something Santos Luzardo quickly acknowledges (117). Santos Luzardo perceives his predator as ambivalent. He describes doña Bárbara as having the voice of an "androgynous demon," as if her gendered soul were both feminine and masculine. He finds that duality a threat. It does not follow the "straight line of man." It is unstable—as unstable as the predatory relations that occur in the Apure plains. Similar to the incursions of the one-eyed crocodile, so does doña Bárbara "raid" across genders. The geomorphism of her voice, which mimics the sounds of the jungle and plains. Moreover, the words used for both geographies are

feminine. Whereas the narrative deploys the masculine term "llanos," the feminine "llanura" is linked to the predatory values associated with doña Bárbara. Lorenzo Barquero suggests as much to Santos Luzardo when he exclaims "¡La llanura! ¡La maldita llanura, devoradora de hombres!" ("The plain! The cursed plain, devourer of men!"; 72).

However much Santos Luzardo might feel an "aversion" to doña Bárbara, he also is attracted to her in a manner which he cannot explain. Like all "monstrosities of nature" she is an interesting hybrid of beauty and terror. Doña Bárbara the monster—like the tuerto of *Bramador*—is a terrifying creature, yet one that attracts the attention of ranchers and men. Insofar as she is a nonhuman other, the attraction men have for her is a testimony of the "love *of* country" displayed in *La vorágine* and *Doña Bárbara* (Sommer 264). As a predator, her gaze hypnotizes prey, pulls them into a role reversal. This "paradoxical lesson" questions the "apparently ideal man who controls barbarism" (Sommer 264). Predation challenges the patriarchal binary between male humans and nonhuman others, making male characters susceptible and fearful as they become aware that they are the prey of women and the fauna of the plains. It is Santos Luzardo's masculine "opinion and the fantasies he weaves which to a greater or lesser extent create the female in this case" (Magnarelli 55). His gaze is based on the "Great Divide" that makes any non-male human other a predating monster. The predatory loop of the novel, however, challenges that distance between the male human and the other, for the former is forced to constantly encounter the hunting or feral animals. These encounters place male humans in ambivalent situations. Santos Luzardo refuses to remain with doña Bárbara because he becomes aware of how vulnerable he is against that ambivalence. He does not know if he is the hunter or the hunted. The "Sphinx of the plains" forces him to face that impasse. As the predator of the

plains, doña Bárbara instils ecophobia in men. Her gaze is inscrutable, just like the yawning mouth of the aquatic snake or scaly lids of the Orinoco crocodile. Predators in the Orinoquía region that appear in *La vorágine* and *Doña Bárbara* enact that uncanny reversal. The predatory loop irremediably twists the "straight lines of man."

In this chapter I have focused on the underlying predatory ecology that emerges in specific episodes and in the appearance of numerous emblematic predators of the Orinoco plains, such as the Orinoco crocodile and the anaconda. The appearance of those specific animals not only suggests the importance of predation in both *La vorágine* and *Doña Bárbara*, but also to the precarious interconnectedness between humans and animals. Rather than a harmonious relation, narration of predatory events sets the stage for the possible disruption of the organic mesh that sustains the Casanare and Apure. As readers, we become aware of the dangers and excesses of predation. The culling of crocodiles in *Doña Bárbara* reminds us of the reason why the *Crocodylus intermedius* is an endangered species. The ecophobia that Arturo Cova experiences as he encounters the anaconda preying on him evokes a sense of respect for the role of predators in the environment. The gaze of predators *questions* human superiority, although it never entirely dissolves human dominance. Moreover, the identification of women as predators in both novels also points to the masculine basis for the dichotomies between humans and animals. It is the male protagonists that at first see themselves as outside the predatory loop, only to experience the terror of being hunted, of having their roles reversed as women and animals hunt them. I argue that the shifting predatory ecologies challenge the "Great Divide" projected by the masculine gaze unto nature, for the ambivalent impasse that the male characters face when confronted by their predators disrupts relations. This brings us to the poem Homero Aridjis that

opens this chapter: by devouring the other, the jaguar ends up devouring himself. So does the predatory ecologies of *La vorágine* and *Doña Bárbara* remind us of the vulnerable mesh in which humans and animals are entangled, one that often breaks down.

O Pantanal or Naming Wetlands

Eu não sei nada sobre as grandes coisas do mundo, mas sobre as pequenas eu sei menos.

-Manoel de Barros, *Memórias inventadas*

Perhaps one of the most idiosyncratic plains geographies in Latin America, the Pantanal wetlands is considered by geographers to be "one of the largest wet and continuous extensions of the planet" (Franco 21). It is found in the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso do Sul, bordering both Paraguay and Bolivia. Spreading over 150,000 square kilometres, its flood plains are fed by the tributaries of the Paraguay river. These wetlands oscillate between periods of heavy rain and drought. This cycle of precipitation fragments the wetlands into various swamps or "pântanos" (Campos 68). Although the biome has only a few endemic species, "the density or abundance of the populations of species, especially in terms of the herpetofauna and bird fauna and mammals, constitutes in and of itself a spectacle that is far more accessible in the Pantanal than in any other Brazilian biome" (Franco 32). Two of the most emblematic animals of Brazil are found in the region: the Pantanal jaguar, the largest feline in the Americas, and the *tuiuiú*, or jabiru stork, which displays its characteristic red collar.

Although the Pantanal holds a relatively minor place in the literary environmental imaginaries of the plains in Brazil and Latin America, its significance has increased since the 1970s when it caught the attention of ecologists travelling through South America. Historian Abílio Leite de Barros explains how it was in those years that the Pantanal became an "ecological sanctuary," although the *Pantaneiro* people had been living in that same region for

centuries (21). The most notable writer to generate an imaginary of the Pantanal wetlands is Manoel de Barros. During the seventies, Barros' poetry began focusing on that specific region and finally earned national recognition (McNee 40). Gradually he has become a widely read poet, so much so that his works are now included in the curriculum for secondary school students throughout Brazil.[13] Not only has the Pantanal become a literary topic, but it has also entered popular culture through the celebrated television series that aired in 1990. The theme song for the television series was composed by the folk songwriter Almir Sater, who went on to gain popularity with his *Pantaneiro* music. Even if it does not hold such a central place as the s*ertão* in Brazilian culture, the Pantanal has gained more and more attention both in literature and media. Tourists travel far and wide to visit the wetlands of Brazil in the hopes of seeing the rare *tuiuiú*, a phenomenon that attests to the significance of this biome in the ways people across the globe imagine the plains of Latin America.

The increasing visibility of the Pantanal wetlands in Brazilian and Latin American culture justifies a closer reading of their environmental significance. In the previous three chapters, I have concentrated on the *pampas*, the high plains, and the Orinoco basin plains, all of which are dominant in the literary canon. In this chapter I will focus on the Pantanal as a literary geography that is rapidly gaining attention, so as to examine how a relatively peripheral imaginary becomes gradually more dominant. The manner in which different writers and readers have imagined the plains throughout Latin America in the past two hundred years reveals an evolution in the literary visibility of certain environments. Certain regions occupy the attention of writers, whereas others

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[13] In 2015, Manoel de Barros's *Menino do mato* was included in the list of compulsory literary works to be read by students preparing for the university entrance exam or *vestibular* (http://vestibulandoansioso.com/dicas/30-leitura-obrigatoria-vestibular-2015/ Last accessed 12-09-2016).

are largely ignored. As time goes by, other geographies and biomes gain attention, leaving behind those that had sparked the imaginations of previous generations. This is crucial to understanding why certain environments are ignored by policy makers, whereas others gain centre stage. The Pantanal was recognized as a biome in Brazil long before the *pampas* in Rio Grande do Sul. This should not come as a surprise, for whereas there is only one canonical text that engages directly with the *pampas* in Brazil—Érico Veríssimo in *O tempo e o vento*—the Pantanal has received the attention of such important writers as Guimarães Rosa and Barros. The emergence of certain biomes in the literary images of canonical texts brings them into public focus. The environmental imaginaries of the Pantanal are a salient example. I will consider the evolution of environmental imaginaries not only in terms of alterations in the way these regions are portrayed, but also in their visibility or dominance in literature. Whereas the Pantanal was hardly cited by authors at the beginning of the twentieth century, it has since become more present in literature and culture within Brazil. Its increased visibility in literature has accompanied the increased public attention to that ecological sanctuary, as well as the passing of policies to conserve the biome.

I will focus exclusively on the Pantanal's literary representations in Brazil, exploring its descriptions in three relevant texts: *Terra Natal* (1920) by Francisco Aquino Corrêa, "Entremeio —Com o vaqueiro Mariano" by João Guimarães Rosa, and *Livro de pré-coisas* (1985) by Manoel de Barros. Although the three authors chosen are canonical, insofar as they form part of the distinguished intellectual elite, Guimarães Rosa is by far more well known than both Corrêa and Barros. The differences and similarities in the ways that each text represents the Pantanal will help map how these wetlands have shifted from a generic portrayal to a poetics of the minutiae. The first text is the poetic work by the archbishop of Cuiabá at the beginning of the

twentieth century, a long poem influenced by Euclides da Cunha's analysis of the Brazilian *sertões* (Aquino 23). Francisco Aquino Corrêa (1885-1956)—popularly known as Dom Aquino —holds a canonical place in the literary tradition of the state of Mato Grosso, for he was n inducted to the Brazilian Academy of Letters. Not very well known at the national level, Dom Aquino is one of the first and most important writers in Mato Grosso. The second text is a relatively little known short story by the celebrated author Guimarães Rosa, published in the newspaper *Correio da Manhã* in three parts between October 1947 and July 1948 and later published as a book in 1952 with publisher Edições Hipocampo. It was also included in the posthumous collection of short stories *Estas estórias* in 1969. Its narrative centres on a fictional meeting between the author and a cattle rancher from the Pantanal. The third text constitutes Barros' poetical account of the wetlands, explicitly stating in its subtitle that it is a "Roteiro para uma excursão poética no Pantanal" ("Guide for a poetic excursion in the Pantanal"). Barros' poems are of particular interest because they are presented as a "guide" of the region. It is a rare occasion when his poetry deploys the word "Pantanal." Such reticence to refer directly to the biome is linked to Barros's focus on the minutiae of landscape rather than on sweeping vistas, an aspect that I will examine at length in this chapter. All three texts trace a literary geography of the Brazilian wetlands and its gradual emergence as an important environmental imaginary of the plains.

An important issue present in the texts is the ecological knowledge that is constructed through naming of plants and creatures. This is an issue that is also recurrent in my overarching argument in this dissertation that explores the connection of environmental imaginaries and ecological knowledge. The use of naming is an invaluable device that constructs the ecological

knowledge of a given region or biome. So far I have focused on the way certain texts offer broad depictions of the land that seemingly effaced the specificities of the land, describing the environment as a desert. In this chapter I will argue that another possible epistemology of the plains is possible through the use of names to refer to places and creatures in the wetlands. The names used to refer to the constituents of the land are never neutral—never just a fact of grammar—but reveal a mode of knowing the world around us. By analyzing the evolution of the environmental images of the Pantanal through the use of names, I bring to the foreground that dimension of language that is crucial in shaping our knowledge of the environment.

Whereas Guimarães Rosa and Barros introduce a plethora of bioregional references that ultimately challenge referentiality in language, Dom Aquino's depictions of the Pantanal in *Terra natal* are generic and abstract. We have already seen how such an abstract portrayal of the plains is central to the environmental images of the *pampas*, for example. Both Guimarães Rosa and Barros offer an interesting alternative, one that is based on the poetic enumeration of different animals and plants found in the Pantanal. They saturate their texts with bioregional references. By "bioregional references" I mean the constant mention of specific flora and fauna, as well as the specific topography of the region, such as rivers or cities. For example, rather than using the generic word "trees," a reference is made to a particular species of tree, such as the "espinheiro" ("hawthorn"). Guimarães Rosa and Barros favour naming specific living species in their descriptions of the biome.

Malcolm McNee argues that Barros's poetry "often features and names the richly varied plant and animal life of the region in their specificity" (38). He also explains, however, that Barros' poetry names specific animals, "Just as often, though, birds are generically identified just

as birds, and trees are simply trees" (38). There is a juxtaposition between the concrete and the abstract—between the local and the universal. This is also true of Guimarães Rosa, who incorporates regionalisms and universal themes in his narratives. One of the ways these two writers achieve such a juxtaposition is through the use of names, both specific and generic. Names can often reveal an abstract knowledge of the land, as well as a local and indigenous appreciation of the region. I am interested in foregrounding how the rhetoric of listing the living minutiae generates an environmental imaginary that emphasizes mutualism in the wetlands and challenges referentiality as a means to represent the world around us.

From an epistemological perspective, the language deployed by the two writers also questions the possibility of nature as a closed whole to be accessed through panoramic vistas. For Guimarães Rosa and Barros, the Pantanal wetlands are imagined as a collection of beings dependent on each other. Contrary to Dom Aquino's hermetic perspective of the Pantanal, one in which nature is presented as a sublime whole, Guimarães Rosa and Barros use a language that attempts to describe the wetlands without necessarily recurring to abstraction, precisely through the act of listing living beings. For example, Guimarães Rosa uses a language that captures the local knowledge of the Pantanal, using colloquialisms to name animals: "Com a lanterna-elétrica, eu derramava na grama um caminhozinho, precavendo-me da jararaca-do-rabo-branco, que aqui só tratam de boca-de-sapo" ("With an electric lantern, I spilled over the grass a small path, avoiding the *jararaca-do-rabo-branco,* which they call here the *boca-de-sapo*" 103). Rather than offer the scientific or common names for many of the animals described, he chooses local names that emphasize a language saturated with regionalisms. The moment the reader encounters such regionalisms, he or she is challenged to imagine a place that seems foreign. The Pantanal

becomes opaque to the reader, precisely because the language emphasizes the local names over the common ones. It is hard to imagine a place that is filled with creatures whose names are not known and that cannot be found by looking them up in a dictionary or encyclopedia. The references are so regional that they resist appropriation by the reader's imagination, which in turn leads to both a reflection of the role of language as mediator with the environment and our role as outsiders looking in. The environment described resists appropriation by the unacquainted reader's imagination. The reader becomes conscious of how language can become so localized that in its regional specificity it fails to elicit the geography described. The specificity of the language makes explicit that ambivalence between wanting to describe a thing by naming it in all its specificity and making clear how language can never completely stick to the thing described. It is also a means of establishing an authority in the knowledge of a given place.

Barros also experiments with the act of naming, testing the limits of words and the constraints of grammar, whilst also pushing the boundaries of figurative devices so as to generate in the reader a metalinguistic awareness. Both his poetry and prose draw attention to the connotative dimension of language, the strange meanings elicited through nouns and adjectivized nouns strung together in unexpected ways: "Essa abulia vegetal sapal pedral" ("That plant-like frog-like stone-like apathy"; *Livro* 202). Here the reader struggles to make sense of these constructions, conscious of how language can make no sense and yet express something profound. One cannot take meaning for granted in his poetry. Barros' obliges us to read and re-read, to take a closer look at what at first glance seems nonsensical. Take for example, the adjective "sapal." It is a strange adjective formed from the noun "sapo." Encountering that

surprising adjective, the reader has to engage with the word at a metalinguistic level. Can the word "frog" be used to describe apathy? What does it *really* mean?

In the preface to his poetic anthology, Barros claims that "os meus desenhos verbais nada significam. Nada. Mas se o nada desaparecer a poesia acaba" ("my verbal sketches signify nothing. Nothing. Yet if nothingness disappears, poetry ends"; "Prólogo" 7). Ludic in its use of metaphors and similes, his poetry avoids panoramic images and stable conceptual descriptions. His language—especially his focus on naming living things—destabilizes meaning and questions the relationship between words and things. Rather than anchor on the large scale vistas of wetlands, Barros surveys the sediments of the ground and foregrounds the minuscule organisms that crawl in its undergrowth. It is the infinitesimal scale of that which is strewn across the ground that acts as a lever to suspend the referential and denotative relation between language and the physical reality of Pantanal.

Although nature as a whole is not present in the environmental imaginaries traced by Guimarães Rosa and Barros, naming the flora and fauna of the Pantanal assigns an ethical value to the constituents of the biome, emphasizing the abundance and mutualism of species. When reading "Entremeio" or *Livro,* the reader is presented with a plethora of names for the creatures and plants that are to be found within those flood plains. By naming organic and inorganic things within the Pantanal, the texts create an imaginary that very much resembles an ecosystem in its emphasis on the interrelations between living beings. Not only are animals and plants listed in drawn out passages, but also the relations that they share in the land. Guimarães Rosa, for example, introduces the following passage to describe the Pantanal:

> Sempre, enfeitando céu e várzea, o belo excesso de aves, como em nenhuma outra parte: se alinhavam as garças, em alvura consistindo; quero-queros subiam e desciam doce rampa curva; das moitas, socós levantavam as cabeças; anhumas avoavam, enfunadas, despetaladas; hieráticos tuiuiús pousavam sobre as pernas pretas; cruzavam-se anhingas, colheireiros, galinholas, biguás e baguaris, garças-morenas; e passavam casais de arara azul—quase encostadas, cracassando—ou da arara-brava, verde, de voo muito dobrado. (117)

> Always, decorating the sky and the wetland, the beautiful excess of birds, like in no other place: herons would line up, consisting of height; *quero-queros* would go up and down a sweet curved ramp; from the bushes, *socós* would lift heads; *anhumas* would fly, swollen, flustered; hieratic *tuiuiús* would land on their black legs; *anhingas*, *colheireiros*, *galinholas*, *biguás* and *baguaris*, and the *garças-morenas* would cross paths; and partners of *arara azul* would pass—almost leaning against each other, squawking—or the *arara-brava*, green, in a folded flight.

A wide variety of birds are named in the passage—both using the common name and also their regional name, as is the case with the *garça-morena* (commonly known as the "little blue heron") or the *arara-brava* (commonly known as the "red-and-green macaw")—while the exchanges between fauna are present in the crossing paths of birds. In the passage, the different behaviours of birds are also described. The herons "line up," while the *arara azul* fly in pairs. The text is invested in emphasizing the "beautiful excess of birds." The Pantanal thus appears as a living and breathing ecosystem of avifauna.

Barros also offers passages that accentuate the abundance of flora and fauna, as well as the dependency between the organic and inorganic constituents of the imagined geography:

> Penso num comércio de frisos e de asas, de sucos de sêmen e de pólen, de mudas de escamas, de pus e de sementes. Um comércio de cios e cantos virtuais; de gosma e de lêndeas; de cheiro de íncolas e de cabados orifícios de tênias implumes. Um comércio corcunda de armaus e de traças; de folhas recolhidas por formigas; de orelhas-de-pau ainda em larva. Comércio de hermafroditas de instintos adesivos. As veias rasgadas de um escuro besouro. O sapo rejeitando sua infame cauda. Um comércio de anéis de escorpiões e sementes de peixe. (189)

> I think of a commerce of edges and wings, of semen juices and of pollen, of shedding of scales, of pus and of seeds. A commerce of mating cycles and virtual songs; of muck and of nits; of a smell of the inhabitants, of dug orifices of featherless hookworms. A hunchback commerce of *armaus* fish and *traças* insects; of leaves collected by ants; of larval *orelhas-de-pau*. Commerce of hermafrodites with adhesive instincts. The torn veins of a *besouro* ("beetle"*)*. A toad rejecting its vile tail. A commerce of scorpion rings and fish seeds.

Here the act of naming is pushed to its limits. Instead of describing the landscape, Barros names the marginal creatures found in the muck of the Pantanal. He does not name flora and fauna as much as he references the anatomy of creatures: "larvae," "veins," "semen," "orifices," and "pus" are among some of the words that appear in the passage. The poem challenges the viability of independent organisms in favour of an exchange of organic and inorganic substances that are

the basis of the wetlands. Hardly any verbs are utilized, and instead prepositional phrases are deployed to further modify the core noun of the entire passage—the word "commerce." The term suggest a constant exchange between living beings. Both Guimarães Rosa and Barros create an environmental imaginary of the wetlands that lists the minutiae of the region, while also valuing the significance of mutualism. Mutualism in ecology is defined as the "interactions between two species that benefit both of them" (Bronstein 3). The environmental imaginaries of the Pantanal wetlands in these two authors are built on the mutualism between living beings. They offer a looking-glass through which to see the wetlands not as immense landscapes, but as the web of organic beings interacting with each other and their environment. I will now concentrate on tracing the environmental images of the Pantanal in each of the writers mentioned in a chronological sequence, so as to present the evolution of the representations of the wetlands. Environmental imaginaries are not static or fixed, but evolve with time. This means that those representations of the plains that are firmly set in a Eurocentric perspective can eventually change into other views that are more aware of the indigenous and local knowledge of the environment, as is the case of the images of the Pantanal. The fact that these images evolve suggests the crucial importance of incorporating other voices to enrich and shift colonial depictions of the land. Dominant environmental imaginaries can be changed by seeking alternative voices to contribute differing epistemologies of the plains.

In his description of the Pantanal in *Terra natal,* Dom Aquino offers a wide vista of the wetlands. Born in Mato Grosso, he went on to become archbishop of Cuiabá and member of the Academia Brasileira das Letras, a prestigious position held by many important Brazilian writers such as Machado de Assis. His first book was published in two volumes in 1917 under the title

Odes. Three years later he published *Terra natal* in which he closely depicts the landscape of Mato Grosso, referencing rivers and cities throughout the state. The structure of the book is similar to Euclides da Cunha's *Os sertões*, for it is divided into two parts: the first dedicated to the nature of the region and the second to the human component. Just as in other regionalist writers, the synecdoche between land, language, and inhabitants is also present in Dom Aquino. The text clearly enacts that organicity between the three in its panoramic description of the wetlands:

> Verde mar de gramíneas, mar parado,
> Que os corixos, qual serpe desconforme
> De cristal, vão cruzando, lado a lado,
> O imenso pantanal se estira e dorme. (*Terra* 90)
>
> Green sea of grasses, unmoving sea,
> That the waterways, as a colossal serpent
> Made of glass, cross, from side to side,
> The immense pantanal stretches and sleeps.

The wetlands are compared to an "unmoving sea," to a sea of liquid grass that remains static to the poet's eyes. Such a comparison between prairies and sea is not uncommon in literatures of the plains (Schultz 3). Similar to other writers of the plains that portray the *pampa* or *sertão* as an ocean, Dom Aquino represents the wetlands as a body of water. The metaphor focuses on the horizontality of both the plains and the "unmoving sea," for the stanza ends with a reference to the dimensions of that land. It is "immense" and "stretches" out over the region. The image of

the region is vague and generic. There are many places that could be described as an extended grassland with meandering rivers.

The word "pantanal" is not capitalized. It is not seen as a proper noun, as a word referring to place or thing that ontologically prioritized. As such, the word avoids attaching any specificity to the landscape. It indicates a type of terrain: wetlands. Perhaps the poet simply refers to the landscape as a collection of "pântanos" or "swamps," rather than a place specific enough to be named with a proper noun. Taking a look at the title of the poem cited, the ambiguity remains. It is titled "Pantanal," without an article to make clear the specificity of the region named. Other poems in the book include specific references to cities and rivers in their titles: "Rio Coxipó," "Cuiabá," "Poconé," "Corumbá," "Santana do Paranaíba," "Nioaque," and "Rio Madeira" are among some of the places named in the titles of his poems. Moreover, the capitalization of those places is maintained in the poems themselves. For example, in the poem titled "Cuiabá," the capitalization is sustained: "Oh! Cuiabá das lendas Brasileiras" ("Oh! Cuiabá of Brazilian legends"; *Terra* 51). Even more pertinent is the fact that one of the poems in the volume references the specific biome *cerrado* and is titled with the appropriate article, "O Cerrado" (*Terra* 86). A brief survey of the instances in which the terms "pantanal" and "pantanais" are used in the volume also points to their generic use to describe a particular topography of the land. In the poem "Poconé," Dom Aquino portrays the landscape by writing that "Sobre relvoso chão de canga cor-de-rosa / Balisando a amplidão dos verdes pantanais, / A cidade se esboça ao longe, calma e airosa" ("On the grassy pink *canga* ground / Setting boundaries to the width of the green swamps, / The city is sketched in the distance, calm and graceful"; *Terra* 54). The use of the plural form without capitalization indicates its generic

reference to “swamps.” In another poem titled “Corumbá,” the term appears once again without capitalization and in its singular form: “Assim nasceste, sob os céus serenos, / À flor do lindo pantanal bravio” (“Thus you were born, below the serene skies, / To the flower of the pretty and wild swamp”; *Terra* 55). Dom Aquino does not refer to a specific place when using the word “pantanal.” The wetlands are not a concrete location in his poetry, for it is not a singular entity, but rather a terrain.

This generic aspect of the term “pantanal” shapes the ontology and epistemology of the region in Dom Aquino. He does not name the wetlands as a place with an ontological status; that is, the “pantanal” is not a place or entity. It is basically a word constructed by incorporating the suffix -al to the noun “pântano,” so as to depict a large area of swamps—it is descriptive. Whereas the term “pantanal” is not a specific location with a proper noun, the different cities and rivers are sufficiently significant as to merit capitalized proper nouns. Places like Cuiabá and Paranaíba are prioritized over the generic “pantanal.” Although these considerations of the term are linguistic, they affect the representation of the wetlands. Insofar as this region is not considered a place in and of itself, it remains a given terrain with no agency or presence. The “pantanal” is simply a collection of swamps to be included as part of the state of Mato Grosso. It is a marginal topography, an accident of the land that the poet mentions in passing. This epistemology of the wetlands is further manifested in the images deployed in the poem “Pantanal.”

> Pasta, em manadas plácidas, o gado.
>
> Lá foge um cervo. E, de onde em onde, enorme,
>
> Como velho navio abandonado,

Uma árvore braceja a copa informe. (*Terra* 90)

Grazing, in placid herds, the cattle.

There a deer flees. And, from time to time, enormous,

As an old, abandoned vessel,

A tree gesticulates its shapeless top.

Here continues the sweeping depiction of the wetlands. The flora and fauna named is generic: "cattle," "deer," and "tree." It could still be almost any place on Earth. The metaphor of the land as a sea continues insofar as the tree—an organic being—is described as an "abandoned vessel" in that "immense" extension of grasslands. Anthropocentric in his perspective, the poet sees the tree not as a tree, but as a manmade artifice that interrupts the panoramic view of the land.[14] The last line of the stanza further accentuates this by anthropomorphizing the tree as it "gesticulates" or "moves its arms." By emptying the pantanal of any particular specificity and anthropomorphizing some of its constituents, Dom Aquino imagines a landscape that is essentially a vacant place prepared to receive colonists arriving in vessels. Just as other writers of the plains throughout the Americas, his imagined geography of the wetlands represents the land as an empty space that lends itself to its symbolic colonization. This is particularly troubling given the indigenous presence in the region prior to the arrival of the Spaniards and Portuguese.

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[14] The resemblance between Dom Aquino's stanza and a passage from James Fenimore Cooper's *The Prairie* is striking: "The earth was not unlike the ocean, when its restless waters are heaving heavily, after the agitation and fury of the tempest have begun to lessen. There was the same waving and regular surface, the same absence of foreign objects, and the same boundless extent to the view […] *Here and there a tall tree rose out of the bottoms, stretching its naked branches abroad, like some solitary vessel*; and, to strengthen the delusion, far in the distance, appeared two or three round thickets, looming in the misty horizon like islands resting on the waters" (my italics 13).

Dom Aquino's abstract depiction presents a vacant and Edenic landscape, a virgin land yet to be inhabited.

In the preface to *Terra natal,* Dom Aquino uses lofty language to describe nature found in that state: "Contemplai a sua natureza que nos sorri ainda, na eclosão virginal de beleza tão encantadora, que nem o cientista mais frio pode estudá-la, sem arrebatar-se" ("Contemplate its nature that still smiles at us, in that outbursts of virginal beauty so enchanting, that not even the most indifferent scientist can study, without letting himself get carried away"; 23). An alluring nature personified as a seductive virgin who coquettishly smiles at her observer. The environment is receptive to the masculine gaze, inciting Brazilians to populate its virgin territories and bask in its irresistible beauty. It is important to keep in mind that Dom Aquino sees himself as continuing in the vein of Euclides da Cunha and Visconde de Taunay. Both of them participated in military campaigns in Brazil, the former in Canudos and the latter in the war with Paraguay. Dom Aquino's exaltation of the "virginal beauty" of Mato Grosso comes after the campaigns against Paraguay for control of the region between 1864-1870 (*Terra* 22). He further exclaims that "Façamos uma literatura que professe cavaleiramente a bela divisa de um dos nossos homens de letras […] literatura que saiba edificar a grandeza moral da Pátria" ("Let us create a literature that nobly professes the beautiful maxim of one of our men of letters […] literature that knows how to build the moral greatness of our homeland"; *Terra* 26). The patriotic sentiment behind his poems informs the way Dom Aquino envisions nature as a place in which to install the homeland. Notice how nature is feminine and "virginal." Literature must express the "noble" sentiments of "our men of letters." There is a clear gender binary in his view

of nature, one that portrays the land as an untouched woman awaiting the embrace of the "men of letters," such as Dom Aquino.

In his study of what he calls the "new world pastoral," Lawrence Buell argues that "the experience—by no means uniquely American, as we have seen, but common to other settler cultures—of the 'empty' landscape" is "arrestingly different from any old world counterpart" (*The Environmental* 78). In Dom Aquino's poem that "empty landscape" is idyllic and far detached from the threatening feel of the wilderness. Nothing in the land described is ominous. It is but a vacant garden, a place of rest and respite for settlers, a place where masculine desire can find its reception in the feminine embrace of an empty land awaiting the taking. The poem seems far closer to the European pastoral tradition than that of the "new world pastoral." No ambivalence is offered. The wetlands invite the masculine gaze of settlers and manifest no threats:

> Não vibra um eco só de voz alguma:
> Ao longe, silencioso e desmedido,
> O bando das pernaltas lá se perde.
>
> Mas, de repente, em amplo vôo, a anhuma
> Enche do seu nostálgico gemido,
> A infinita soidão do plaino verde. (*Terra* 90)
>
> Not an echo of any voice alone vibrates:
> In the distance, silent and without measure,

A band of *pernaltas* is there lost from sight.

But, all of a sudden, in a broad flight, an *anhuma*

Fills with its nostalgic cry,

The infinite solitude of the green plain.

Silence pervades this place where no "voice" can be heard. The absence of any "voice" suggests that no humans inhabit this land. Only birds can be seen and heard. Tranquil yet nostalgic, the depiction of the wetlands is pastoral. The emphasis on sonority—on the reigning silence of the place and the sudden break in that silence that the *anhuma* (*Anhima cornuta)* causes—evokes a place of worship where the poet embraces his solitude. It is a silent and wide land in which the sounds of birds are a "nostalgic cry" that suggest the experience of loss in this place. Not much detail is given regarding the surroundings. It is a "green plain" of silence and birds. As in the Biblical narrative of the Garden of Eden, so the cry of the *anhuma* reminds the poet of an original idyll that is long gone. It follows in the vein of the Edenic myths that shaped the first accounts of Brazil's landscape during colonial times (McNee 1). The nostalgia that the poet experiences when hearing the *anhuma* reveals the evocative and introspective tone of the depiction.

The only specific marker of the region is the *anhuma* bird, for all the other names of flora and fauna found in the poem are generic. The word "pernaltas" is a significant example of this, for it is a colloquialism that refers to any type of bird with long legs. Not only is the poet using common names to reference the avifauna of the region, but also colloquialisms to denote a "bird-with-long-legs" in general. "Pernaltas" could be herons, flamingos, cranes, or any other type of

birds. By deploying such a word, the specificity of the avifauna found in that place is effaced. The *anhuma* is an exception, anchoring the poem in the region. Its characteristic cry or "scream" is well known throughout the wetlands. The poet experiences that characteristic cry as "nostalgic," which suggests the anthropomorphization of the bird in the poem.

The next text to represent the Pantanal is written by Guimarães Rosa. In 1947, he penned a short story titled "Entremeio—Com o vaqueiro Mariano," a narrative that follows the footsteps of a cattle herder in Nhecolândia in the Pantanal (93). According to Richard Young and Odile Cisneros, the story "anticipates the idiosyncratic prose" of the author's later novellas and his acclaimed novel *Grande Sertão: Veredas* in 1956 (424). The short story by Guimarães Rosa has received attention from Paulo Sérgio Nolasco dos Santos in his chapter titled "Guimarães Rosa e Manoel de Barros: no pantanal da Nhecolândia" (2016) and also in a paper he presented at the Associação Nacional de Pós-Graduação e Pesquisa em Letras e Linguística (ANPOLL) where he reconstructs the connection between Guimarães Rosa's "Entremeio" and Barros' *Livro* through the meeting of both writers in the Pantanal in June of 1953 that Barros himself suggested in several interviews (6). The date of the meeting poses difficulties, for it would have taken place after the publication of the story in *Correio da Manhã* and its book edition by Edições Hipocampo.[15] Whether or not this supposed meeting took place, the perceived proximity that Barros sees between his *Livro* and "Entremeio" establishes a link that can benefit from a closer

[15] "Entremeio" was first published and disseminated in the *Correio da Manhã* newspaper and then followed by book formats, both independently by publisher Edições Hipocampo in 1952 and in the posthumous collection *Estas estórias* in 1969 by Livraria José Olympo Editora. For a complete bibliographic register of publications by Guimarães Rosa, the Universidade de São Paulo maintains a *Banco de dados bibliográficos João Guimarães Rosa* at the following website: https://www.usp.br/bibliografia/inicial.php?s=grosa Last accessed 21-10-2017.

reading of the two texts, especially from an ecocritical perspective focused on the environmental images of the Pantanal wetlands.

Guimarães Rosa's emphasis on naming the flora and fauna of the region establishes an epistemology of the wetlands that foregrounds the interconnections between living beings, instead of offering broad vistas that efface the minutiae that populate the environment. According to Maria Esther Maciel, the story "Entremeio" by Guimarães Rosa "deixa explícito o fascínio do autor pelo mundo das interações e articulações entre homens e animais" ("makes clear the author's fascination with the world of interactions and articulations between humans and animals"; 267). The Pantanal is presented through a myriad of interactions between ranchers, cattle, and wild animals in the region. How, then, does naming animals and plants in the region create an imaginary of the minutiae of the wetlands? How does Guimarães Rosa differ from Dom Aquino in his depiction of the Pantanal? Although Guimarães Rosa at times offers panoramic descriptions of landscape in which the wetlands are considered large expanses of flat land, most of the depictions that appear in "Entremeio" emphasize naming the animals that populate it, especially the avifauna. Whereas Dom Aquino offers abstract and generic names for the birds in the wetlands, Guimarães Rosa introduces an extensive catalogue of birds in the third section of his short story, using several different common and local names. His "Entremeio" manifests already a tension with regionalist representations, juxtaposing panoramic descriptions of the Pantanal with specific references to those beings that inhabit the region. There is a conscious effort to construct universal themes not by effacing the particulars of the region, but by presenting the local as unique.

Guimarães Rosa's short story is presented as an encounter with a "vaqueiro" or cattle herder of the Pantanal; an encounter in which the narrator spends time with the local in order to learn more about the trade firsthand. As an outsider, the narrator experiences the region with the help of the cattle herder named Mariano, travelling on horseback through the Pantanal and seeing with his own eyes what the life of the ranchers is like. The narrator will interview the rancher about life in the Pantanal in three parts, discussing herding and the natural environment of the region. A close reading of the narrative reveals how the hierarchy universal-local is inverted by valuing the region as unique on account of its own merits. As a foreigner in the Pantanal, the narrator offers an outsider's perspective into the region that is gradually subsumed by the local voice of the rancher Mariano.

The very first sentence of the story situates the reader in a very specific region, not just the Pantanal wetlands, but a specific place called Nhecolândia: "Em julho, na Nhecolândia, *Pantanal* do Mato Grosso, encontrei um vaqueiro" (93). Readers are offered concrete spatial and temporal information: the story takes place in July, in a region of the Pantanal known as Nhecolândia. Unlike Dom Aquino's idyllic garden, the wetlands are referenced with specific names; that is, with "Nhecolândia," "Pantanal," and "Mato Grosso." The "Pantanal" is, moreover, introduced as a region in its own right, maintaining its capitalization throughout the story. Dom Aquino deployed the term as denoting a generic topography of swamps. It is also interesting to note how the word "Pantanal" is italicized, as if further specifying the regional nature of the word. His story takes place in *the* Pantanal of Mato Grosso, not just any other swamp or wetland. Its ontological status is far more definite than the "pantanal" as a terrain in Dom Aquino.

Several levels of narration operate, creating the sensation of an outsider's immersion in the local folklore. The conversation with Mariano gradually shifts from the narrator's interests to the latter's tales and adventures in the Pantanal. The first diegetic level is the narrator's, as he tells of his encounter with the rancher Mariano. The second diegetic level is the actual recounting of Mariano's experiences as a herder in the region. As the story progresses, the second diegetic level becomes dominant. Mariano's discourse is the axis of the narration, opening up an interstice in the narrator's discourse through which to introduce colloquialisms and specific knowledge of the region. The manner in which the two narrative levels interact during the conversation slowly blurs the lines between the narrator's reporting of what was said and Mariano's recounting in the present tense. The use of free indirect discourse bolsters the dichotomy between an outsider's knowledge (the narrator's) and a local's knowledge (Mariano). The outsider-insider knowledge binary is a manifestation of the tension between universal and local epistemologies that runs through the environmental images of the Pantanal in "Entremeio":

> Tinha para crescer respeito, aquela lida jogada em sestre e avesso. Mas paciência, que é de boi, é do vaqueiro. E Mariano reagia, ao meu pasmo por trabalho tanto, com a divisa otimista do Pantanal:
>
> —Aqui, o gado é que cria a gente…
>
> E aguardava perguntas, pronto a levar-me à garupa, por campo e curral. Em tempo nenhum se gabava, nem punha acento de engrandecer-se. Eu quis saber suas horas sofridas em afã maior, e ele foi narrando, compassado, umas sobressequentes histórias. (96)

> He commanded respect, all that hard work handling cattle right and left. But patience, which belongs to the cattle, also belongs to the *vaqueiro*. And Mariano reacted, to my astonishment for such work, with the optimist maxim of the Pantanal:
>
> —Here, it's the cattle that raises us…
>
> And he waited for my questions, ready to take me on horseback, through field and corral. Never did he boast or make a point of exalting himself. I wanted to know all about his suffering hours, and he went on narrating, with rhythm, subsequent factual stories.

The narrator's esteem for Mariano grows as he hears of the latter's feats. He seems seduced by Mariano's directness and sincerity, describing the rancher's manners as commanding respect without the need to "boast" or "of exalting himself." He wants to "know all about his suffering hours." In the narrator's speech, regionalisms seem to slip into his retelling. As an outsider listening to Mariano, such phrases as "lida jogada em sestre e avesso" and "Aqui, o gado é que cria a gente" seem to derive from the local's knowledge of the place. This slippages in the narrator attest to the growing influence of Mariano in the telling of the story.

As Mariano begins recounting the day to day life of a *pantaneiro* rancher in the first part of "Entremeio," horizontal and panoramic descriptions of landscape are introduced in the narrative, especially the herding of cattle. In a similar vein to other writers of the plains, Guimarães Rosa draws similarities between the land and a body of water: "trazidos grupo a grupo e ajuntados num só rebanho, redondo, no meio do campo plano, oscilando e girando com ondas de fora a dentro e do centro à periferia" ("brought in groups and placed together in a single herd, round, in the middle of a flat country, oscillating and turning like waves from outside to

inside and from centre to periphery"; 94). The image of flat fields in which groups of steers appear as waves lapping on the shores of the Pantanal is similar to descriptions of the *pampas* by Sarmiento or the *llanos* by Rómulo Gallegos. The local topography is blurred with the image of cattle moving as waves of water on land. Notice, however, the dynamic characteristic of the plains in the description. Undulating in concentric circles, the cattle in the open fields generate a hypnotic view of the land. We are not witnessing a tranquil garden, but a landscape of movement. Whereas Dom Aquino presents the metaphor of the sea as a static perspective of a seemingly vacant landscape, Guimarães Rosa's Pantanal is brimming with activity. This place is not one of pastoral respite, but rather of constant work. This incessant activity foregrounds the mutual interactions between humans and animals in the wetlands. Ranchers and cattle are always on the move. At the end of the first part of "Entremeio" the rancher Mariano confesses that "O Pantanal não dorme" ("The Pantanal does not sleep"; 102). Every day brings with it the struggle of ranchers as they depend on their cattle. There is a manifest mutualism between cattle and humans, one that is based on ranching as the mode of subsistence of the region.

The following passage reveals how the interconnections between beings affect the entire wetlands, as well as the wide extension of the region:

> O céu estava extenso. Longe, os carandás eram blocos mais pretos, de um só contorno. As estrelas rodeavam: estrelas grandes, próximas, desengastadas. Um cavalo relinchou, rasgado à distância, repetindo. Os grilos, mil, mil, se telegrafavam: que o Pantanal não dorme, que o Pantanal é enorme, que as estrelas vão chover. (102)

> The sky was wide. Far in the distance, the *carandá* trees were blocks more black, of one sole contour. The stars were everywhere: big stars, nearby, worn. A horse whinnied, torn at a distance, repeating. The crickets, thousands, thousands, sent telegraphs to each other: that the Pantanal does not sleep, that the Pantanal is enormous, that the stars will rain.

The panoramic perspective is characterized by its width: "O céu estava extenso." The wetlands are "enormous," an attribute very similar to the oft deployed "immensity" of the plains in other writers. Focusing on the horizon and the sky, the reader is presented with a horizontal perspective, one that looks over all things in the land. Yet in the second sentence we encounter the name of a specific type of tree, the "carandá." Also referenced in the passage are "cavalo" and "grilos," both of which are generic names. While the *carandá* is native to the region, horses and crickets are ubiquitous. The reference to that indigenous species of tree anchors the depiction in the wetlands—the *carandá* is a marker of place. The sound of the horse is reminiscent of the nostalgic cry of the *anhuma* in Dom Aquino. It is not Mariano that voices this panoramic description of the region, but rather the narrator, shifting the narrative back to how an outsider views the Pantanal. This accentuates the distinction between the narrator and Mariano, between the outsider's gaze and the local's accounts. The outsider's view is directed toward panoramic vistas, whereas Mariano prefers to describe in detail the comings and goings that take place in the region. Mariano retells of the incidents that occur in the lives of ranchers as they deal with herding cattle. "Entremeio" constantly plays with these shifts between outsider/insider knowledge of the Pantanal, juxtaposing and embedding diegetic levels.

After the first day's interview with Mariano, the narrator decides to walk on his own to the rancher's cabin early in the morning. The manner in which he begins to describe his surroundings, reveals his lack of knowledge of the region, foregrounding the outsider/insider dichotomy that is at play throughout the story:

> No trânsito de uma fantasmagoria de penitente, a ponte ia côncava, como um bico de babucha, ou convexa, qual dorso de foice, e não se acabava, que nem a escada matemática, horizontal, que sai de um mesmo lugar e a ele retorna, passando pelo infinito. E no infinito se acenderam, súbitos, uns pontos globosos, roxo-amarelos, furta-luz, fogo inchando do fundo, subindo bolhas soltas, espantosos. Parei, pensando na onça parda, no puma cor de veado, na suassurana concolor, que nunca mia. Mas os olhos de fósforo, dois a dois, cresciam em número. E distingui: os bezerros. (103-4)

> In the passage of a penitent's phantasmagoria, the bridge was concave, like a pointy babouche, or convex, as the back of a sickle, and it did not end, like a mathematical horizontal stairway, that comes out of the same place and to that place it returns, passing through the infinite. And in that infinite they lit up, all of a sudden, some globular dots, iridescent, fire rising from the bottom, loose bubbles ascending, awe-inspiring. I stopped, thinking of the *onça parda*, of the *puma cor de veado*, of the concolor *suassurana,* that does not growl. But the phosphorescent eyes, two by two, grew in number. I made them out: the calves.

As the narrator ventures into the ranch just before dawn, he begins to see the eyes of creatures he cannot identify in the dark, feeling forlorn in a strange landscape. Frightened by the sight of

many pairs of eyes lighting up, his imagination conjures the threat of an *onça parda* or puma. The tension in the passage relaxes the moment the narrator realizes that he is surrounded by calves—not bulls or steers, but merely young calves. Unacquainted with life in the Nhecolândia ranch, the narrator mistakes the tame eyes of calves for the feared *onça*. The reader is made aware of the gaps in the outsider's knowledge of the region. Confusing calves with a cougar is quite a slip in grasping the environment of the Pantanal.

An important aspect of the passage are the three names used to refer to a single animal, the cougar: "onça parda," "puma cor de veado," and "suassurana concolor." The cougar is a feline of the Puma genus that is widespread throughout the Americas. Its scientific name is *Puma concolor*, although these large cats are most often known by the names puma, panther, and mountain lion in North America. In Brazil, the cougar is often named "onça-parda" or "suçuarana." Guimarães Rosa's spelling differs slightly from the now accepted "suçuarana." The terms "parda," "concolor," and "cor de veado" that accompany the different names for the feline refer to its coloration. The Latin term "concolor" suggests an even coloration of its fur, unlike other large felines such as the jaguar or the leopard. The adjective "parda" in Portuguese refers to its brown colour. Similarly the term "cor de veado" also refers to the brown colour that it shares with deer (one of the cougar's primary preys). Hence all three names refer to the same feline, the cougar.

Each of the names, however, refers to the cougar in a slightly different manner that merits scrutiny. The name "suassurana concolor" is closest to the scientific name *Puma concolor*,

whereas “onça parda” emphasizes the similarities between the *onça* (“jaguar”)[16] and the cougar. It is important to note that the jaguar is commonly named “onça-pintada” in contrast with the “onça-parda.” The name “puma cor de veado” seems the most mundane and local portrayal of the physical attributes of the cougar. The repetition of different names that refer to the same feline reveals a keen awareness in the narrative for referentiality. Although they all name the same large cat, each name evokes a different association, whether scientific (“suassurana concolor”), comparative (“onça parda”), or regional (“puma cor de veado”).

A closer consideration of the narrators reference to the cougar as his biggest fear is another reminder of his lack of knowledge of the local region. The alpha predator of the Neotropics which include the Pantanal wetlands is the jaguar (Soisalo and Cavalcanti 487). Moreover, “When the ranges of pumas and jaguars overlap, pumas are more abundant in drier areas and jaguars select wetter areas” (Seymour 340). The Pantanal subspecies is in fact the largest jaguar, known by its specific scientific name *Panther onca palustris*. This subspecies has suffered a significant loss of its habitat, a situation which has led to its coexistence with humans in large areas that continue to be converted to “agriculture, cattle ranching and human settlements” (Soisalo and Cavalcanti 488). Unlike the narrator, Mariano is well aware of the presence of both the *onça-parda* and the *onça-pintada* in the region (94). He will later comment on the encounters between jaguars and ranchers in the Pantanal: “É capaz d’a gente topar alguma

[16] According to the *Dicionário Priberam*, the word “onça” means “jaguar” or “Panthera onca.” Thus when the word is used alone, it refers to a jaguar and not necessarily a cougar. See https://www.priberam.pt/dlpo/onça Last accessed 24-10-2017.

onça. Tem muita soroca[17] delas, por aqui" ("It is possible that we encounter a jaguar. There are many jaguars around here"; 119). His knowledge of the region allows him to assess the possible threats, whilst also bearing witness the encounters between humans and jaguars given the growth in cattle ranching in the wetlands.

Gradually, the narrative will incorporate a significant number of references to animals in the region, beginning with the nicknames of different steers and ending with an overwhelming catalogue of avifauna. Maciel explains that "O que se desprende da fala de Mariano é, de fato, um grande conjunto de saberes não apenas sobre a vida bovina em geral, como também sobre cada um dos animais que integram a boiada" ("What can be picked up from Mariano's conversation is, in fact, a large knowledge not only of the bovine life in general, but also a knowledge of each and every animal that integrates the herding"; 266). Naming becomes a rhetorical strategy to specify the constituents of the Pantanal in Nhecolândia, offering an intimate view of the interactions between humans and nonhumans. In another passage, the narrator also points out another distinction between the common name of an animal—the "jararaca-do-rabo-branco" (an endemic species of pit viper in Brazil)—and then goes on to explain the name by which that same animal is locally known—as the "boca-de-sapo" (103). Here, once again, the reader is presented with the dichotomy between outside/local epistemology of the region. On the one hand, we have the common name of the pit viper by which most people outside of the region recognize that snake. Most common names for animals in Brazil have a certain literalness to them. "Jararaca-do-rabo-branco" literally means "jararaca (which is a forest from where the

[17] Guimarães Rosa uses a term derived from the Northeast of Brazil to refer to the jaguar. According to the Dicionário Online de Português, the word "soroca" is the same as "sororoca" which means "onça pintada." See https://www.dicio.com.br/sororoca/ Last accessed 24-10-2017.

snake gets its name) of the white tail." The word "jararaca" is of Tupi Guarani origin. According to the *Dicionário Tupi Guarani*, the term literally means "grabs and poisons." Guimarães Rosa is recovering indigenous knowledge of fauna by using such words to refer to animals. There is an explicit attempt at maintaining the local and indigenous idioms in the references used to portray the Pantanal. The local name for *jararaca* viper is not as literal: "boca-de-sapo" or "frog's mouth" seems to be a metaphor for the way the snake looks to bystanders. An outsider that was not initiated in the local knowledge of the flora and fauna of the Pantanal would likely not know what to make of the regional name for the pit viper. Knowing that regional and indigenous name is a glimpse to the regional epistemology of the Pantanal. It is a new mode of seeing the world of that biome, one that seems more intimate and obscure to those outside.

As Mariano takes the narrator through the wetlands on horse, the presence of avifauna dominates the text:

> Fomos por este, norte e este, no meio do verde. O céu caía de cor, e fugiam as nuvens, com o vento frio. Voavam também, ou pousavam, que aquí e lá e ali, multidões de aves—sós, em bando, aos pares—tanta e todas: mais floria, movente, o puro algodão das garças; anhumas abriam-se no ar, como perús pomposos; quero-queros gritavam, rasantes, ou se elevavam parabólicos. (113)

> We went East, North and East, in through the greenery. The sky would change at sunset, and clouds would flee, with the cold wind. Also flying, or landing, here and there, multitudes of birds—alone, in flocks, in pairs—so many: but flowery, moving,

> the pure cotton of the herons; *anhumas* would open up in the air, as pompous turkeys; *quero-queros* would cry out, sweeping by, or rising up in parabolas.

From herons to *quero-queros* ("Southern Lapwing"), the landscape of the Pantanal is a flurry of countless birds. We already encountered the *anhuma* in Dom Aquino's poem. Mariano will later explain to the narrator that the *anhuma* is not just any bird but the "rainha do Pantanal" ("the queen of the Pantanal"; 114). The *anhuma* or *Anhima cornuta* is commonly known in English as the "horned screamer" and has a characteristic plumage atop its head that it exerts when threatened by bigger animals. Although seemingly small and inoffensive, its high-pitched cry intimidates possible predators. The expression used by Mariano points in that direction. He not only names the birds found in the Pantanal, but also characterizes them, placing them in their corresponding context within a larger ecosystem. Birds are named and described, identifying qualities and behaviours in each bird. Take, for example, the *quero-queros*. They are described as birds with "courage" and "anxiety," fighting for survival even against much bigger creatures (124). Other birds are also personified, such as the "sad" *baguaris* or the timid *emas* (114-15). All in all, more than twenty different species of birds are referenced in the last section of Guimarães Rosa's "Entremeio": *garças*, *anhumas*, *perús*, *quero-queros*, *emas*, *baguaris*, *jaburus*, *gaivota*, *catorras*, *gavião-perdiz*, *fruxu*, *anhingas*, *biguás*, *socós*, *tuiuiús*, *arara-brava*, *arara azul*, *garças-morenas*, *galinholas*, *tucanos*, *joão pintor*, and many other birds.

The sheer number of references to the avifauna of the Pantanal leaves the narrator astonished at the abundance of the wetlands. Mariano explains the characteristics of each type of bird, initiating the narrator and reader in a knowledge of the region in which the constituents become alive in the imagination. It is not a mere catalogue of birds, but a naming of the members

of a world that is intimately interconnected. Each bird has a specific place in the ecology of the Pantanal wetlands, each one a distinct creature that interacts with others to form a web of interrelations between living beings. The passage makes clear that each bird has its ecological niche. There is an organic structure to the wetlands described by Mariano, as if each animal named holds an intimate relation with the rest of the creatures of the region, including the cattle and the herders. It is the portrayal of the Pantanal as an ecosystem built on mutualisms and other interactions.

When a pair of *quero-queros* defies the herders as they cross paths, Mariano is quick to say that it would be better for them to leave the birds alone, for they are very courageous and "are not afraid of anything" (124). A mutual respect is held between both human and bird, one that acknowledges the importance of each.[18] This mutualism is further stressed in Mariano's description of the Pantanal at the very beginning of the last section, when he claims that "o Pantanal é um mundo e cada fazenda um centro" ("the Pantanal is a world and each ranch a centre"; 112). The Pantanal is a "world" in and of itself, a place in which each ranch plays a central role in defining the region. It is a multi-centred ecosystem in which humans and nonhumans are not so different, in which its constituents share a mutual respect for each other. Everything is connected. Humans and animals are all embedded into a the wetlands as a biome. This "world" in which the herder knows each of his cows by name, that knows the difference

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[18] Barros seems to allude to this episode in "Entremeio" when in *Livro* he describes the *quero-quero* bird in the following manner: "Se está o vaqueiro armando laço por perto, em lugar despróprio, ele bronca. Se está o menino caçando inseto no brejo, ele grita naquele som arranhado que tem parte com arara. Defende-se como touro" ("If the cattle herder is preparing the lasso nearby, in an improper place, he complains. If a child is hunting insects in the swamp, he screams in that scratched sound that is similar to that of the *arara*. He defends himself like a bull"; 214).

between an “onça parda” and an “onça pintada,” and can also name and characterize many of the birds found in the region, is a specific place, not simply a vacant garden.

I will now consider Barros and his environmental imaginaries of the Pantanal. Considered by Carlos Drummond de Andrade and Antonio Houaiss to be one of the most important contemporary poets, Barros has been described by the Brazilian press as the poet of the wetlands of Mato Grosso do Sul, even if on several occasions he himself dismissed the title “poet of the Pantanal” (Müller 20). This is somewhat disconcerting, given that much of his poetry manifests an overwhelming bioregional specificity; that is, it presents a considerable number of references to the Pantanal biome in the form of flora and fauna, as well as the corresponding hydrologic aspects of the wetlands found in the Southwest of Brazil and parts of Paraguay and Bolivia. Although he does not claim to be the “poet of the Pantanal,” in an interview with *Revista Leituras* in 2007 he did explain that “minhas palavras são nutridas e fertilizadas pelo chão, pelas águas e pela natureza pantaneira” (“my words are nourished and fertilized by the ground, by the waters, and by the Pantanal nature”; n.p.). In his response to the interviewer, Barros avoids referring to the Pantanal itself, simply saying “pantaneira.” He prefers to talk about the “ground,” “waters,” and “nature” of the region, rather than refer to the Pantanal by itself. In *Livro*, he will refer to the proper name “Pantanal” in several occasions, alongside other places such as “Corumbá,” “o rio Paraguai,” “o rio Taquari,” and “Nhecolândia”:

—Este é o portão da Nhecolândia, entrada pioneira para o Pantanal.

Insetos compostos de paisagem se esfarinham na luz. Os cardeais recomeçam…

Suspensas

sobre o sabão das lavadeiras, miúdas

borboletas amarelas:

—Buquê de rosas trêfegas… (“Livro” 186).

—This is the gate of Nhecolândia, pioneer entry into the Pantanal.

Insects composed of landscape are spread like flour in the light. The cardinals begin…

Suspended

on the soap washing women, small

yellow butterflies:

—Bouquet of restless flowers…

The passage names the wetlands with the proper name “Pantanal” capitalized. It is no longer just a terrain—as was the case in Dom Aquino. Moreover, a reference to Nhecolândia is introduced, clearly setting up the connection to Guimarães Rosa’s “Entremeio.” Through Nhecolândia, the poet presents a gateway to the Pantanal wetlands. The presence of a “gate” and “entry” might lead the reader to expect a panoramic vista of the area, yet the images presented immediately after are of small living creatures in quotidian situations: “insects” floating in the light of day, “cardinals” beginning their flights or songs, “butterflies” gathering around women washing with soap, and a “Bouquet of restless flowers.” No grand view of the wetlands is offered, nor a sublime portrayal of the land as it extends into the horizon. The first phrase is particularly relevant in displaying Barros’ imagery of the Pantanal: “Insects composed of landscape are spread like flour in the light.” Rather than describe the “landscape” as constituted of “insects” flying, Barros portrays the bugs of the wetlands as “composed of landscape.” The insects are

made of the land; that is, they contain the land in themselves as they fly about. They seem to have a symbiotic parity with the land. Those insects *are* the region as they buzz around. The Pantanal is an entity on the same grounds as are the different cities and rivers in Mato Grosso do Sul, but so are the insects, butterflies, birds, and flowers. The living beings found in the region are every bit as important as the land they inhabit.

Barros chooses to name all the nonhuman beings that can be found strewn across the ground. He offers a poetics that enumerates the living beings of the Pantanal, a rhetorical strategy that triggers a bioregional specificity not unlike Guimarães Rosa's portrayal of the avifauna in the region in "Entremeio." *Livro* is aptly subtitled "Roteiro para uma excursão poética no Pantanal" ("Guide for a poetic route in the Pantanal") and includes references to the Taquari river and flora and fauna found in the region such as the *tuiuiú* bird or the *piranha*. Not only are the names of plants and animals in the Pantanal recurrent in his poems, but also the weather cycles of the region, especially the transition from drought to rainy season. The abundance of images of the Pantanal wetlands is remarkable, so much so that readers unacquainted with the region find the depictions at times opaque. *Livro* challenges readers to see the Pantanal through the eyes of the poet in his intimate knowledge of the wetlands.

Barros himself admits that his poetry is not very accessible because of his ample use of imagery ("Arranjos para assobio" 7). The use of nouns and their playful transformation into adjectives mimics the direct experience of that which is named. His use of language attempts to figuratively stick to those nonhuman creatures that he sees. Barros speaks of frogs, stones, and plants; and also of the qualities of being "frog-like," "stone-like," and "plant-like" ("Livro" 202). It is almost as if the names he deploys want to quite literally stick to the things they mention. In

order to understand what he means with terms such as "frog-like" or "stone-like," the reader must imagine a frog or stone. That is, he or she has had to experience those things in order to grasp their adjectivized forms. The poet simply points at the entities that make up the region and names them, without any further description or explanation. His language strings together "nodes of images," minuscule impressions of the Pantanal ("Livro" 183).

Barros' environmental imagination engages with two aspects: referentiality and scale. His poetry establishes a primacy of the senses. The overwhelming use of specific names to portray the wetlands prioritizes the senses to imagine the landscape represented that generates in the reader an awareness of the significance of referentiality in language. Generic descriptions often aid in framing the landscape, yet the unrestrained use of names that refer to specific living beings requires a greater knowledge in order to fully recreate what the poet imagines. Dom Aquino, for example, deploys broad vistas with generic terms such as "tree," "cattle," and "plain" to frame the landscape of the wetlands, offering a single specific reference in the form of the *anhuma*. Readers unacquainted with the land can easily imagine a "green plain" with "deer," "cattle," and a "tree" in the distance. The reference to the *anhuma* functions to add a regional flavour to the passages, but it does not detract from grasping the overall meaning of the representation of the wetlands. In contrast, Barros avoids offering broad brushstrokes of landscape, incorporating many specific references to animals and plants in the Pantanal:

> Incrível a alegria do capim. E a bagunça dos periquitos! Há um referver de insetos por baixo da casca úmida das mangueiras.
>
> Alegria é de manhã ter chovido de noite! As chuvas encharcam tudo. Os baguaris e os caramujos tortos. As chuvas encharcaram os cerrados até os pentelhos. Lagartos

> espaceiam com olhos de paina. Borboletas desovadas melam. Biguás engolem bagres perplexos. Espinheiros emaranhados guardam por baixo filhotes de pato. ("Livro" 191).
>
> Incredible the happiness of tall grass. And the mess of *periquitos*! There is a fervour of insects below the humid shell of the *mangueiras*.
>
> Happiness of the morning is having rained at night! The rains flood everything. The *baguaris* and the lopsided snails. The rains flood the *cerrados* up to the pubic hairs. Lizards spread with eyes of fibre. Hatched butterflies cling. *Biguás* swallow perplexed *bagres*. Tangled bramble guards ducklings below.

This passage depicts the wetlands after the rain, focusing on the mutualisms between living beings after the region floods. Several references to specific creatures are the following: "periquitos" ("parakeets"), "mangueiras" ("mango trees"), "baguaris" ("cocoi herons"), "biguás" ("neotropic cormorants"), and "bagres" ("catfish"). Each of these living beings is portrayed in connection with each other. Insects gather beneath the "mangueiras," while the "biguás" eat "bagres." The enumeration of different flora and fauna creates a scene of interdependence. Moreover, the names used also reveal a linguistic interdependence that is not surprising, given that the Pantanal wetlands are shared between Paraguay, Bolivia, and Brazil. The word "periquito" actually comes from Spanish, for example. The word "baguari" is even more complex, since the term derives from the Tupi-Guarani word "mbaé-guari" or "maguari" that literally means "tortuous thing" (*Dicionário Ilustrado Tupi Guarani*). In Paraguay and Bolivia, the term refers to the Jabiru stork, also known as the *tuiuiú* in Brazil. In Mato Grosso do Sul,

however, the term “baguari” is also used to refer to the “garça-mourena” or cocoi heron, which also inhabits the wetlands (Albernaz-Silveira and Joana da Silva 73). The passage presents the Pantanal as a living tissue that manifests not only the interdependence of animals and plants, but also of Portuguese, Spanish, and Tupi-Guarani. This intercrossing of references and languages is challenging to readers unacquainted with the region. The use of local terms such as “baguaris” offers an intimate yet opaque view of the creatures living in the Pantanal. Barros portrays a wetlands that is alive and buzzing with activity, if also filled with anthropomorphisms.

Barros takes the notion of mutualism further, framing many close-ups of the fauna and flora that constitute the biome of the region. He is constantly naming animals and things in the region, disrupting panoramic representations of the Pantanal by refocusing on the interactions between the minutiae of the ecosystem. He often includes poems that act as glossaries of creatures in the Pantanal (“Matéria de poesia” 150-151; “Arranjos para assobio” 49-52; “Livro” 211-215; “Poemas rupestres” 401-413;). Barros includes in *Livro* a glossary of creatures of the Pantanal titled “Pequena História Natural” (“Small Natural History”) that functions as a few encyclopaedic entries of the following animals: “Urubu,” “Socó-Boca-D’Água,” “Tatu,” “Quero-Quero,” “Cachorros,” “Quati,” and “Garça” (211-216). Although some of the animals described in the section are generic, such as “cachorro” (“dog”) or “urubu” (“vulture”), others such as the bird “quero-quero” (“southern lapwing”) or the small mammal “quati” (“coati”) are found in that region and are emblematic:

> 6. DE QUATI
>
> Aparece um quati escoteiro. Decerto perseguido de cachorro. No chão é ente insuficiente o quati. Imita ser baleado. O rabo desinquilibra de tanto rente na terra.

Agora, se alcança árvore, quati arma banzé. Arreganha. Monta episódio. E até xinga cachorro.

Igual é o tamanduá. Fora do mato, no limpo, tamanduá nega encrenca. Porém se encontra zamboada, vira gente. E desafia cachorro, onça-pintada, tenente. (215).

6. OF COATI

An *escoteiro* coati appears. Surely chased by a dog. On ground, the coati is an insufficient being. He imitates being shot. The tail is unstable from being so close to the ground.

Now, if he reaches a tree, the coati raises hell. He shows his teeth. Makes a scandal. And even insults the dog.

The same is the *tamanduá*. Beyond the bush, out in the clear, the *tamanduá* refuses conflict. But if finds undergrowth, he becomes as people. And defies dogs, jaguars, lieutenants.

Note the number in the title of the poem. It imitates an entry into an encyclopaedia or natural treatise. The coati is depicted in its behaviour with a dog chasing it. When on the ground, it is vulnerable and awkward. Yet the moment it reaches a tree, it becomes ferocious and noisy. The anthropomorphization of the mammal is relevant in the poem. The coati "raises hell," "makes a scandal," and "even insults the dog." The poem then introduces another animal of the Pantanal that is said to be similar, the "tamanduá" or "anteater." Here the anthropomorphism is even more explicit, for when the anteater finds undergrowth of the wetlands, he becomes people ("vira

gente") and "defies dogs, jaguars, lieutenants." Again, the emphasis is on the relations between the anteater and other living beings, such as jaguars and people.

The naming of animals and the use of pseudo-glossaries are indicative of the significance of enumerating flora and fauna in Barros's poetry. His poetics of naming is linked to the innocence with which his poems portray the world of the Pantanal. When describing the coati, the sentences are short. As a child that imagines the coati actually communicating the dog that chased it up a tree, the coati is described as "insulting" and harassing its chaser. The anteater is also seen as turning into "people" the moment it engages in conflict, as the poet were adopting the view of a child that sees two adults argue. Scholars Paulo Eduardo Benites de Moraes and Josemar de Campos Maciel argue that Barros's language tends towards innocence; that is, it attempts to express the world through a language of innocence characteristic of children (86). Naming things is part of that turn to a more child-like language that begins to describe the immediate surroundings. That innocent gaze allows for a more close-up perspective of the Pantanal in which the names of creatures are more important than abstracts concepts. Of particular force is the list of birds that the Brazilian poet introduces into his text, many of which are specific the region. When describing the "garças pantaneiras" as nostalgic, he questions whether he is not "impregnating with human pestilence" those regional birds by describing them in that way (Barros 216). He acknowledges the human dimension of anthropomorphizing the creatures of the Pantanal.

Barros thus constructs an infinitesimal mosaic of the wetlands that avoids broad and sweeping representations of landscape in favour of referring to the relationships between creatures. By "infinitesimal" I mean those things which are "ínfimas" insofar as they are small,

unimportant, and often ignored for much grander visions of the world. As Barros states in *Tratado geral das grandezas do ínfimo:* "Para mim poderoso é aquele que descobre as / insignificâncias (do mundo e as nossas)" ("For me powerful is he who discovers / insignificant things (of the world and ourselves)"; 375). Here he is engaging with the colonial tradition of "Tratados," such as Pêro de Magalhães Gândavo's *Tratado da Terra do Brasil* (1576)—a book that is a type of catalog of the fauna and flora of Brazil. Whereas Gândavo enumerates the important creatures of Brazil, Barros ironically lists those considered insignificant. Barros uses a similar lexicon when describing his poetics of trash: "ínfimo," "insignificâncias," "coisas desimportantes," "nadeiras," "coisas inúteis," and "trastes" are some of the words he uses, always referencing that which is valued as marginal and minute. There is indeed a provocation of exalting the humble. It is not necessarily a question of the actual size of the things mentioned, but rather of the insignificant value traditionally attached to them. His poetics of the infinitesimal draw the reader's attention to the minuscule in terms of value. Such focus on the insignificant disrupts panoramic vistas of the wetlands. Unlike Dom Aquino's abstract depiction of the region, Barros presents us with a microscopic lens through which we can take a closer look at all those things ignored and ultimately effaced from landscape in the former's representation of the region.

Impressionistic and immediate, Barros' poetry portrays the wetlands in minute brushstrokes. When describing his *Livro*, he writes that "Este não é um livro sobre o Pantanal. Seria antes uma anunciação. Enunciados como que constativos. Manchas. Nódoas de imagens. Festejos de linguagem" ("This is not a book about the Pantanal. It is rather an annunciation. Utterances as constatives. Smudges. Nodes of images. Celebrations of language"; 183). The

passage also makes clear the philosophical discussion that underlies his prose. The phrase "Utterances as constatives" refers to the speech acts theory which distinguishes between those utterances that assert things about the world and those that are performative, that make things happen in the world. Barros is not going to offer an abstract representation of the wetlands. Rather he is going to assert the Pantanal through the extensive use of names, as if they were nodes of images. He is not invested in totalizing descriptions, reducing the scale of his depictions to the insignificant parts. In fact, the proper noun "Pantanal" only appears sparsely throughout the book, compared to the overwhelming number of words that refer to the flora and fauna of the wetlands. Indeed the proliferation of nouns sustains the claim that *Livro* is invested in enunciating the wetlands. Barros uses specific words for plants and animals found in the Pantanal: more than 30 types of plants and trees (some examples are "curimba," "cambará," "antúrio," "acurizeiro," "mangueira," and "lilá"), more than 20 types of birds (some examples are "urubu," "amassa-barro," "papagaio," "cancã," "bemtevi-cartola," "arara," and "tuiuiú"), more than 15 types of fish (some examples are "tordo," "pacu," "cascudo," "peixe-cachorro," "moreia," and "arraia"), more than 20 types of insects (some examples are "borboleta," "frango d'água," "carrapato," "besouro," "aranha-caranguejeira," and "vaga-lume"), and many other animals (some examples are "jacaré," "quati," "capivara," "anta," "cágado," and "jia"). It is similar to an aesthetic of the catalog, insofar as there is an overwhelming presence of references to flora and fauna. This catalog of living beings and their interrelations generates an environmental mosaic, one in which mutualisms are the cohesive element.

The impact of naming the flora and fauna of the Pantanal in such detail produces in the reader an awareness of referentiality and the importance of the links between living beings. Not

only do the nouns for plants and animals make obvious the indigenous origins of the words and reinforce the sense of autochthony, but they also overwhelm the reader, forcing him or her to struggle in imagining the mosaic of creatures found in the wetlands. Unless directly acquainted with the flora and fauna referenced in the text, it is difficult to picture the wetlands. For example, the section titled "Agroval" contains 485 words, of which 41 are nouns that refer to specific flora and fauna, such as "arraia," "rapa-canoa," "cascudos," "carunchos," and "armaus" ("Livro" 188-189). It is in that section that Barros affirms that when he thinks of the Pantanal, he thinks of the "troca de favores que se estabelece; no mutualismo; no amparo que ali se completa entre os rascunhos de vida dos seres minúsculos" ("exchange of favours that is established; the mutualism; the shelter that is there completed between drafts of life of minuscule beings"; "Livro" 188). His environmental imaginary of the wetlands is not just an enumeration of beings, but the portraying of life in that ecosystem as a mosaic of infinitesimal creatures that interact with each other:

> Penso nos embriões dos atos. Uma boca disforme de rapa-canoa que começa a querer se grudar nas coisas. Rudimentos rombudos de um olho de árvore. Os indícios de ínfimas sociedades. Os liames primordiais entre paredes e lesmas. Também os germes das primeiras ideias de uma convivência entre lagartos e pedras. O embrião de um muçum sem estames, que renega ter asas. Antepassados de antúrios e borboletas que procuram uma nesga de sol. (189)

> I think of the embryos of acts. A misshapen mouth of *rapa-canoa* that begins to want to stick to things. Brute rudiments of a tree knot. Indices of infinitesimal societies.

> Primordial vines between walls and slugs. Also the germs of the first ideas of a coexistence between lizards and stones. The embryo of *muçum* without stamen, that refuses to have wings. Ancestors of anthuriums and butterflies that search for a sliver of sun.

The passage portrays the "infinitesimal societies" that thrive at the humid surface of the Pantanal. These communities of living beings are linked in the present and the past. The poet imagines "primordial vines" in the walls. He considers the "muçum" ("eel") as the ancestor of anthuriums and butterflies. Every living creature is connected in this web of mutualisms, no matter how strange the link. Hence the embryo of an eel that has no "stamen" and "refuses to have wings" is part of the lineage that binds a species of flower and a species of insect together. Mutualisms reach farther than living beings. The possibility of a "coexistence between lizards and stones" is also present in these "infinitesimal" communities of the wetlands. A common origin is also emphasized in the passage—all things commune in their origins. The references to flora and fauna in the short passage are also representative of the poetic enumeration in *Livro*. Moreover, the instances of the term "embryo"—which appears several times—stress the sexual and reproductive aspect of the ecosystem. Life in the Pantanal is not aseptic, but rather a mess of fluids and creatures in embryonic states, awaiting to burst forth into the waters. It is as if the wetlands are a living tissue of organic transfusions.

The constant references to water, rain, and marshland are linked to sexualized and embryonic images. In the previous passage, the river Taquari is portrayed as "pregnant." The "Argoval" poem also includes several mentions of "infinitesimal societies" as embryonic. Barros' depictions of the Pantanal constantly refer to images of birth and death, of exchanges of

fluids, seeds, and blood. Perhaps one of the most powerful pieces in the book evokes the minute transfusions of life that occur just beneath the surface as the rain finally descends upon the wetlands:

> E ao cabo de três meses de trocas e infusões—a chuva começa a descer. E a arraia vai levantar-se. Seu corpo deu sangue e bebeu. Na carne ainda está embutido o fedor de um carrapato. De novo ela caminha para os brejos refertos. Girinos pretos de rabinhos e olhos de feto fugiram do grande útero, e agora já fervem nas águas das chuvas.
>
> É a pura inauguração de um outro universo. Que vai corromper, irromper, irrigar e recompor a natureza. (“Livro” 189)

> And at the end of three months of exchanges and infusions—the rains begins to fall. And the mantis ray will awaken. Her body gave blood and drank. In her flesh is still present the stench of a *carrapato*. Once again she walks to the full marshes. Black tadpoles with fetal tails and eyes escape the great uterus, and now are bubbling in the waters of the rains.
>
> It is the pure inauguration of another universe. That will corrupt, irrupt, irrigate and recompose nature.

There is nothing sublime about the imagery presented. In the humid and subterranean placenta of the Pantanal, small creatures are gradually evolving and maturing. There are transfusions of blood and flesh and the stink of putrid matter. The small and negligible creatures—such as the *arraia* (“sting ray”) and *carrapato* (“tick”)— just beneath the ground emerge with the first rains.

Yet these poetics of the sedimented ground, where the minutiae of the wetlands exchange fluids, blood, and seeds lead the reader to a different knowledge of the region, one in which the mutualisms shape its understanding. Instead of offering a broad and aseptic view of the land, Barros' chooses to enumerate the creatures that populate the wetlands and describe their organic interactions. It is the minuscule events that take place at ground level which manifest the origins of the wetlands. These small creatures that seem hidden from view "corrupt, penetrate, irrigate, and recompose nature." No grand and elevated vistas. No immense scale. Just the mutualism of the small and insignificant. Accentuating the infinitesimal scale of the wetlands in Brazil through a poetics of naming the insignificant, Barros offers a depiction of the region that dismisses grand metaphors of landscape in favour of those beings unnoticed yet whose role in sustaining the mosaic of life in the Pantanal manifest the origins of the region. One need look no further than the small animals and vegetation hidden in the wetlands to gain an invaluable image of the world found in that specific region. Barros's poetics in *Livro* is an attempt to lead the reader to "unseeing the world" or rather to see it with the innocence of a child, the gaze of she who is naming the world for the very first time.

As I have argued throughout this chapter, the modes of representation of the Pantanal shifted from a panoramic view of the region in Dom Aquino to a depiction of the land that avoids panoramic sweeps in favour of portraying the interactions between flora and fauna through a poetics of enumeration and an exploration of the insider/outsider knowledge dichotomy in Guimarães Rosa and Barros. The latter two imagine the wetlands as a living web of mutualisms. The local and specific become central to their imagined geography of the Pantanal. To that end, naming disrupts the broad and sweeping representation of the wetlands as a garden or vacant

space awaiting appropriation. Whereas Guimarães Rosa deploys naming as a way to distinguish between outsider/insider knowledge of the region, Barros takes it a step further and uses it to exploit the gaps of referentiality. In his poetry the Pantanal is not *as* central as are the different creatures that populate the sedimented ground of the wetlands, evoking a sense of mutualism and dependency that does not rely on sublimely beautiful vistas to emphasize its importance and value. Much the same way as Guimarães Rosa elevates the role of local knowledge of the region in the figure of Mariano, so does Barros accentuate the place of the insignificant and negligible creatures to be found inside of the Pantanal. Theirs is a poetics of the Pantanal that, while regional in all its specificity, breaks the mold of regionalist writers of the plains insofar as they disrupt the panoramic gaze of the land through the naming of things inside it, not over and above it as is exemplified by Dom Aquino's poem of the region.

O Sertão or How the Wilderness became a Desert

> O *gerais* corre em volta. Esses gerais são sem tamanho. Enfim, cada um o que quer aprova, o senhor sabe: pão ou pães, é questão de opiniães… O sertão está em toda parte.
>
> João Guimarães Rosa, *Grande sertão: veredas*

The numerous references to the *sertão* in Latin American literature indicate its undeniable presence as dominant imagined geography. If we consider exclusively the Brazilian literary canon as encompassing the works of more than fifty authors, from José de Alencar (1829-1877) and Euclides da Cunha (1866-1909) to more contemporary writers such as Maria Valéria Rezende (b. 1942), the term *sertão* emerges as one of the most prevalent words in referring to places in Brazil. It is far more present than *pampas* and *Pantanal*. The prevalence of the word "sertão" in Brazilian literature raises an interesting question regarding the binary between real and imagined environments. Whereas the latter two terms refer to regions that are recognized biomes by geographers, located in specific regions of Brazil, the former does not refer to a particular biome or region. It evokes a series of powerful environmental images, such as a very dry climate and scant vegetation. It is a predominant environmental imaginary in Brazilian culture and literature, yet it is surprisingly geographically indeterminate insofar as it does not indicate a specific place. By indeterminate I mean the lack of a specific or determinate geographical region. The concept of indeterminacy is often deployed by researchers in the field of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) to explore the inherent vagueness of spatial objects, such as mountains or valleys (Bittner and Stell 100). Vagueness suggests the blurring of limits

that delineate an object. Take, for example, the Canadian Rocky mountains: When does the mountain range begin? At what elevation does the land that surrounds the mountains becomes a part of them? Geographical objects are vague insofar as they often cannot be rigorously delineated. Jiusto emphasizes the following:

> spatial indeterminacy, like other impediments to positive knowledge, shifts the practical epistemological basis of environmental assessment from realism, where the measure of truth is correspondence with objective empirical experience operating independent of the researcher, to constructivism, where truth is inherently contextual and active. (215)

Spatial indeterminacy thus reveals a distinction between real geographies that can be accessed empirically and those geographies that are constructed subjectively. I will argue that the *sertão* is spatially indeterminate. It does not have a fixed location, but can refer to a multitude of different places in Brazil. The indeterminacy of the *sertão* is due to its evolution as an environmental imaginary in Brazilian history, first denoting an unexplored wilderness of the interior by Portuguese colonizers to later referring to a deserted landscape by writers in the twentieth century. The indeterminacy of the *sertão* does not mean that it does not exist as a real geography, but rather that there are many different *sertões*. As a vague geography that transmits a series of powerful environmental images, it sheds light on the role of environmental imaginaries in shaping our knowledge of the world. The purpose of this chapter is to reveal how an environmental imaginary can shape our ecological knowledge, even if it functions as a vague imagined geography that has no fixed location.

So as to explore the dichotomy between real and imaginary geographies, it is important to distinguish the *sertão* from other biomes and regions. Santos, for example, analyzes the *sertão* as an "imagined geography" (108). He goes on to argue that the images attached to that imagined geography "são bem produtos de forças e interesses políticos" ("are products of political forces and interests"; 109). How does the use of the term "sertão" shape the environmental knowledge of Brazil? According to ecologists, "A biome is a major regional complex of similar communities —a large scale ecological unit recognized primarily by the dominant plant type and vegetation structure" that is "largely a function of climate" (Withgott and Brennan 96-97). Hence precipitation and flora are indicators of the type of biome that a particular region sustains. The *pampas*, for example, is generally described as a grassland within the context of major world biomes (Cunningham et al. 96). The *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* (IBGE) distinguishes six biomes in Brazil: *Caatinga*, *Mata Atlântica*, *Pantanal*, *Pampa*, *Cerrado*, and *Amazônia* (n.p.). However, it does not include the *sertão* as a biome. Neither is it included in the geographical lexicon for describing the physical relief of the country, such as the words "planalto," "planície," "serra," "bacia," and "depressão." In other words, it does not refer to a specific vegetation or type of terrain, making it a term difficult to define geographically and ecologically—even if its status as referring to a place somewhere in Brazil is hard to contest.

Often the term is accompanied by another word to circumscribe its location. For example, the "sertão nordestino" is considered a subregion of the *Caatinga* biome. Yet there are also other "sertões," such as the "sertão mineiro," the "sertão matogrossense," and the "sertão cearense," to

give just a few examples. Maria de Amélia Alencar makes the following statement in regards to the indeterminate nature of the term "sertão":

> No Brasil, do período colonial, a palavra *sertão* tem sido usada para fazer referência a áreas as mais diversas, pois seu enunciado depende do *locus* de onde fala o enunciante. Assim, sertão podia se referir, no período colonial (e até hoje), as áreas tão distintas e imprecisas do interior de São Paulo, da Bahia, a região amazônica, Minas Gerais, Goiás e Mato Grosso, além do sertão nordestino. (243)

> In Brazil, since its colonial period, the word *sertão* has been used to refer to the most diverse areas, for its assertion depends on the *locus* from which the speaker enunciates. Hence, *sertão* could refer to, during the colonial period (and even nowadays), to areas as different and imprecise as those from the interior of São Paulo, of Bahia, the Amazon region, Minas Gerais, Goiás and Mato Gross, beyond the *sertão* of the Northeast.

Alencar argues that the term is geographically "imprecise" insofar as it denotes a broad range of regions in Brazil. Albertina Vicentini echoes this idea by tracing the philological origins of the term to the Latin noun "desertanum" that means "an unknown place where deserters went," a term which was later used by the Portuguese to describe the interior of Africa and Brazil as they travelled the coastline by boat (45). Perhaps the best example of this is Pero Vaz de Caminha's letter to King Manuel I of Portugal, in which he describes what he saw of Brazil from the ships of the Portuguese fleet led by Pedro Álvarez Cabral in 1500: "Pelo sertão nos pareceu, vista do mar, muito grande, porque, a estender olhos, não podíamos ver senão terra com arvoredos, que

nos parecia muito longa" ("The land of the *sertão* seemed to us, seen from the sea, very large, for when we extended our gaze, we could not but see land with trees that seemed to us very wide"; n.p.). Caminha does not describe the *sertão* as a desert, but rather as a "wide" and "large" land with trees that could be seen from the ship. It is a vague term, one that is not linked with a specific vegetation or topography. It is the land that Caminha could see to the interior of Brazil from the coastline.

Even if the term does not seem to be part of the scientific language of geographers, it holds a central place in Brazilian literature and culture, so much so that it is often referenced by writers. Vicentini emphasizes that the word is "thematically overdetermined," even if it is geographically imprecise (42). Its significance reaches beyond literature, present in the songs of some of the most celebrated musicians of Brazil, such as Luiz Gonzaga and Maria Bethânia, and in important films, such as the notable adaptations of *Vidas secas* (1963) by Nelson Pereira dos Santos, *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* (1964) by Glauber Rocha, and *Grande sertão* (1965) by Gerardo Santos Pereira. The *sertão* remains as popular as ever in cultural productions, with films like *O Auto da compadecida* (2000), *Cinema, aspirinas e urubus* (2005), and *Viajo porque preciso, volto porque te amo* (2010). Even the *sertaneja* music genre has gained international attention in recent years. Unlike any other purely geographical term, the *sertão* evokes an imagined geography widespread throughout Brazilian culture. It is one of the most dominant environmental imaginaries in all of Brazil. As Santos suggests, "o sertão é elemento de auto identificação e reconhecimento para o brasileiro" ("the *sertão* is an element of self-identification and recognition for Brazilians"; 108).

In this chapter I will focus exclusively on the ways in which Brazilian literary texts depict the *sertão*. Dominant imagined geographies shape our knowledge of the world around us, offering a series of tropes that remain embedded in the modes of representing the environment. Often considered a desert in popular culture, the many *sertões* of Brazil actually range from dry forests to savannahs and wetlands. A closer scrutiny of the different vegetations mapped by the IBGE shows that there are no desert regions ("Vegetação do Brasil"). Exploring the environmental images of the *sertão* provides an invaluable opportunity to discuss the emergence of a dominant environmental epistemology linked to a particular mode of representing the land. More than any of the imagined geographies analyzed in this dissertation, the *sertão* is clearly competing with other imagined geographies in its national context, exerting a dominance over the imagined geographies of the *Pampa* and the *Pantanal.* Its increased visibility in Brazilian literature over other biomes can be explained in part through its historical significance. It holds such a powerful grip on the cultural imagination of Brazilians, that it is far more commonplace in literature, film, and music than, for example, the Amazon rainforest. By focusing on the *sertão*, I explore how it functions as a dominant environmental imaginary that is nevertheless geographically indeterminate. It constructs a series of images that shift from an arid region not unlike a desert to a region that is opposed to the littoral of Brazil. Its very indeterminacy affords it a powerful rhetoric capable of evoking a sense of place, a rhetoric that at its very core is built on the geographical contrast between the interior and coastal areas of Brazil.

In order to reveal the latent indeterminacy of the *sertão*, I will survey several of the literary references made of that imagined geography by Visconde de Taunay in *Inocência* (1872), by José de Alencar in *O sertanejo* (1875), and by Euclides da Cunha in *Os Sertões* (1902) at the

turn of the nineteenth century. These references will demonstrate the multiplicity of different places referred to with the term. From the state of Mato Grosso to Minas Gerais, Ceará, and Bahía, the term "sertão" is deployed to name a wide range of regions throughout Brazil, none of which can be considered a desert *strictu sensu*. For example, the use of the plural in da Cunha's well known—although not widely read—book sets up the vagueness of the term. Moreover, these texts reveal the evolution of the environmental imaginaries of the *sertão*, ranging from its depiction as an uninhabited wilderness to a scorching desert. I will then focus on the close readings of three important texts of the twentieth century that reimagine the *sertão* by emphasizing the human and ecological crisis of one of the many different *sertões*, that of the *sertão nordestino*: *Vidas secas* (1938) by Graciliano Ramos and *O rio* (1953) and *Morte e vida severina* (1955) by João Cabral de Melo Neto. More than any of the previous imaginaries of the plains analyzed in this dissertation, the *sertão* is the clearest example of how environmental imaginaries can profoundly shape the way we imagine the world around us, even going against the grain of other ways of knowing our surroundings.

Alfredo d'Escragnolle Taunay (1843-1899)—commonly referred to as Visconde de Taunay—was not only a Brazilian writer and politician, but also a military engineer who participated in several campaigns of Mato Grosso in the war between Paraguay and the Triple Alliance (Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil) that took place between 1864 and 1870. Trained as an "engineer geographer," Taunay offers detailed descriptions of landscape in many of his books (Maretti 184). His popular regionalist novella *Inocência* tells the story of an impossible romance between an urbanite, Cirino, and a countrywoman, Inocência, in the interior of Mato Grosso. Born in the province of São Paulo, yet making a living as fake doctor prescribing medicines to

villagers in the interior of Brazil, Cirino one day arrives in Sant'Ana do Paranaíba. There he meets Santos Pereira, farmer and father to the young Inocência. A troubled romance ensues and later becomes all the more complex when a German naturalist named Meyer arrives, acting as a comedic foil to Cirino. The novella begins with a detailed portrayal of its setting:

> Corta extensa e quase despovoada zona da parte sul-oriental da vastíssima província de Mato Grosso a estrada que da vila de Sant'Ana do Paranaíba vai ter ao sítio abandonado de Camapuã. Desde aquela povoação, assente próximo ao vértice do ângulo em que confinam os territórios de São Paulo, Minas Gerais, Goiás e Mato Grosso até ao rio Sucuriú, afluente do majestoso Paraná, isto é, no desenvolvimento de muitas dezenas de léguas, anda-se comodamente, de habitação em habitação, mais ou menos chegadas umas às outras […] até ao *retiro* de João Pereira, guarda avançada daqueles solidões, homem chão e hospitaleiro, que acolhe com carinho o viajante desses alongados páramos, ofrece-lhe momentâneo agasalho e o provê da matalogem precisa para alcançar os campos de Miranda e Pequiri, ou da Vacaria e Nioac, no Baixo Paraguai.
>
> Ali começa o sertão chamado *bruto*. (17-18)

> Through the outspread and almost uninhabited southeastern region of the very vast province of Mato Grosso cuts the road that from the villa of Sant'Ana of Paraníba goes to the abandoned place of Camapuã. From that settlement, near the vertices of the angle that is bordered by the territories of São Paulo, Minas Gerais, Goiás, and Mato Grosso until the river Sucuriú, tributary of the majestic Paraná; that is, in the

> extension of many leagues, one may easily walk from one settlement to the next, some closer than others […] until the *retiro* of João Pereira, vanguard of those solitudes, grounded and hospitable man that welcomes with care the traveller of those stretched plateaus, offers him brief shelter and provides the necessary food to reach the fields of Miranda and Pequiri, or of Vacaria and Nioac, at the mouth of the Paraguay river.
>
> There begins the *sertão* called *brute*.

Notable in this passage are the numerous references to geographic locations. The narrator mentions cities and provinces in an effort to describe the setting in detail. Some of the language used to analyze the land is similar to that of a surveyor. For example, the sentence "assente próximo ao vértice do ângulo em que confinam os territórios de São Paulo, Minas Gerais, Goiás e Mato Grosso até ao rio Sucuriú, afluente do majestoso Paraná" uses geometric terms such as "vértice do ângulo" to delineate the borders of the region where the story will take place. It is as if the narrator wants to be as precise as possible in indicating the location where events will take place. The reader is offered a panorama of rivers, cities, and provinces that help triangulate the region within the state of Mato Grosso. After incorporating a plethora of geographic references that establish the setting, the narrator suggests that it is in that location that the "*sertão* called *brute*" begins. The singular form of the term is used in this case. Moreover, it is accompanied by a specification; that is, it is a "sertão" that is often described as "brute." In the original, Taunay writes the word "brute" in italics, incorporating the following footnote to clarify the meaning of the term in that particular context: "Florestas de arbustos de 3 a 4 pés de altura mais ou menos, mui chegados uns aos outros" ("Forests of shrubs of more or less 3 to 4 feet high, very close to

each other"; 18). The footnote reveals the possibility of there being different types of *sertão*, according to their vegetation. Later in the novella, the German naturalist Meyer—having travelled through Brazil before meeting Cirino and Inocência—will explain that he had also visited another *sertão*, the "sertões do Imperio" ("sertões of the Empire"; 132). The particular *sertão* in which the story takes place is one of densely populated shrub flora. It is not initially described as a desert, but rather as a grassland or savanna; that is, a "tropical grassland interspersed with clusters of acacias or other trees" (Withgott and Brennan 100). This type of *sertão* is also not found in the Brazilian Northeast—the often cited location of the sertão—, but is in the southeastern region of Mato Grosso. This means that the usage of the term in Taunay is not restricted either to the *Caatinga* or the Northeast, and neither does it necessarily connote an arid terrain.

Although the opening passage of *Inocência* establishes the geographic context of the novella, little is offered in the way of a description of the *sertão* beyond its vegetation and location in Mato Grosso. A common theme in the depictions of the region is its vast extension and seemingly flat terrain. When describing the presence of macaws flying across the horizon, the narrator explains that "Ali ficam alcandoradas, balouçando-se gravemente e atirando, de espaço em espaço, às imensidades das dilatadas campinas" ("There they are, perched on high, balancing gravely and taking flight, from space to space, towards the immensities of the vast fields"; 22). The word "campinas" can be a field or plain, a flat extension of land with mostly grass vegetation. Here emphasis is placed on its size, for it is "vast" and immense. In another passage, the region is described as a "vastidão" ("vast extension"; 24). As in other literatures of the plains, the large size of these regions is a significant part of their environmental imaginaries.

Especially interesting, however, is the description of the "sertanejo" that the narrator introduces in the novella, for it echoes the origins of the word *sertão* as indicated by Vicentini insofar as "desert" also shares a common Latin root: "O legítimo sertanejo, explorador dos desertos, não tem, em geral, família. Enquanto moço, seu fim único é devassar terras, pisar campos onde ninguém antes pusera pé, vadear rios desconhecidos, despontar cabeceiras e furar matas, que descobridor algum até então haja varado" ("The legitimate sertanejo, explorer of deserts, does not generally have a family. While young, his only objective is invade lands, reach fields where nobody had stepped before, cross unknown rivers, traverse river deltas, and penetrate forests that no discoverer had until then reached"; 24). The word "sertanejo" refers to an "explorer of deserts." This raises an interesting question as to what is meant by "deserts." The narrator already described the region as grassland, so it is likely that the term refers to unexplored and uninhabited lands, as the cited passage suggests. A desert is a land on which "nobody had stepped before" and "that no discoverer had until then reached." It would seem that Taunay is referring to the *sertão* as any unexplored and uninhabited region, often in the interior of Brazil, since exploration historically began in the littoral. In *Inocência*, the *sertanejo* is not an inhabitant of a particular place or geography, but rather an individual that travels to unknown lands:

> Esses discípulos, aguçada a curiosidade com as repetidas e animadas descrições das grandes cenas da natureza, num belo dia desertam da casa paterna, espalham-se por aí além, e uns nos confins do Paraná, outros nas brenhas de São Paulo, nas planuras de Goiás ou nas bocainas de Mato Grosso, por toda parte enfim, onde haja deserto. (25)

> Those disciples, having their curiosity fed by the repeated and enthusiastic descriptions of grand scenes of nature, one good day decide to desert their paternal house, scattering throughout, and some in the ends of Paraná, others in the woods of São Paulo, in the plains of Goiás or the ridges of Mato Grosso, every place where a desert is found.

Sertanejos "desert their paternal house," so as to travel "every place where a desert is found." Yet those places referred to in the passage are "woods," "plains," and "ridges" throughout Brazil. It is clear from the passage that the term "desert" does not necessarily connote an arid landscape, but rather a place yet unexplored by Europeans. It seems the term is closer to that of "wilderness," than an actual desert. According to Garrard, the notion of wilderness "fits the settler experience in the New Worlds," which are often seen as "apparently untamed landscapes" that manifest the contrasts "between the forces of culture and nature" (60). Taunay is evoking the sense of an "untamed landscape" yet to be explored. This is striking, for later depictions of the *sertão* in writers such as Ramos and Cabral will emphasize the harsh climate and human migration as a crucial aspect of its environmental imaginary. In *Inocência*, however, the term is geographically vague and broadly refers to wilderness regions in the interior of Brazil. There are a variety of *sertões*, most of which are described as having grassland vegetation.

Latent in Taunay's environmental imaginary of the *sertão* is the tension between the settled littoral—the place that Cirino and Meyer arrive from—and the rural interior of Brazil. The troubled romance between Cirino and Inocência is a reflection of that dichotomy, a dichotomy that Cirino is well aware of when he says to Pereira that "Isto são costumes da cidade… aqui, no sertão, há outros modos de pensar" ("These are city habits… here, in the

sertão, there are other ways of thinking"; 128). Their romance is "troubled" insofar as it is impossible. The interior of Brazil is starkly different from its urbanite coastal cities. Taunay translates the geographic tension into an impossible romance between two individuals from different regions. The interior/littoral binary is a recurrent theme in the environmental imaginaries of the *sertão*, one that is present in da Cunha, Ramos, and Cabral with growing emphasis. In *Inocência*, the tension is manifested through the portrayal of *sertanejos* as "explorers" of the interior wilderness of Brazil, not unlike the figure of the "bandeirante." In Ramos and Cabral the movement of peoples from the coast to the interior will be reversed in the figure of the "retirante"—he who retreats back to the littoral as a migrant in search of the means to live with dignity. The literatures of the sertão all dwell on the tensions between those two geographical entities, the interior and the littoral, and the displacement this causes between peoples of both regions.

Most widely known for his *indigenista* trilogy that includes *O Guarani* (1857), *Iracema* (1865), and *Ubirajara* (1874), José de Alencar also wrote several regional novels, such as *O gaúcho* (1870) and *O sertanejo* (1875). This tendency towards narrating regional stories is linked to the construction of a national identity present in many writers of that period. Robert Patrick Newcomb analyzes the significance of narrating national history in Brazilian Romantic writers and argues that Alencar is committed to "valorizing local languages and themes" (9). Renata Mautner Wasserman also suggests that one of the strategies of "New World writers" such as Alencar and Cooper was to deploy the "otherness" present in their countries as an "affirmation of an independent national identity" (132). Alencar confesses as much in his autobiographical text *Como e porque sou romancista* (1893), when he discusses the differences between his *O guaraní*

and Cooper's novels, insisting that there is no single "personagem de cujo typo se encontre o molde nos Mohicanos, Espião, Ontário, Sapadores e Leonel Lincoln" ("character of which type one may find the mold of Mohicans, Espião, Ontário, Sapadores, and Leonel Lincoln"; 47). Alencar's interest in regional narratives seems anchored in a search for a national identity, not unlike other regionalist writers in Latin America. What is remarkable is that he centres an entire novel on the figure of the *sertanejo*. Those explorers of the Brazilian wilderness become central in the environmental imaginaries of the *sertão* in Alencar.

The book romanticizes the life and adventures of *sertanejo* Arnaldo as he faces the ranchers of Quixeramobim and attempts to elope with young Dona Flor. The novel idealizes the bravery and individualism of Arnaldo as he overcomes the challenges posed by a wild nature. The narrator opens with a depiction of the setting: "Esta imensa campina, que se dilata por horizontes infindos, é o sertão de minha terra natal" ("These immense fields, that extend across horizons without end, are the *sertão* of my native land"; 11). It is an "immense" land, one that extends without limits into the horizon. It is a place "without end." The lack of limits evokes a wilderness that is "the *sertão* of my native land." Notice this last phrase, for it suggests the possibility of other *sertões*. This extension of land is part of the *sertão* of the narrator's "native land."

The description is generic insofar as it does not give any specific details as to what could be found within those "immense fields." After that initial depiction, the narrator continues by asking himself "Quando tornarei a respirar tuas auras impregnadas de perfumes agrestes, nas quais o homem comunga a seiva dessa natureza possante?" ("When will I breathe your auras impregnated with rustic perfumes, those in which man takes as communion the sap of that

powerful nature"; 11). The land is seductive, filled with "rustic perfumes" that awaken the longing of "man" to join with "powerful nature." The depiction continues to be abstract, without any specific references to geography, flora, or fauna. The *sertão* is a "powerful nature" to be breathed in by *sertanejos*. There is an intimate link between them and the land. Towards the end of the narrator's introduction, the reader is offered a specific location for the setting of the novel: "Assim fizera o dono do comboio que no dia 10 de dezembro de 1764 seguia pelas margens do Sitiá buscando as faldas da Serra de Santa Maria, no sertão de Quixeramobim" ("Thus the owner of the convoy did that on the 10 day of December of 1764 he continued alongside the river Sitiá, searching the mountains of Serra de Santa Maria, in the *sertão* of Quixeramobim"; 11). The narrator introduces several geographic references that indicate the precise location of the story—the river Sitiá, the mountain range of Santa Maria, and the city of Quixeramobim. Arnaldo's adventures will thus take place in the interior of the state of Ceará. By stating that the events of the story will take place in "the *sertão* of Quixeramobim," the narrator once again suggests the possibility of other *sertões*. The novel *O sertanejo* does not take place in one of many *sertões*—the one found in Quixeramobim.

More so than *Inocência*, Alencar's novel focuses on describing the *sertão* of Quixeramobim as a desert. For example, the region is represented in contrast with "civilization" in the following manner: "A civilização que penetra pelo interior corta os campos de estradas, e semeia pelo vastíssimo deserto as casas e mais tarde as povoações" ("The civilization that penetrates through the interior cuts the fields with roads, and inseminates the very vast desert with houses and later villages"; 11). The dichotomy between civilization and the *sertão* is sexualized, for it is the former that "penetrates" and "inseminates" the land with "houses" and

"villages." Notice how civilization is linked to an urban culture. Its influence on the land is generating urban centres in the "vast desert." It seems then that the depiction of the *sertão* as a "vast desert" has less to do with the climate and vegetation, as much as with whether or not the land is populated with humans recognized as humans. It is still connected to the notion of wilderness mentioned. Later the narrator explains that "os fazendeiros tinham por timbre fazer ostentação de sua opulência e cerca-se de um luxo régio, suprimindo assim em torno de si o deserto que os cercava" ("the ranchers often manifested their opulence and enclosed themselves in a regal luxury, thus effacing the desert that surrounded them"; 34). It is with "opulence" and "luxury" that ranchers attempt to forget the "desert" that surrounds them. Again, the tension between a material culture inspired by urbanites and the wilderness of the *sertão* is latent in the images that appear in the narrative. Moreover, the *sertanejo* is considered "filho do deserto" ("son of the desert"; 55). Arnaldo's love for Dona Flor is truncated throughout the narrative precisely because he is a "son of the desert," unfit to marry a woman that aspires to the life of an urbanite. This tension between civilization and wilderness is exploited throughout *O sertanejo*. At the core of Alencar's environmental imaginary of the *sertão* is the binary between the urban littoral and the wilderness found throughout the interior of Brazil.

The narrative also introduces several important descriptions of the landscape that will later become common themes in portrayal of the *sertões* of the Northeast, such as the constant drought and the emblematic *juazeiro* ("Ziziphus joazeiro") trees that are common in the *Caatinga* biome.

O sol ardentíssimo coa através do mormaço da terra abrasada uns raios baços que vestem de mortalha lívida e poenta os esqueletos das árvores, enfileirados uns após outros como uma lúgubre procissão de mortos.

Apenas ao longe se destaca a folhagem de uma oiticica, de um joazeiro ou de outra árvore vivaz do sertão, que elevando sua copa virente por sobre aquela devastação profunda, parece o derradeiro arranco da seiva da terra exausta a remontar ao céu. (14)

The very ardent sun strains through the haze of the scorched earth to deliver some pale rays that cover with a livid, dusty shroud the skeletons of trees, standing in line one after the other like a lugubrious procession of the dead.

Barely visible in the distance, the foliage of an *oiticica*, of a *joazeiro*, or of some other vivid tree of the *sertão* that raises its green top above that profound devastation, it seems like the last drop of sap of the exhausted land ascending to the sky.

The description emphasizes the deathly appearance of the land, portraying the trees as "skeletons" in a "procession of the dead." The climate is described as arid insofar as the sun is "very ardent" and the land "scorched." It is the *seca* or drought that is manifested in the "profound devastation" of the *sertão*. Hence the term "desert" is in *O sertanejo* not just a synonym for "wilderness," but also literally referring to the arid climate of the region. It takes on a negative connotation throughout the passage, for the drought generates devastation of that "exhausted land." The narrator will even depict the weather as a "holocaust": "Quem pela primeira vez percorre o sertão nessa quadra, depois de longa seca, sente confranger-se-lhe a alma

até os últimos refolhos em face dessa inanição da vida, desse imenso holocausto da terra" ("Who for the first time traverses the *sertão* in that region, after a long drought, feels his soul tighten in the face of that exhaustion of life, of that immense holocaust of the land"; 15). It is a land of suffering and death, alive only to agonize in the drought. Whereas in *Inocência* the significance of drought was not necessarily linked to the *sertão*, it is in O *sertanejo* that it becomes very present in the environmental imaginary offered by Alencar. The *sertão* becomes a literal desert, not just an unexplored wilderness.

What is also interesting is the latent agency of the land through its personification as a living being. The trees are not just flora. They are part of a "lugubrious procession of the dead." The land wears a "shroud" as a cadaver awaiting burial and also agonizes in the cruelty of a "holocaust" caused by the drought. It is not inanimate, but rather a living creature that can communicate with the sertanejo Arnaldo, because "Para o sertanejo a floresta é um mundo, e cada árvore um amigo ou um conhecido a quem saúda passando" ("For the *sertanejo* the forest is a world, and each tree a friend or an acquaintance that he greets while passing"; 69). Although its arid climate is portrayed negatively by the narrator of *O sertanejo*, the land is personified and given a certain amount of agency. The relationship between Arnaldo and the nature of the *sertão* is nevertheless idealized. Throughout the novel, he is able to read into the signs of his environment perfectly: "Uma folha, um rasto, um galho partido, um desvio da ramagem, eram a seus olhos vaqueanos os capítulos de uma história ou as efemérides do deserto" ("A leaf, an animal track, a broken branch, displaced foliage, were all to his *vaqueano* eyes the chapters of a history or the notable events of the desert"; 69). Nature holds no secrets from Arnaldo. Nothing is withheld from him. The *sertanejo* has a privileged access to this agonizing land, one that no

urbanite can fully understand. He holds a knowledge of the *sertão* desert than those from the cities ignore. There is almost a prophetic aspect to the way in which Arnaldo communes with nature—whether it be reading the signs of his environment or controlling its wild beasts, such as the *onça*—one that will later be reflected in how Euclides da Cunha depicts the famed *sertanejo* of Canudos, Antônio Conselheiro. Alencar presents an environmental imaginary in which the *sertão* is identified with an arid climate whose secrets are only available to *sertanejos*, further deepening the latent binary between interior and littoral that is present since Caminha's first depiction of Brazil.

Trained as an engineer in the Military, da Cunha participated in the important campaign against the rebellion in Canudos that took place between 1896-97. Written as a way to document the War of Canudos, *Os Sertões* (1902) defined the "cultural imaginary" of the emerging nation (Ferreira Cury 72). Leopoldo Bernucci argues that the text has only increased in popularity during the past hundred years, especially in the last twenty years of the twentieth century (15). Although written as a work of nonfiction, the book established an environmental imaginary of the *sertão* that would later influence writers such as Mario Vargas Llosa in *La guerra del fin del mundo* (1981). Da Cunha expertly traces an imaginary of the *sertão* that not only manifests its inherent geographical indeterminacy, but also incorporates Alencar's personification of the land as agonizing under a severe climate.

Both in *Inocência* and *O sertanejo*, the term "sertão" had always been accompanied by another geographical indicator, such as Sant'Ana de Paranaíba or Quixeramobim. The singular was used to denote a region among many others throughout the interior of Brazil. Da Cunha, however, chooses to title his book by using the plural "sertões." The use of the plural shapes the

environmental imaginary of the *sertão*, for it portrays the land as a disorganized wilderness lacking progress, while at the same time emphasizing its appeal to the enterprise of civilization. Through the use of the plural, da Cunha sets up a series of images that exploit the tension between the littoral and the interior in terms of the civilization-barbarism dichotomy that is recurrent throughout *Os Sertões*.

The use of the plural generates an ambivalence from the very start. Does the title refer to a multiplicity of imagined geographies named *sertão*? Or does the plural form denote a single imagined geography? Is it many places or one place? From an ecocritical perspective, each possibility entails a distinct epistemology of the *sertão*. The first alternative seems to emphasize the absence of a distinct geographical situation, whereas the second suggests an articulated understanding of the region named. If by "sertões" the author suggests that there are many different regions that may be called "sertão," then the knowledge needed to grasp such varied geographies must be nuanced and articulate. In order to know the *sertão*, one would have to be acquainted with the different sertões. For example, he or she would have to be acquainted with the *sertão* of Mato Grosso, the *sertão* of Quixeramobim, the *sertão* of São Paulo, and so on. It requires a more subtle understanding of each of those locales. However, if the title encompasses a wide range of biomes and topographies, the *sertão* becomes almost an abstract space to be populated with different attributes, the same way one might say that the term "plains" is generic and does not really say much about what that particular topography might be like in Brazil.

Another possible alternative is that the title might be transmitting a concrete knowledge of that imagined geography, mainly the diversity of the topography, hydrology, and flora that regardless form a coherent region or ecosystem. Bioregions and ecosystems are built on the

mutual relationships between many different organic and nonorganic constituents to form a balanced arrangement. The Canadian prairies, for example, denote three different types of grassland biomes that share similar soil types and climate conditions. The use of the plural transmits the geographical knowledge of how those specific environments are articulated into a larger bioregion. In *Os Sertões*, the plural form contrasts with the more common use of the singular. Da Cunha does not dispel the term's initial ambiguity. One of Bernucci's first footnotes in his critical edition of *Os Sertões* is that the plural form is used "mesmo quando significa conjunto" ("even when it means a collection"; 65).

The choice of the plural is not merely a question of style, but rather a statement that geographically translates the tension between progress and underdevelopment. Da Cunha is well aware of the multiplicity of places the *sertão* denotes when in an article published in the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo* in 1897 titled "Nossa Vendéia" he insists that the region is "sem um sistema orográfico definido" ("without a defined orographic system"; 537). It is not homogenous, thus requiring a detailed description of the different mountain ranges and plains that shape the Brazilian interior. Moreover, da Cunha's reading of landscape does not distinguish between real and imagined geographies, maintaining a juxtaposition of both. His descriptions of the land attempts to trace its contours as an engineer. Bernucci explains that *Os Sertões* contains several intersecting language registers, of which the geological language is most "ostensive" and the keystone of the entire book (30). Ilan Stavans also suggests that da Cunha's style "mimics the rough topography of the backlands" (xviii). The geologic language he deploys creates a scientific tone of precision, a cartography of the *sertões*:

> Novo horizonte geológico reponta com um traço original e interessante. Mal estudado embora, caracteriza-o notável significação orográfica, porque as cordilheiras dominantes do sul ali se extinguem soterradas, numa inumação estupenda, pelo possantes estratos mais recentes, que as circundam. A terra porém, permanece elevada, alongando-se em planuras amplas, ou avultando em falsas montanhas, de denudação, descendo em aclives fortes, mas tendo os dorsos alargados em plainos inscritos num horizonte de nivel, apenas apontoado a leste pelos vértices dos albardões distantes, que perlongam a costa. (75-6)

> A new geological horizon reappears with an original and interesting picture. As soon as one studies it, however, it takes on a notable orographic significance because the dominating mountain ranges to the south die there, entombed in a magnificent burial by powerful and more recent layers that encase them. The land, however, retains its elevation, extending out in broad plains or clumping up into denuded mountains that descend along steep slopes. These then flatten out into plains that level off to the horizon on the east, where distant mountain chains appear all the way to the coast. (Lowe 10)

It seems as if da Cunha is describing the landscape as objectively as possible, tracing the "orographic" aspects of the land by indicating the characteristics of mountain ranges and plains in geological terms: "estratos," "planuras," "cordilheiras," "planuras," and "albardões." The depiction presents a changing landscape of mountains and elevated plains. There is no uniformity to the land, but rather mountain ranges that "die" and "flatten," to give way to "broad plains."

There is no single geological or geographic entity, but rather a complex set of topographic circumstances. Yet even in that combination of scientific terms to describe the lack of homogeneity of the land, da Cunha's prose reveals a poetic vein. He describes mountains that "die there, entombed in a magnificent burial." The mountains are sepulchred beneath the "broad plains" that extend into the horizon. His cartography of the land foreshadows the events of Canudos, as if the human drama and the environment were intimately tied. As Stavans argues, *Os Sertões* reframes the "intimate relationship between Brazil's physical landscape, its people, and culture" (xvii).

The fixed relationship between both is due to the influence of French historian Hippolyte Taine's theory of environmental determinism that is visible in the division of *Os Sertões* in three sections, "A Terra," "O Homem," and "A Luta" (Anderson 549). The land determines its human inhabitants and their society and culture. In other words, the knowledge of how the land itself is topographically organized points to the motivations for the social structures and cultural values of its peoples. Geography thus becomes the basis for analyzing society. Culture collapses into explanations of real geographies, for it is determined by the land. In other words, culture is reduced to geographical and geological explications. This "environmental determinism" in da Cunha leads him to a language that, while densely scientific at times, is often surprisingly poetic. *Os Sertões* is filled with geographical and geological terms to describe the diverse regions implied by the term "sertões": "chapadas," "planuras," "campos gerais," "sistema orográfico," "emersões calcárias," "rede hidrográfica," "terrenos terciários," "depósitos sedimentários," "massas graníticas," "planícies," "páramo," and "significação mesológica" are just a few of the terms deployed by da Cunha. The precision of his scientific lexicon is present throughout the

book. Such is his desire to establish a cartography of the *sertões* that in the 5th edition he includes several maps used in the Canudos campaign. As scholar Aarti Madan suggests, da Cunha's "primary focus is neither actor nor setting but rather the very physical space of the sertão" ("Provincializing World Geography" 114). Madan argues that *Os Sertões* attempts to "translate" the "writing of the land" into "writing the nation" ("Provincializing World Geography" 114). In other words, the cartography of the *sertões* is not just a mapping of the land, but also of the Brazilian nation. Physical geography becomes a means to explain the complexities of Brazilian society—land explains human interactions. This environmental determinism is even manifested in the portrayal of Antônio Conselheiro, when da Cunha writes "É natural que estas camadas profundas da nossa estraticifcação étnica se sublevassem numa anticlinal extraordinária—Antônio Conselheiro" ("It was not surprising that our deep ethnic strata pushed up the extraordinary anticlinal—Antônio Conselheiro"; 251). Conselheiro is described using a geological image, one of stratified rocks folding into an "extraordinary anticlinal." The leader of the rebellion is represented as a "strata" phenomenon, a physical contour of the land that he inhabits. He is a product of the geological forces that shape the land.

The geological depictions of da Cunha raise an interesting point regarding the ambivalence of the term "sertões," for it is a reflection of the seeming lack of a "defined orographic system." The *sertões* are heterogenous and antithetical, "Barbaramente estéreis; maravilhosamente exuberantes" ("Brutally sterile; marvellously exuberant"; Cunha 134). They have no uniformity in their geological and climatological aspects. The composition of the *sertões* strikes da Cunha as so original that he critiques Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel for ignoring a fourth "geographical category" manifested in the interior of Brazil (134). According to da Cunha,

the German philosopher only included three types of categories: “vastas planícies áridas,” “vales fertéis,” and “litorais” (133). The *sertões*, however, do not fit into any of these categories. The difficulty emerges given the radical transformations that the sertões manifest. “Ao sobrevir das chuvas, a terra, como vimos, transfigura-se em mutações fantásticas, contrastando com a desolação anterior” (“After surviving the rains, the land, as we saw, transforms itself in fantastic mutations, contrasting with the preceding desolation”; Cunha 135). The sertões are not a static geography, but one of constant change between opposite poles, between “sterility” and “exuberance.”

This geographical instability, moreover, determines its inhabitants and their values. The peoples of the *sertões* or “sertanejos” are the result of the “agentes físicos de sua terra” (“physical agents of their land”; Cunha 214). The inhabitants have no agency, but it is rather the land that establishes their societal norms. The disorganization of the *sertões* translates into the “barbaric” social structure of the “sertanejos.” The *sertanejo* “É inconstante como ela. É natural que o seja. Viver é adaptar-se. Ela talhou-o à sua imagem: bárbaro, impetuoso, abrupto” (“Is inconstant like her. It is natural that he be so. To live is to adapt. She carved him in her image: barbaric, impetuous, abrupt”; Cunha 215). Determined by the disorganized orography of the *sertões*, so too the *sertanejos* become a “populaçaõ multiforme” (Cunha 298). The multiplicity of regions elicited by the term *sertões* determines the disorganized structure of *sertanejo* societies at the core of the Canudos conflict. The changing orography of the *sertões* sets up the term’s geographic indeterminacy insofar as no single region can be isolated as the *sertão*. There is no single geographical location, but rather a shifting geography that is shaped by the underlying strata of the land.

The instability of the *sertões*—their oscillating climatology and disorganized geomorphology—validates the use of the plural. These lands display a lack of uniformity that is linked to an overarching dichotomy between barbarism and civilization. In his preliminary note to *Os sertões,* da Cunha explains that "A civilização avançará nos sertões impelida por essa implacável 'força motriz da História'" ("A civilization will advance in the sertões propelled by that unwavering 'force of History'"; 66). Da Cunha is convinced that civilization and history will bring progress to the *sertões*. Outside of the title, this phrase is the first instance of the term "sertões" in the book. Here they are characterized as a place in which civilization will gradually enter. Civilization is absent in the *sertões*. Notice how da Cunha is considering the *sertões* as a *place*—a location wherein civilization can introduce itself—by using the preposition "nos" or "in the" to describe the insertion of civilization. The preposition establishes a spatial relationship between "civilização" and "sertões." The verb "avançará" further emphasizes the spatial image of civilization entering into a place named the *sertões*. For da Cunha, the *sertões* hinge on their indeterminate geography and on their ability to elicit a sense of place. They open to the possibility of incursions by civilization, very much the same way the Canudos campaign represents the thrust of the armies from the Brazilian littoral into the interior. Social tensions between civilization and barbarism are thus translated into a geographical dichotomy between the *sertões* and the littoral.

A possible challenge to the geographical indeterminacy that I argue is that da Cunha is analyzing a specific conflict—the War of Canudos—that took place in a particular location in the state of Bahía. If the subject of his *Os sertões* is that place in Bahía, then the plural term must be referring to that location, regardless of the orographic complexities of the region. Although this

seems like a viable criticism, it does not address several difficulties in the way that da Cunha's book is structured. Firstly, the War of Canudos is indeed a significant component of the entire book, yet it only occupies the last part of three. It is relegated to a minor part of the text in comparison with the previous two parts, "A Terra" and "O Homem." This is due, in part, to the fact that although da Cunha wanted to cover the entire campaign, "in truth he witnessed less than a month of the military operation" (Stavans xii). Stavans explains that da Cunha attempted to overcompensate by researching accounts that examined the psychology of the Canudos rebels, an effort that "is evident in the unbalanced structure of the book: Almost two-thirds is about everything but the campaign" (xii). Da Cunha focused on attempting to understand the war by making sense of the accounts of the land and its people, rather than exclusively documenting the event that took place in Canudos. He adopts a far broader perspective prior to analyzing the specific details of the campaign that are limited to a particular space and time in Brazil. Secondly, the broad scope that he adopts makes it difficult to indicate a specific region that he refers to when describing the *sertões*. Instead the reader is offered a detailed description of the Brazilian territory, following the river São Francisco as it meanders from the state of Paraná all the way to Bahía. The following passage is an example of the broad sketches of land depicted by da Cunha:

> Estereografa-se, duramente, nas placas rígidas dos afloramentos gnáissicos; e o talude dos planaltos dobra-se no socalco da Mantiqueira, onde se encaixa o Paraíba, ou desfaz-se em rebentos que, após apontarem as alturas de píncaros centralizados pelo Iatiaia, levam até ao âmago de Minas as paisagens alpestres do litoral. Mas ao penetrar-se este Estado nota-se, malgrado o tumultuar das serranias, lenta descensão

> geral para o norte. Como nos altos chapadões de São Paulo e do Paraná, todas as caudais revelam este pendor insensível com derivarem em leitos contorcidos e vencendo, contrafeitas, o antagonismo permanente das montanhas: o rio Grande rompe, rasgando-a com a força viva da corrente, a serra da Canastra, e, norteados pela meridiana, abrem-se adiante os fundos vales de erosão do rio das Velhas e do São Francisco. (74)

> It is harshly sketched out like a map over rigid plates of gneissic outcroppings, and the slopes of the plateau drop down along the Mantiqueira ledge where the Paraíba flows, or it breaks up into spurs that ring the summits, with Mount Itataia in the center, and which bring the Alpine landscapes of the coast all the way to the heart of Minas Gerais. Upon entering there, however, one will notice that in spite of the jumble of ridges there is a gradual descent to the north. In like manner on the high plains of the states of São Paulo and Paraná all the main tributaries show a slightly perceptible inclination to flow in twisted beds as they get resistance of the mountains. The Rio Grande breaks out and tears the Canastra Range with the full strength of its current. If we follow along the meridian, opening up ahead will be the broad eroded valleys of the Rio das Velhas and the São Francisco. (Lowe 9)

Rather than offer a precise location, da Cunha chooses to map a very large expanse of territory, referring to mountain ranges, rivers, plains, and states in Brazil. Nowhere does he specifically detail the location of the *sertões.* He offers broad geologic representations of the land, often tracing the river São Francisco as it reaches Bahía. Perhaps the most concrete geographic

location offered of the *sertão*—but not of the *sertões*—is a small section titled "A Entrada do Sertão" ("Entrance to the *Sertão*") that broadly sketches the northeastern region of Brazil, especially Bahía (80). The fact that da Cunha uses the singular, instead of the plural, seems to suggest that he is describing the entrance to a particular *sertão*, that of the often cited *sertão* of the northeast or *sertão nordestino*. Yet it would be a mistake to reduce *Os Sertões* to that particular region, for it seems that da Cunha is making a case for all regions to the interior of Brazil. The War of Canudos occurred in one of those *sertões*, but there are many others.

A closer look at one of the opening passages of *Os Sertões* reveals da Cunha's environmental imaginary: "O planalto central do Brasil desce, nos litorais do Sul, em escarpas inteiriças, altas e abruptas. Assoberba os mares; e desata-se em chapadões nivelados pelos visos das cordilheiras marítimas, distendidas do Rio Grande a Minas" ("the central plateau descends towards the southern coast of Brazil in high, steep escarpments. It towers over the seas and breaks into ridges, levelling off from the peaks of the coastal mountain ranges which extend from Rio Grande do Sul to Minas Gerais"; 71). The central plateau that extends to the interior of Brazil is contrasted with the mountain ranges of the littoral, a geographical contrast that manifests the difficulties between an undeveloped land and the urbanite centres found on the coast. The "planalto" and "chapadões nivelados" contrast with the "litorais do Sul" and the "cordilheiras marítimas." The plains of the interior are distinguished from the littoral mountain ranges of the South. Da Cunha's geological language leads him to differentiate between plains of the interior and the mountain ranges of the littoral. This distinction echoes the historical context in which "the most dramatic illustration of this geographical divide between coast and interior was the military siege of Canudos in the 1890s" (Skidmore 84).

Da Cunha's description of those two topographies at the beginning of the book are to him a testimony of the "conflito secula que ali se trava entre os mares e a terra" ("the eternal conflict that is there established between land and sea"; 72). His imaginary of the *sertão* is a place of struggle. The geomorphological forces at play react in a manner not unlike that of Darwinian evolution ("Provincializing World Geography" 119). What is particularly interesting is that the land itself becomes the agent of change. The nonhuman component of da Cunha's imagined geographies sets forth a polemic between the *sertões* and the littoral. Two geological armies—rolling plateaus on the one side and mountain ranges on the other—are poised against each other. Notice the use of the verb "assoberba" in the cited passage. The verb is constructed from the noun "soberba" which translates into "pride" and "arrogance." The *sertões* exert an "arrogance" as they tower above the coast, just as the rebels in Canudos affirm their pride against the urban littoral. The *sertões* are dominating the ocean that feeds the littoral.

Although the *sertões* remain geographically indeterminate insofar as the term by itself refers to all the lands that are found to the interior of Brazil, da Cunha does offer some of the most powerful depictions of the *sertão nordestino*. He is one of the first authors to place special emphasis in describing the *Caatinga* vegetation, presenting a landscape that is not unlike that of a desert. The fact that da Cunha chooses to refer to the *Caatinga* specifically reveals his knowledge of that particular *sertão*. The word comes from the Tupi language and means "mata branca" or "white forest," for the coloration of the vegetation often has a white tone from the lack of water ("Caatinga"). It is considered a unique biome found in Brazil that is "a complex tropical ecosystem characterized by a wide variety of both herbaceous and arborescent vegetation" and covers "an area of approximately 800,000 km²" (Pinheiro et al. 1313). Although

it “harbours one of the most biodiverse tropical dry forests in the world,” it is also a biome with the highest poverty index in Brazil (Mattei Faggin et al. 2). The descriptions of the *Caatinga* are central to da Cunha’s environmental imaginary of the *sertão* insofar as they evoke a hostile landscape that is not unlike a desert:

> Ao passo que a caatinga o afoga; abrevia-lhe o olhar; agride-o e estonteia-o; enlaça-o na trama espinescente e não o atrai; repulsa-o com as folhas urticantes, com o espinho, com os gravetos estalados em lanças; e desdobrase-lhe na frente léguas e léguas, imutável no aspecto desolado: árvores sem folhas, de galhos estorcidos e secos, revoltos, entrecruzados, apontando rijamente no espaço ou estirando-se flexuosos pelo solo, lembrando um bracejar imenso, de tortura, da flor agonizante… (116)

> Here the *caatinga* brushland engulfs him. It cuts off his field of vision. It attacks and stupefies him. It tangles him up in its thorny scheme of things and has no attraction for him. Rather, it repels him with its stinging leaves, its thorns, its dry wood standing up like lances. And it unfolds before him for mile upon mile, unchanging in its desolate look of leafless trees and twisted, dry branches, all curled around each other and pointing stiffly into space or bending over toward the ground as they recall immense waving arms, torture, or the death throes of vegetation… (Lowe 35)

Described from the perspective of a traveller, the vegetation is aggressive. It “engulfs,” “attacks,” and “stupefies” the traveller. The passage imbues the flora of the land with agency, with an active role in creating an inhospitable atmosphere. The *Caatinga* is personified as a bellicose enemy

that constantly “repels” those who enter its forest. Its trees are compared to “lances” that are “standing up” prior to a battle. The passage ends with the image of a vegetation similar to an agonizing person that is “waving arms” as in “torture.” The vegetation seems to foreshadow the massacre of Canudos in its “death throes.”

Notice da Cunha’s pejorative depiction of what biologists consider “one of the most biodiverse dry forests.” Although the *Caatinga* suffers from long periods of drought, it is nonetheless a very unique and biodiverse ecosystem. Yet da Cunha deploys a series of images that exaggerates the seeming barrenness of the biome as characteristic of the *sertão*. The land is “thorny” and “desolate,” and its trees “leafless” and “twisted.” It is a dying place, where the vegetation is in constant agony. Da Cunha is describing a desert landscape, one in which there is hardly anything alive as the drought affects flora and fauna: “Ajusta-se sobre os sertões o cautério das secas; esterilizam-se os ares urentes; empedra-se o chão, gretando, recrestado; ruge o Nordeste nos ermos; e, como um cilício dilacerador, a caatinga estende sobre a terra as ramagens de espinhos” (“The cauterizing drought settles over the *sertões*. The white-hot air becomes sterilized. The ground becomes stony, cracked, ridged. The Northeast roars across the barren land, and like a lacerating hair shirt, the *caatingas* spread their thorny branches over the land”; 118). The *seca* or drought “cauterizes” the *sertão*. In other words, the land itself is wounded and has its lacerations burned by the drought. The *sertão* is no longer a vigorous wilderness that is deserted as in Taunay or Alencar, but rather a place of sickness that is slowly dying and becoming a real desert. Its “ground becomes stony, cracked,” without any visible flora that is not the “thorny” *Caatinga*. It is “sterilized” place. These powerful images will become a commonplace in the way the *sertão* is imagined inside and outside of Brazil. The *sertão* as an

inhospitable desert with its thorny *Caatinga*. This is the dominant environmental imaginary of the *sertão*, which reveals its juxtaposition over the real geography of the *Caatinga* as a biodiverse dry forest unique in the world. Da Cunha imagines a *sertão* that exaggerates the arid conditions and personifies the land as agonizing and tortured, as if wearing a catholic "cilicio" or "spiked belt" to augment its suffering. The religious undertones are very much present in his representation of the *sertão*.

Yet for all its seeming desolate aspects, it is also represented in a passage as a "paradise" filled with avifauna. Da Cunha here offers another image of the *sertão*:

> E o sertão é um paraíso…
>
> Ressurge ao mesmo tempo a fauna resistente das caatingas: disparam pelas baixadas úmidas os caititus esquivos; passam em varas, pelas tigüeras, num estrídulo estrepitar de maxilas percutindo, os queixadas de canela ruiva; correm pelos tabuleiros altos, em bandos, esporeando-se com os ferroes de sob as asas, as emas velocíssimas; e as seriemas de vozes lamentosas, e as sericóias vibrantes, cantam nos balsedos, à fímbria dos banhados onde vem beber o tapir estacando um momento no seu trote, brutal, inflexivelmente retilíneo, pela caatinga, derribando árvores; e as próprias suçuaranas, aterrando os mocós espertos. (130-131)

> And the sertões are a paradise…
>
> Appearing again at the same time are the resistant fauna of the caatingas. Spreading in great numbers in damp, low-lying spots are the skittish *caititus*. They pass over the stubble fields in herds with a strident noise of cutting jaws, *queixadas* of reddish-

> cinamon color. Swift *emas* run across the high tablelands in bands as they spur themselves on with the energy hidden under their wings. There are crested *seriemas*, with their mournful voices, and the vibrant *sericóias* singing in the brush beside the marshes where the tapirs come to drink, standing rock-still for a moment from their lumbering gait. They go along in an inflexible straight line through the *caatinga*, knocking down trees. The *suçuaranas* terrify the alert *mocós*.

Contrasting heavily with the aseptic and sterile landscape of the *Caatinga*, here the *sertão* is brimming with life. The overwhelming references to flora and fauna evoke the Biblical garden of Eden: "caititus," "queixadas," "emas," "seriemas," "sericóias," "tapir," "mocós," and even "suçuaranas." It is a biodiverse place where animals roam free. The *sertão* can be a torture under the reign of the *Caatinga*, whilst also a "paradise" when the thorny vegetation subsides and life can take hold of the land. This description by da Cunha is impressive, since it offers such a contrasting image. However, it is the imagery of the agonizing desert that will continue to shape the environmental imaginaries of the *sertão* to this day.

In 1937—a year before publishing his most cited novel *Vidas secas*—Alagoan writer Graciliano Ramos authored a brief article titled "A propósito da seca" that appeared in the Rio de Janeiro newspaper *Observador Econômico e Financiero*. In it he argues that the drought is not the only factor in understanding the problems of the Brazilian Northeast, offering a social approach to the issues faced in the region. The article opens with a provocative passage that seems to challenge the environmental imaginary that depicts the *sertão* as a desert: "O estrangeiro que não conhecesse o Brasil e lesse um dos livros que a nossa literatura referente à seca tem produzido, literatura já bem vasta, graças a Deus, imaginaria que aquela parte de terra

que vai da serra Ibiapaba a Sergipe é deserta, uma espécie de Saara" ("A foreigner with no knowledge of Brazil and had read one of the books produced in our literature that deals with the drought, literature now quite vast, thank God, would imagine that that part of the land that goes from the mountain range of Ibiapaba to Sergipe is deserted, a type of Sahara"; 49). Although Ramos addresses the hypothetical figure of a complete foreigner in Brazil, unacquainted with the literatures of the *sertão*, it is important to note that he is addressing the urbanites of Rio de Janeiro, many of whom would have no direct knowledge of that region, except for the accounts found in newspapers and literature. Ramos thus opens his article acknowledging the presence of an imaginary of the *sertão* that is to be found mostly in literary texts and which portrays it as a deserted land. The word "deserta" ("deserted") is purposefully ambivalent, since it means both "uninhabited" and "desert-like." He is well aware of the alterations that have shaped the images of the *sertão* in Brazilian literature, from the idea of a wilderness to the notion that it is literally a desert landscape. Ramos continues by stating the following:

> os nossos ficcionistas do século passado, seguindo os bons costumes de uma época de exageros, contaram tantos casos esquisitos, semearam no sertão ressequido tantas ossadas, pintaram o sol e o céu com tintas tão vermelhas, que alguns políticos, sinceramente inquietos, pensaram em transferir da região maldita para zonas amenas os restos da gente flagelada. (49)

> our fiction writers of the past century, following the good habits of an epoch of exaggerations, recounted so many strange cases, planted the dried *sertão* with so many bones, painted the sun and the sky with such red tones, that some politicians,

> sincerely apprehensive, thought of relocating from the cursed region to more calm zones the rest of the dilacerated people.

Ramos claims that such images of the "deserted" *sertão* are the "exaggerations" of past writers. The land filled with "bones" and the "red tones" of the sky all shaped its portrayal as a dying place. It is not a place where people live their lives, but rather a cemetery from which the "restos"—another word with two possible interpretations, as the "rest" of the people left and as "cadavers" of the people of the *sertão*—are to be relocated. It almost seems as if Ramos is referring directly to the powerful images evoked by the *Caatinga* in *Os Sertões*. Throughout the rest of the article, he will criticize the idea that the *sertão* is indeed "deserted," insisting that the primary factor in the misery of that particular *sertão* is the large population that lives there with very few resources (51). He finishes the article with as provocative an ending as was the beginning: "Processos rotineiros na agricultura, indústria precária, exploração horrível do trabalhador rural, carência de administração devem ter contribuído, tanto como a seca, para o atraso em que vive a quinta parte da população do Brasil" ("Habitual procedures in agriculture, precarious industry, horrible exploitation of the rural worker, lack of administration must have contributed, as much as the drought, to the backwardness in which a fifth part of the Brazilian population lives"; 52-53). In contrast with da Cunha, who attempted to explain social conflicts through the contours of the land, Ramos sees the social problems that affect the *sertão*. He sees its human face. He is invested in the human condition of the region; that is, "*Vidas secas* narra o mundo reificado e a luta dos homens pela liberdade" ("Vidas secas narrates a reified world and the human struggle for freedom"; Bastos 134). His interest is primarily the role of the *sertanejo*, no longer an "explorer" of the wilderness, but rather the "indivíduo meio selvagem, faminto,

esfarrapado, sujo" ("individual that is half-savage, starving, in rags, dirty"; "Sertanejos" 21). The *sertanejo* is no longer an adventurer or a religious rebel, but is instead a victim of a social injustice as overwhelming as the periods of drought. Suffering discrimination and scarce resources, he is now forced to make the opposite journey from the interior to the littoral, as is the case of the protagonists of *Vidas secas*.

Although the novel takes place somewhere in the Northeast of Brazil, given the references to the *Caatinga*, the place referred to with the word "sertão" remains geographically indeterminate in *Vidas secas.* The narrative avoids references to real locations that might aid in establishing its setting. It tells the story of Fabiano and his family as they face a long drought, recounting the harsh conditions of life that they endure. The term "sertão" only appears toward the end of the novel in the last two chapters. The depictions of landscape are so immersed in the attributes of the *sertão nordestino* present in da Cunha—drought and poverty—that the text does not need to explicitly present the term in order to evoke that place.

The drought is perhaps one of the most salient deployed to describe the *sertão*. The book opens with a description of landscape that sets the stage for Fabiano's struggle against the climate of the region: "Na planície avermelhada os juazeiros alargavam duas manchas verdes" ("In the reddened plain, the *juazeiros* stretched as two green stains"; 9). The red hue of the plain suggests a lack of foliage that is further accentuated with the contrast of the two green stains of *juazeiro* trees. The adjective "reddened" which reminds the reader that the land is not naturally red, but rather has become so. It is here that Fabiano and his family find themselves at the beginning of the narrative, attempting to find shade. The trees are "stretching," which imbues the landscape with a certain frailty, as if the little green "stains" are straining to survive in the

plains of the *sertão*. Those green patches, however, are far away and can only be perceived "através dos galhos pelados da catinga rala" ("through the stripped branches of the raw catinga"; 9). Here the *Caatinga* vegetation is linked to the "reddened plains," whilst also emphasizing the inhospitable atmosphere. It is a vegetation with "stripped branches." Past its reach are the *juazeiros* to be found, as a green oasis in the land.

Often the narrator of *Vidas secas* portrays the land as inhospitable and scorching hot. When Fabiano first appears in the narrative, he perceives the *Caatinga* as extending itself as a "vermelho indeciso salpicado de manchas brancas que eram ossadas" ("indecisive red spattered with white stains that were bones"; 10). Again the red colour characterizes the *sertão,* as its comparison with a cemetery filled with "bones." Later in the narrative, when the drought threatens to arrive yet again, after Fabiano and his family have successfully installed themselves in a ranch for some time, the *sertão* seems like it will catch fire (109). Perceiving the foreboding signs of an approaching drought, Fabiano questions whether he should remain or not: "Podia continuar a viver num cemitério? Nada o prendia àquela terra dura, acharia um lugar menos seco para enterrar-se" ("Could he continue to live in a cemetery? Nothing kept him from leaving that hard land, he would find a less dry place where he could be buried"; 118). The *sertão* is a "cemetery," a scorching land with "reddened" earth and "stripped" vegetation. These images of a deathly place that is scorching hot are not unlike those presented by da Cunha.

There is even a certain verticality to the images of the *sertão* that is intimately linked with the drought, for Fabiano is always looking to the sky for signs of rain. When Fabiano first arrives at the ranch, he fearfully looks at the blue skies and sees a cloud. He and his family quickly become apprehensive that the cloud might not remain enough to rain: "conservaram-se

encolhidos, temendo que a nuvem se tivesse desfeito, vencida pelo terrível azul" ("they remained crouched, fearing that the cloud would disperse, defeated by the terrible blue"; 13). Whereas the land suffers, the real threat comes from the clear skies that smother any chance of rain. Another aspect of the vertical orientation of landscape in the images of the *sertão* is the emphasis on the trees found in the *Caatinga*: "jatobá," "xiquexiques," "mandacarus," "juazeiro," "quipá," "mucunã," and "baraúna" are some of the trees mentioned in *Vidas secas.* As in the *juazeiros* at the beginning of the book that are "stretched," so do the references to trees have the effect of orienting landscape on a vertical axis that stretches to the sky. It is the trees that first manifest the signs of drought, as the indigenous word "caatinga" indicates when referring to the vegetation as becoming white when lacking sufficient water. By naming the variety of trees in that biome, the *Caatinga* is imagined as a place far more biodiverse than in *Os Sertões*. This emphasis on flora communicates a knowledge of its vegetation that goes beyond its mere representation as "thorny" and hostile. Even if the arid climate affects the land, it is not quite a desert. The different trees attest to the enduring uniqueness and biodiversity of the *Caatinga*, valuing this arid biome as populated with a singular vegetation found nowhere else in Brazil. A positive ecological value is attached to this flora by Fabiano: "Agora Fabiano era vaqueiro, e ninguém o tiraria dali. Aparecera como um bicho, entocara-se como um bicho, mas criara raízes, estava plantado. Olhou as quipás, os mandacarus e os xiquexiques. Era mais forte que tudo isso, era como as catingueiras e as baraúnas" ("Fabiano now was a rancher, and nobody would remove him from that land. Had appeared as an animal, dwelled as an animal, yet had grown roots, he was planted in the ground. He looked at the *quipás*, the *mandacarus*, and the *xiquexiques*. He was stronger than all those, he was like the *catingueiras* and the *baraúnas*"; 19). It is the

catingueiras and *baraúnas* that manifest the strength of *sertanejos* working the land in the harsh drought. Ramos also tries to transform the metaphor "criar raízes" into quite literally a vegetation of *sertão*.

Such verticality of landscape also establishes contrasts between the land below and the sky above, as in the following passage: "Fabiano espiava a catinga amarela, onde as folhas secas se pulverizavam, trituradas pelos redemoinhos, e os garranchos se torciam, negros, torrados. No céu azul as últimas arribações tinham desaparecido" ("Fabiano spied the yellow *catinga*, where the dry leaves disintegrated, minced by the gusts of wind, and the twigs twisted, black, scorched"; 117). The "yellow" land with its "disintegrated," "twisted," and "scorched" vegetation contrasts with the "blue sky." It is that cerulean image that haunts Fabiano, who gauges the "céu limpo, cheio de claridades de mau agouro" ("clean sky, filled with clarities of ill omen"; 109). This verticality imbues the narrative with a preoccupation with the ongoing climate in the *sertão*. Although the land might be suffering a drought, the signs that Fabiano reads in his environment offer insights into possible changes in the weather. He is profoundly aware of the cycles in the climate of the *sertão*, an ecological knowledge that grasps the significance of atmospheric conditions in the environment. His is a valuable lesson in the Anthropocene, when the effects of climate are so often challenged by politicians allied with the fossil fuels industry.

Fabiano's constant concern for the clouds that appear in the sky and how the lack of rain profoundly affects his life and his family's is a testimony to the importance of climate change in human and nonhuman lives. By climate change I do not mean the alterations that human actions have had on the gradual heating of the Earth, but rather the literal changes in the climate. One need not go as far as human triggered changes in climate—although this is not an anachronistic

issue either, for Cunha considers such effects in *Os sertões*—to become aware of how humans are not above the changes that occur in the environment. Fabiano recognizes in the cycles of drought that nature cannot be controlled, that it changes time and again. And this is precisely an invaluable lesson in the Anthropocene, for the problem is not *just* that humans have become a geological and climatic force, but that our hubris deludes us into believing that we can control the environment. The plights of *retirantes* speaks volumes to lack of humility during the Anthropocene, when politicians openly declare that they can "fix" environmental problems.

It is ultimately the climate that forces Fabiano and his family to begin a journey from the sertão to the littoral towards the end of the narrative, a journey that ends when they arrive at a city: "Chegariam a uma terra desconhecida e civilizada, ficariam presos nela. E o sertão continuaria a mandar gente para lá. O sertão mandaria para a cidade homens fortes, brutos, como Fabiano, sinhá Vitória e os dois meninos" ("They would arrive at an unknown and civilized land, they would be imprisoned in her. And the *sertão* would continue to send people there. The *sertão* would send to the city strong men, brute, like Fabiano, Mrs. Vitória, and the two children"; 128). Here appears an alteration in the binary between the interior and the littoral in the environmental imaginaries of the *sertão*, for the journey is reversed. In Taunay, Alencar, and da Cunha it is the *sertanejo* that enters and explores the *sertão* from the littoral, yet at the end of *Vidas secas* it is the *sertanejo* that travels back to the littoral in search of the means to survive. This migration of peoples is due to the climate, to the changes in precipitation that no longer sustain the population of the *sertão nordestino*.

João Cabral de Melo Neto's *O rio* (1953) and *Morte e vida severina* (1955) bring to its climax the tragedy of climate change and its displacement of *sertanejos*—now *retirantes*—

seeking respite from the drought in the wetlands of the littoral. Unlike his predecessors, Cabral's poetry vividly centres the images of the *sertão* in the Northeast of Brazil. Cabral's reinvention of the imagined *sertão* into the Northeast is not surprising, for he was known as a writer who drew inspiration from a variety of authors and literary traditions (Carballo 99). He also accentuated an aspect of the images of the *sertão* that were latent in its literatures; that is, the role of water and rivers in shaping its environmental imaginaries. For example, da Cunha centres his entire cartography of *Os Sertões* on the river São Francisco. Cabral will focus on the river Capibaribe as it flows into Recife, narrating the events of each poem as if following the river. I argue that *O rio* and *Morte e vida severina* establish an active dialogue with the literatures of the *sertão,* reimagining the Northeast by deploying images of a deserted landscape and portraying the stark differences between the arid *Caatinga* and the humid mangroves of Pernambuco. The human and environmental problems of the *sertão* are fused together in his poetry, each mirroring the other—the plight of the *retirantes* is reflected in the land they are fleeing and *vice versa*. Whereas the poem *O rio* narrates the escape of the river Capibaribe to the coast, *Morte e vida severina* tells of the retirante Severino following the same river so as to migrate to Recife. Braulio Tavares explains that these poems are the result of Cabral applying different "verbal filters" to the same physical reality, the river Capibaribe (8). I would argue that they offer two perspectives—an ecological one and a human one—on the same core problematic that structures the environmental imaginaries of the *sertão* to this day, that of the binary between the interior and the coast.

Throughout both poems, the land is portrayed as a desert, an inhospitable place due to the long periods of drought. *O rio* begins describing the source of the river Capibaribe as a "terras de

sede" ("lands of thirst"; 19). It is the river itself that acts as interlocutor throughout the poem. The land—like the *retirantes* of the Northeast—is thirsty. There is a lack of water that characterizes the region. Later the river describes in more detail its memories of that arid land from which it travels on its journey to Recife:

> Por trás do que lembro,
> ouvi de uma terra desertada,
> vaziada, não vazia,
> mais que seca, calcinada.
> De onde tudo fugia,
> onde só pedra é que ficava,
> pedras e poucos homens
> com raízes de pedra, ou de cabra. (20)

> Behind that which I remember,
> I heard of a deserted land,
> emptied, not empty,
> more than dry, burnt.
> From which everything fled,
> where only stones remained,
> stones and a few men
> with roots of stone, or of goat.

Here Cabral subtly explores the origins of the term "sertão" as a "deserted" place. Whereas in Caminha the term had first meant an unexplored land to the interior and later da Cunha deployed the term to literally mean a "desert," here the "deserted land" is a place that has been "emptied, not empty." This place is "deserted" insofar as the climate has "burnt" it. Only stones remain, as well as humans with "roots of stone," stuck to the ground much the same way that stones are lodged in the dry land. The human and nonhuman elements are incrusted into each other in the depiction of the region. The land is "deserted" because its human inhabitants have fled and because it lacks vegetation. Those that remain are fastened to the ground as stones. By emphasizing that integration of the land and humans, Cabral established an environmental imaginary that reveals the embeddedness of both in the Northeast. Toward the end of *O rio*, the Capibaribe will once again portray that region as "aquela planície aterrada" ("that horrified plain") as it descends into the mangroves of Recife (40). Here there is a slight play of words, for the adjective "aterrada" can mean both "horrified" and also as "a-terrada" it can mean "interred" or "flattened" It is both a place that frightens away its inhabitants, and also a land "interred" as if filled with the sepulchres of the *retirantes* that return when dead. This region is a place that enacts a cycle of death and life through the comings and goings of its inhabitants: "A mesma dor calada, / o mesmo soluço seco, / mesma morte de coisa / que não apodrece mas seca" ("The same silent pain, / the same dry hiccup, / same death of thing / that does not rot but dry"; 25). Humans and nonhumans suffer a "silent pain" of drought that brings with it a "dry" death. What characterizes this region is its scorching climate that frightens life away, only leaving room for death.

Morte e vida severina continues the recurrent image of a desolate landscape that mirrors the ecological and human tragedy of the *sertão* of the Northeast:

—Ter uns hectares de terra,

irmão das almas,

de pedra e areia lavada

que cultivava.

—Mas que roças que ele tinha,

irmãos das almas,

que podia ele plantar

na pedra ávara?

—Nos magros lábios de areia,

irmão das almas,

dos intervalos das pedras,

plantava palha. (95)

—He had some hectares of land,

my soul brother,

of stone and washed sand

that he cultivated.

—But what plantations did he have,

my soul brother,

that he could plant

in the avaricious stone?

—In the thin lips of the sand,

my soul brother,

in the spaces between stones,

he planted straw.

There is a cadence to the passage through the repetition of "irmão das almas," a communing between both interlocutors. As anonymous as the stones embedded in the land, so are the *retirantes* that migrate to the coast because their lands can no longer be harvested due to the drought. A closer look reveals the salient objects of the passage, repeated in each measured burst of dialogue: "stones," "rocks," and "sand." The land and its peoples are bound in an inhospitable situation. Language itself seems parsed into carefully measured parts. Cabral is emphasizing the organicity of landscape and its human dimension. The environment is a space where the human and nonhuman are intimately connected in the images presented. The land is portrayed as a human body, The sand has "lips," evoking the sense of a dry mouth that has little moisture. The "avaricious stone" suggests its unwillingness to release any moisture. In another passage, a mountain range is described as "magra e ossuda" ("thin and bony"), similar to the famished bodies of the inhabitants of the *sertão* (92). Later that same mountain range is described as having "ombros" ("shoulders"; 95). The river Capibaribe is also depicted as having "pernas que não caminham" ("legs that do not walk"; 98). Just as the *retirantes* are forced to walk such long distances that their legs cannot walk anymore, so does the river suffer that same journey to the coast. In these and many other instances, the land is portrayed as inhospitable through images of the bodies of people forced to migrate from the *sertão*. The bodies of *retirantes* are shaped by the

harsh climate they endure, much the same way the land mirrors their sufferings. The environmental crisis is also a human crisis.

Adam Joseph Shellhorse notes how the construction of the poem "negotiates the problem of modern structural violence in the Brazilian hinterlands" insofar as it presents "the plight of the marginalized subaltern in a violent and uneven modernity" (203). Precisely, the geographic tension that underlies the literatures of the *sertão* explores that "uneven modernity." The interior is a "marginalized" place, a desert compared to the rich and urban coast.

—Eu também, antigamente,
fui do subúrbio dos indigentes,
e uma coisa notei
que jamais entenderei:
essa gente do Sertão
que desce para o litoral, sem razão,
fica vivendo no meio da lama,
comendo os siris que apanha;
pois bem: quando sua morte chega,
temos de enterrá-los em terra seca. (118)

—I also, a long time ago,
was from the suburb of the destitute,
and one thing I noticed
that I will never understand:

those people from the *Sertão*

that descend to the littoral, without reason,

end up living in the mud,

eating whichever crabs they can catch;

well then: when their death arrives,

we have to bury them in parched land.

Cabral concentrates on the displacement from the *sertão* to the littoral, starkly different from Taunay, Alencar, and da Cunha's emphasis on civilization making the inverse incursion. Here the movement is from the underdeveloped to the urban centres in the littoral. The destitute people of the *sertão* "descend to the littoral, without reason." It is a movement without reason, without a rationale. The verb "descend" carries with it the presence of unevenness, of an unequal situation —both topographically and socially. The "people of the *Sertão*" must descend, lower themselves to those in the littoral. Theirs is not a mere journey, but a displacement in which the marginalized other must seek out the privileged. Cabral's imagined geography of the *sertão* has a moral dimension, a political commentary on the injustices of colonization. Shellhorse claims that Severino's journey is a "political mapping of Brazil" and emphasizes the "symbolic spatialization of this problem" (215). Unlike the positivistic view of "ordem e progresso" espoused by da Cunha, those who descend to the coast are pushed on such a journey as a fatal obligation. It is not the march of civilization to the disorganized and brute interior, but the tragic path to the coast from a destitute land. Cabral dramatizes in *Morte e vida severina* a fundamental component of the environmental imaginaries of the *sertão* in the twentieth century, that of the displacement that structures the land and its inhabitants. The *sertão* evokes visions of movement

and geography. Whether it be its "irresistible" attraction of civilization or its fatal spurning of the subaltern, the *sertão* is never a static place, but rather a region of constant comings and goings, mostly goings.

The capitalization of the term *sertão* is also pertinent. Cabral seems to play with the idea that the term is a proper noun, a very specific place. He exploits the geographic dichotomy to its utmost limits. The capitalized "*Sertão*" is a specific place that merits a proper noun, a place of poverty that is everywhere except the coast. It is a "terra seca" or "parched land," alluding to the drought that affects the it. Those "people of the *Sertão*" are faceless indigents that live off the small crabs they find in the dried up riverbed. They come from the dry lands of the *sertão* and end in the wetlands of the coast, embedded in the land all the while. Another important contrast is between the the dry land of the *sertão* and the wetlands of the coast. The retirantes attempt to live off the crabs in the mangroves of Recife, yet are returned to the dry *sertão* when they die. The journey then is useless, for it ultimately ends with a return to the *sertão*.

The role of naming and geography is central to the entire one-act play. At the very beginning, Severino comments on how his name "ainda diz pouco" ("still says little") about what differentiates him from others (91). Towards the end of the passage, Severino states that in order to differentiate himself from other Severinos he could include the place where he is from: "Como então dizer quem fala / ora a Vossas Senhorias? / Vejamos: é o Severino / da Maria do Zacarias, / lá da serra da Costela / limites da Paraíba. / Mas isso ainda diz pouco" ("How to say who speaks / now to your Excellencies / Let us see: it is Severino / of Maria of Zacarias, / there from the mountain range of Costela / limits of Paraíba. / Yet that still says little"; 91). This passage sets up the core problem of naming and the search for an objective language that Cabral

confessed to be a relevant preoccupation in his writing. The search for concrete nouns is perhaps most acutely exercised in the use of proper nouns. A proper noun is specific enough to establish a tight link with its referent. However, Severino challenges this by stating that his name is the same for other people names just like him. When the same proper noun is used to name several referents, ambiguity is created and the narrow link between a name and its referent is broken. In an attempt to further specify who he is, Severino includes the names of his parents "Maria" and "Zacarias." This is still not enough, since there are other people with those three names. It is still ambiguous. In a final attempt to specifically refer to himself, distinguishing himself from all the other Severinos, he uses geography as a determinant. He is "Severino da Maria do Zacarias" from the mountains of "Costela" in the state of "Paraíba." However, even geography "says little" about who he is.

One important aspect to notice is that the term "sertão" only appears a handful of times in *O rio* and *Morte e vida severina*. In the first poem, the word appears on two occasions. It appears as the title of the second section "Notícia do Alto Sertão" and also at the end of the poem when referring to the "sertão do Jacarará" (*O rio* 20, 48). Similar to the other authors in this chapter, there seems to be a variety of "sertões." In a poem such as *O rio* that is constantly offering the names of cities and mountains that the Capibaribe river passes by ("Apolinário," "Poço Fundo," "Couro d'Anta," "Paraíba," "Petribu," "Usina," and many others), it is striking that that the word "sertão" is used so sparingly. Is the sertão found throughout the entire trajectory of the river, or is it just found at its very source, in the "sertão do Jacarará"? There is a latent ambivalence in the word insofar as does not refer to a specific geography by itself. It seems out of place in a poem that is tracing the contours of the Northeast with precision by following the meandering

Capibaribe as it reaches the coast. The poem, however, deploys many of the images that are attached to the portrayal of the *sertão* in other texts: the *Caatinga* vegetation, the deserted landscape, and the drought. Yet by deploying that imagery and offering a detailed cartography of the Northeast region, Cabral is subsuming the environmental imaginary of the *sertão* to that of the Northeast. As the Capibaribe nears Recife, it expresses the following verse in which it refers to the *Nordeste*: "No cais, Joaquim Cardozo / morou e aprendeu a luz / das costas do Nordeste, / mineral de tanto azul" ("In the port, Joaquim Cardozo / lived and learned by the light / of the coasts of the Northeast, / mineral of so much blue"; 45). Many other geographical references are present in prior literatures of the *sertão*, yet it is Cabral that introduces the "Northeast" to represent the tension between the interior and the littoral. The passage portrays the "coasts" of the Northeast as "blue," in contrast with the arid *sertão* of the interior.

The word "sertão" is also sparse in *Morte e vida severina*. It appears only towards the end of the poem, when a dialogue is established between two gravediggers in Recife about "a gente retirante que vem do Sertão de longe" ("those *retirante* people that come from the *Sertão* far away"; 117). The *sertão* is not located in any particular space. It is instead depicted as some place "far away." Moreover, the term "retirante," a term that is traditionally ascribed to migrants from the Northeast, here evokes a sense of moving away from home. The *sertão* is a place people "retreat" from in the sense of a place that generates displacement. The geographic indeterminacy of the *sertão* infuses Severino's migration with a feeling of homelessness, a lack of belonging that forces him to descend the Capibaribe toward the littoral as a destitute and ambivalent being, a person in-between places and nowhere in particular.

Similarly to *O rio*, the term "Nordeste" is also introduced in *Morte e vida severina*. This time Severino overhears several people talking about a dead friend they are carrying back from the coast: "Trabalharás numa terra / que também te abriga e te veste: / embora com o brim do Nordeste" ("You will work in a land / that will also embrace and dress you: / though with the denim of the Northeast"; 109). The verses spoken by the friends of the deceased have a biblical tone, as if the Northeast is similar to the promised land that will dress the *retirantes* with "denim." It is important to remember that the poem is an "auto de Natal pernambucano" or retelling of the religious story of the birth of Jesus using the Northeast as the setting. As the three magi travel from far away to see the birth of Jesus, so does Severino travel from the "Sertão far away" to see the birth of a child. The journey from the *sertão* to the coast is in search of life—even if it ends in death and a return to the *sertão*. It is a powerful narrative poem that has become for many the primary source of the environmental imaginaries of the *sertão*. It incorporates many of the images found in other previous writers, whilst accentuating the significance of the Northeast in that imaginary. Although other literatures of the *sertão* did not mention the Northeast, after Cabral the link between both will become unavoidable.[19]

Throughout this chapter I have traced the evolution of environmental imaginaries of the *sertão* in important texts written by Brazilian authors in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Often the term "sertão" did not refer to a specific geographical location by itself, but rather a variety of places throughout Brazil. Taunay wrote about the *sertão* in Mato Grosso, while Alencar depicted the *sertão* of Ceará. It is in the latter half of the twentieth century that a particular *sertão* becomes dominant—that of the *sertão nordestino*. Although Ramos does not

[19] As Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Jr. suggests, "This Northeast and nordestino are invented by these relations of power and knowledge, and deeply associated with them" (3).

mention any specific places in *Vidas secas*, he does portray in detail the *Caatinga* vegetation and the significance of the drought to the inhabitants of the *sertão*. Given the isolated location of the Caatinga biome within Brazil, gradually the *sertão* of that region becomes more and more visible as an environmental imaginary. Cabral's very successful *Morte e vida severina* anchors the ecological images of the *sertão* in the Northeast. Thus nowadays it is common for Brazilians to associate the *sertão* with the Northeast, given the growing influence of that region in the culture and politics of Brazil.

I also analyzed some of the salient depictions of the *sertão* in literature, such as its representation as a wilderness, as a desert, and as a deserted land. All three images manifest the inherent tension between the coast and the interior in Brazil, a historical and social problem that has been present since the colonization by the Portuguese, the War of Canudos, and the rural exodus from the Northeast to the coast in the twentieth century. These images have shaped the way the interior of Brazil has been imagined by Brazilians and outsiders, as Ramos reminds his readers in his article "A propósito da seca." The ideological basis of the depictions of the *sertão* is perhaps one of the most valuable lessons that we can take away from its environmental images, for its significance in Brazilian culture has informed preconceived ideas of what kind of an environment is found in the Northeast—an inhospitable desert from which its inhabitants are trying to flee. On the one hand it evokes the importance of considering the effects of climate change on human populations faced with longer periods of drought. Climate becomes a central ecological issue in the literatures of the *sertão*. Yet it is also important to indicate how hyperbolic literary representations can also lead to devaluing that particular environment. In the case of the *Caatinga* biome in the Northeast, the dominant images of the *sertão nordestino* have portrayed

the land as “uma especie de Saara,” as Ramos suggests, yet it is a unique and biodiverse dry forest that can only be found in Brazil. Ecologists have been fighting for years now in attempting to fund conservation projects in the Northeast, most notable of which is the present situation of the national park Serra da Capivara that although it is considered a UNESCO World Heritage Site, was forced to close due to being severely underfunded by the government (“Sem recursos” n.p.). How certain environments are portrayed informs the way in which we engage in their conservation, as is revealed in the difficulties of persuading Brazilians of the value of the Caatinga biome. The environmental imaginaries of the *sertão* make evident their significance in shaping our knowledge of the region and our commitment to its conservation.

Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation I have examined some of the dominant environmental imaginaries of the plains in Latin American literature, emphasizing their role in constructing an ecological knowledge of these varied biomes. Described as empty deserts, desolate lands, and predatory wildernesses, the plains of Latin America have been imagined by canonical writers as hostile places that contrast starkly with the emerging urban cultures of the continent. The way their readers have come to know the *Pampas*, *Llanos*, *Altiplanicies*, *Pantanal*, and *Sertão* is shaped by how these writers—privileged white men—depicted the land. The accessibility of canonical texts in the cultural traditions of many of these countries is undeniable, as is the dominance of the environmental images generated in them. By tracing the way in which they describe the plains, I have demonstrated how certain modes of imagining and knowing these lands have predominated for the past two hundred years in Latin America.

My ecocritical readings of canonical texts in Latin America have revealed the transnational continuities in the dominant images of the plains. To my knowledge, no other scholar has focused exclusively on a single geography as it is represented by writers throughout Spanish and Portuguese speaking America. It revealed the common tropes and images used by writers such as Sarmiento, Cunha, Gallegos, and Rulfo, to name only a few authors. The systematic approach to analyzing these authors with the plains as a basis shed light on the ways that dominant images can influence the ecological knowledge of a given place, but also how a set of canonical texts can shape the way those places are imagined over other possible alternatives.

At the interstices of these images, I often discovered the traces of other modes of knowing the land. The indigenous presence in the names of many of the animals, plants, rivers, and lands is embedded in the cultural traditions that these canonical writers exemplify. Often these words become so embedded in dominant culture that they are effaced. Take, for example, the word "pampas," which is so recurrent in *gaucho* literature to describe the plains of Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil. It originates in the Quechua language as a means to denote the plains of the *Puna*. The word's journey from the high plains of the Andes to Argentina bears witness to the transnational dimension of dominant environmental imaginaries. Analyzing these salient images of the plains has helped me understand that there is a rich set of traditions that are not entirely visible in canonical literature, but that provide an alternative set of ecological beliefs well worth researching. One example of an alternative source of ecological knowledge are the Tupi and Guarani languages, whose words for flora and fauna in Brazilian Portuguese points to the importance of indigenous epistemologies in shaping the way Brazilians imagine their environments. I encountered another alternative source while researching the *altiplanicies*: the rich tradition of poetry in the Quechua language. Many of the oral accounts woven by Aymaras, Quechuas, and Araucas presented fascinating imagery of the high plains. Finally, when examining the literatures of the sertão in Brazil, I came upon the role of the *literatura de cordel* that inspired writers such as Cabral and Ariano Suassuna. These popular stories are filled with local knowledge attest to the strong oral traditions of the *sertão*. As I isolated and examined the dominant representations of the plains, I perceived the fleeting shimmer of other possible sources of environmental images that remained veiled by the overwhelming presence of canonical texts.

This realization has led to me consider two possible lines of research that address some of the limitations of doctoral dissertation: (1) an exploration of the alternative sources of ecological knowledge and (2) a research project focused on one type of plains biome, the wetlands. The first line of research engages with the limitations of the *corpus* of the dissertation, whereas the second addresses the geographic limitations of my work by profiling a specific plains biome to be analyzed. Let me begin by explaining the limitations of the *corpus*. By focusing solely on the representations of the plains in canonical works of literature, I was always questioning whether or not I should explicitly incorporate those other voices that I kept uncovering in my research. At the time I felt that it was very important to work exclusively on canonical texts, so as to identify the transnational scope of their predominant environmental images. I still believe that a fundamental first step in foregrounding the ecological knowledge of indigenous traditions, women, and other marginalized voices is to single out the continuities between the environmental images of canonical texts and emphasizing their dominant role in shaping the imaginaries of the plains in Latin America. I did not just want to discuss environmental imaginaries in the plural, as if there was a wide range of representations all equally present. I was invested in revealing how not all environmental imaginaries are equal—how some are far more visible and influential than others. It is only when we realize this important aspect of the different modes of representing the environment that we reconsider the role of the oppressed and marginalized other. After this dissertation I could now begin a comparative analysis of the differences between the dominant and alternative environmental imaginaries of the plains, exploring the works of indigenous traditions in the Andes and Brazil, for example. The popular

culture of the Brazilian Northeast would also be an invaluable entry into these alternative images.

The second limitation has to do with the generic aspect of the geographic term "plains." The word only identifies a topographical nuance that is shared in a diversity of biomes throughout Latin America. As a means to analyze the dominant environmental imaginaries, it allows for a broad scope through which to reveal the similarities beyond national literatures. However, as a geographic term it is not sufficiently specific. As I researched each of the regions in the dissertation, I encountered a recurrent biome—the wetlands. Whether it was the Pantanal, the coastal mangroves of Brazil, or the Orinoco basin plains, I always found that the wetlands were a common geographical denominator. These types of biomes are some of the most important and threatened in the world. Moreover, they are often portrayed negatively in popular culture. Focusing solely on the environmental imaginaries of the wetlands would allow me to continue to explore in depth the ways in which the ways humans imagine their environments shapes their knowledge and stance toward them. Canonical literature only offers a very limited sample of the environmental imaginaries of the plains.

This dissertation is in no way exhaustive, for its purpose is to open different lines of research as to the ways in which the plains have been represented in canonical works of literature. Although these have a significant impact on the way readers come to know these varied biomes, they are not the only means of producing ecological knowledge of the land. They are dominant, but not necessarily representative of all the other voices that are often ignored. My aim with this dissertation was to point to the dominant role of canonical literature, suggesting the presence of other images that need further research, such as those of women writers, indigenous

writers, and popular traditions. The more research that focuses on completing the many environmental imaginaries of the plains, the richer our ecological knowledge of those biomes and the better we may understand our role in the Anthropocene.

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