

**Where the Wild Places Grow: A Comparative Case Study
of the American West and the Brazilian Backlands in
Fiction**

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Abstract

This dissertation aims to recognize and systematize some of the most important characteristics of the reproduction of the West and the Sertão in fiction, through a comparison of two significant literary examples of both these countries (United States of America and Brazil). We can consider the main objective of this dissertation to contrast and compare between the most important characteristics inherent to literary use of space and character in our case studies, and, after that, to ascertain the reasons that led, from what appears to be a similar background, to very disparate methods towards the construction of a national identity. Since a compendium pertaining to all the Literature developed in and about those places would be a daunting task, and one that would not fit the restrictions that a Master's dissertation is delimited by, a strict restriction had to be put in place in terms of the works analyzed. The novels were chosen for their importance in the literary canon of their respective countries as well as the pertinence of their topics towards the construction of an identity of the American West and the Brazilian Sertão. To this end we will analyze two authors' works from each of these cultures. To represent the American West, Jack Schaefer's *Shane* and Cormac McCarthy's *Border Trilogy* were chosen while *Vidas Secas*, by Graciliano Ramos, and *Grande Sertão: Veredas*, by João Guimarães Rosa will be used to represent the Brazilian Sertão/Outbacks. All the while using and analyzing as many other authors we might see fit, and which might serve the purpose of having a diversified scope on the matter we are working on, although they will not be the focus of the dissertation and will only be used, if deemed necessary, to further illustrate a topic.

**Onde Nascem os Lugares Selvagem: Um Estudo de Caso Comparativo
Sobre o Uso do Oeste Americano e do Sertão Brasileiro na Ficção
Literária**

João Duarte de Carvalho Rei Manso Pinheiro

Resumo

Esta dissertação propõe-se identificar e sistematizar algumas das mais importantes características da reprodução do Oeste e do Sertão na ficção literária através da comparação de dois importantes exemplos literários de cada um destes países (Estados Unidos da América e Brasil). Podemos considerar, no concreto, o objectivo principal desta dissertação como sendo o contraste e a comparação entre as características mais significativas da utilização do espaço e das personagens nos exemplos que compõem o nosso estudo de caso e, subsequentemente, determinar as razões que possam ter contribuído, daquilo que aparenta ser um fundo em comum e sob a forma de diversos métodos, para a construção de uma identidade nacional. Tendo em conta que um compêndio de toda a literatura desenvolvida sobre estes espaços seria uma tarefa esmagadora, que largamente ultrapassaria os limites estabelecidos para a realização de uma dissertação de mestrado, foi necessário o estabelecimento de limitações no que toca ao número de obras em análise. As obras escolhidas são, portanto, escolhidas pela sua importância no cânone literário dos respectivos países assim como pela pertinência dos temas tratados na construção da identidade do Oeste Americano e do Sertão Brasileiro. A representar o Oeste Americano, *Shane*, de Jack Schaefer, e a *Border Trilogy*, de Cormac McCarthy enquanto *Vidas Secas*, de Graciliano Ramos, e o *Grande Sertão: Veredas*, de João Guimarães Rosa, foram escolhidos para representar o Sertão Brasileiro. Faremos uso de qualquer outra obra ou autor que, com o seu trabalho, ajude a consolidar as perspectivas apresentadas, servindo o propósito de diversificar as fontes e, se necessário, ajudar a ilustrar o tópico em discussão.

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Introduction

Muita coisa recordava ainda o velho Ilhéus de antes. Não o do tempo dos engenhos, das pobres plantações de café, dos senhores nobres, dos negros escravos, da casa ilustre dos Ávilas. Desse passado remoto sobravam apenas vagas lembranças, só mesmo o Doutor se preocupava com ele. Eram os aspectos de um passado recente, do tempo das grandes lutas pela conquista da terra. Depois que os padres jesuítas haviam trazido as primeiras mudas de cacau. Quando os homens, chegados em busca de fortuna, atiraram-se para as matas e disputaram, na boca das repetições e dos parabeluns, a posse de cada palmo de terra. Quando os Badarós, os Oliveiras, os Braz Damásio, os Teodoros das Baraúnas, outros muitos, atravessavam os caminhos, abriam picadas, à frente dos jagunços, nos encontros mortais. Quando as matas foram derrubadas e os pés de cacau plantados sobre cadáveres e sangue. Quando o caxixe reinou, a justiça posta a serviço dos interesses dos conquistadores de terra, quando cada grande árvore escondia um atirador na tocaia, esperando sua vítima. Era esse passado que ainda estava presente em detalhes da vida da cidade e nos hábitos do povo. Desaparecendo aos poucos, cedendo lugar às inovações, a recentes costumes. Mas não sem resistência, sobretudo no que se referia a hábitos, transformados pelo tempo quase em leis. (AMADO 1999, p. 37)

A brave new land. The destitute plunged, in droves, unto the unknown corners of the new world in the 16th century. For the first time in centuries there was a place that was far beyond the ancient, indisputable, claws of the European empires. What had been denied for generations was within grasp of the masses that had daily labored to finance the wars and revelries of their masters, who had lived, died and multiplied on the same small patch of land, ever sowing, ever starved, for a master they never saw, a king they did not know and a nation whom meant nothing to them. Praised be the new land.

Jorge Amado's citation tells us of such a world, which now, in the present, has steadily been on its way to becoming a civilized society, flaunting all the elitisms and comforts of the old continent. He notes, with his usual insight, how the society of economical peace, of robust political institutions, still owed, however, a lot to its past. The society might be new, but the old ways, the rules that enameled the society of the wilderness, continue to inform the practices and ideals of the people of Brazil and those of the United States, even if their reality couldn't be any more different from what they once were. In both cases we experience the conflict between the present and the mythologized past.

It is rather quaint just how many parallels can be drawn between the foundational periods of both the United States of America and Brazil, something which would not, at first sight, be evident. Its settlement/conquest and subsequent process of establishing a

brand new, independent, national identity lends itself to a very interesting subject for exploration, in various economic, political, technological or cultural dimensions.

This dissertation will, however, restrict itself to a much smaller scope. Taking advantage of the historical similitudes in the colonization of these countries, how akin the areas that better represented the conquest of nature are and how that struggle to civilize the wilderness, to tame it, shaped and molded the very fabric of Brazil's and United States' culture, furnishing a brand new society with a foundation myth of their own, our aim will be to explore how alike this phenomenon translates into the realm of literary fiction, resorting, mostly, to the idealized portrayal of the area and its inhabitants rather than its objective historical and geographical reality.

The two objects of our study will be the Brazilian Sertão, in the interior of the Northeastern region of Brazil, and the American West, the wild land that lay beyond the Mississippi River. A comprehensive study of the literature developed around these would require the study of thousands of works by hundreds of authors, cataloguing details into a comprehensive table that would allow to finally, after this insurmountable analysis, reach some conclusions as to the similarities that undoubtedly must exist between them.

Limited in time and space as this dissertation is, it does not allow for such a study, nor would its author, most likely, be in the condition that would allow the development of a work of such proportions. As such we have elected as a topic a comparison of the use of character and place in the literary fiction of the Brazilian Sertão and the American West.

We have selected two distinct works of fiction out of the heritage of both cultures, picking them out for the relevance given in their stories to those places as well as how impactful culturally they were in each country. Our hope is that, through them, we can relay some of their most significant characteristics in what comes to their usage of character and place.

Those works will be significantly different from one another so as to allow a better representation since the narratives developed are decades apart, in disparate circumstances, allowing us to weed out traits that might just have been a passing fancy and are not actually an integral part of the mythological framework.

Thus, as representatives of the American West, we have chosen Jack Schaefer's *Shane*, released in 1949 and whose first film adaptation received widespread attention in the 1950's and which is, to this day, considered as one of the hall-marks of the Western genre, and Cormac McCarthy's *The Border Trilogy*, comprising the books *All the Pretty*

Horses, The Crossing and *Cities of the Plain*, released throughout the 1990's, again receiving significant accolades from American literary critics.

Our choices regarding the Brazilian Sertão fell upon Graciliano Ramos' *Vidas Secas*, from 1938, widely regarded as his most important work and one of the most relevant to come out of the "Romance dos 30", representative of a specific approach, during that decade, to the matters of the Northeast of Brazil and usually considered to be the Brazilian Neo-Realist movement. The other choice is João Guimarães Rosa's *Grande Sertão: Veredas*, released in 1956, frequently taken as a modern epic, for its bold use of experimental language within the very traditional setting of the Sertão.

The dissertation will have a very straightforward arrangement. Split in three separate chapters, the first two dealing specifically with the characteristics of the American West and the Brazilian Sertão, starting by exploring its historical backgrounds and the characteristics at the core of each mythical construction (the proliferation of cattle as an important economic industry in both places is as example of that) and ending by exploring some of the relevant features of character and place that are explored in our case study.

A full exploration of every character and the multiple aspects pertaining to each one as well as negotiating the various iterations that place can present also revealed to be too broad and has forced us to choose a selected number of particularly relevant characteristics inherent to the central figures around which the myths were expanded — the Cowboy in the American West and the Sertanejo in the Brazilian Sertão. We have also made the decision to take space at face value, abstaining from the very rich debate on the matter surrounding the concept of space and decided upon the term place to refer to the physical and natural environment in which the action of the books occurs. We will thus focus on the physical presence of the two places, the fauna, the flora, the geology, the climate, everything that might interact or is exploited in the narratives to a specific end.

The topics that we have chosen to work upon when it comes to characters, each one having a shorter subchapter relating to it, will be a short analysis of their outward appearance; their relationship with fate and respective position in relation to an ever-changing world that surrounds their mythologized personas; their stance regarding Violence; their likeness with the animal wildlife with which they dealt; the capacity to laugh, crack jokes and be merry, matters of humor and, finally, some considerations on the use of place.

The third chapter will be devoted to comparing the end results of the previous chapters, splitting each parameter that we used into subchapters, each one solely focused on the aforementioned topics. Through that comparison we hope to be able to pinpoint the likeness (or the insurmountable differences) that abound in these particular fictional approaches to the American West and the Brazilian Sertão.

It is important to single out just how limited this dissertation is in its scope. There is no pretense, on our part, to developing a definitive work on the subject but, rather, through this exercise, explore the similarities in literary execution of two very rich and standout cultures who are generally taken to have little relationship between them.

Chapter One. The Old American West

I strained my eyes after him, and then in the moonlight I could make out the inalienable outline of his figure receding into the distance. Lost in my loneliness, I watched him go, out of town, far down the road where it curved out to the level country beyond the valley. (...) I was aware only of that dark shape growing small and indistinct along the far reach of the road. A cloud passed over the moon and he merged into the general shadow and I could not see him and the cloud passed on and the road was a plain thin ribbon to the horizon and he was gone. (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 216)¹

We have all seen or read about this man before. We have known him for as long as we remember. It lives in our collective memory, his shadow spread over all cultural channels, from television to comics, and, to a smaller degree, fiction. The lone Cowboy/Gunman, weary of his (often times unwelcomed) adventures, holding out against everyone and the world itself. In defense of his own personal and very distinct sense of morality, riding into the sunset. He leaves much the same way as he enters — in pondered solitude.

In the quote, Shane, the main focus of the homonymous book by Jack Schaefer, finally abandons the gratifying dullness of a regular working job as a farm laborer, one in which he has indulged in for over a year. He does so just as soon as the antagonist that haunted the town's ranchers is defeated — by none other than himself. He came from the fog that was the American West, devoid of a past, a family or somewhere/something to call home, and he returns to it just as soon as he has served his purpose and we are left to imagine that as well as a past, he lacks a future.

This image has been laboriously constructed over decades in the United States of America. Each book, each movie, each comic, slowly adding and shaping the imaginary conception of what the Cowboy was, and, by extension, what was the old American West.

The worldwide famous comic book cowboy Lucky Luke (created by the Belgian Cartoonist Morris in 1946) always sings the same catchphrase at the end of one of his adventures, "I'm a poor lonesome Cowboy and a long way from home". We could easily

¹ As mentioned Schaefer's novel was published in 1949. In this dissertation, all references will be from this edition.

imagine that Shane would himself be humming that very same song while taking his definite leave towards the Western wilderness.

Similar iterations of this very specific commonplace can be found in the imagined West of John Wayne's and John Ford's cinematic exploits. Perhaps no other scene but the iconic finale of the 1956 movie *The Searchers* exemplifies it better. Wayne, having delivered the girl to her family after a laborious rescue from a Native American tribe (and from the girl herself), walks alone into the vast barren landscape, ignored by the now rejoicing reunited family. The viewer is taken inside the house and made to watch as the lone cowboy silently walks off from that place, ignored by all. The door slams shut, separating audience and characters alike from that man. We can but stand in respect of his actions while still being somewhat troubled by the inherent wildness of his ways, he has been shown to be no ordinary man, reminding Frederick Jackson Turner's words:

That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance which comes with freedom - these are traits of the frontier. (2007, pp. 73-74)

It is not a coincidence that different cultural media shared a similar idea when illustrating their characters' personality. By the time these works were in broad circulation (their audiences far extended the millions) during the 1950's, what is called the Frontier Myth was already an encoded and well-oiled media machine, serving an audience desperate in the search for its own identity. The cliché of the cowboy's lonesome walk into the sunset was one of such constructions, an archetype of the Old West narrative.

Over time, through frequent retellings and deployments as a source of interpretive metaphors, the original mythic story is increasingly conventionalized and abstracted until it is reduced to a deeply encoded and resonant set of symbols, "icons", "keywords", or historical clichés. In this form the Myth becomes a basic constituent of linguistic meaning and of the processes of both personal and social "remembering. (SLOTKIN 1992, p. 5)

The reality of the Old West, however, is a whole different matter. When dealing with this subject we must be clear about what we are talking about: the historical facts dealing with that period of the late 1800's; and the subsequent mythical construction that developed

during and after that period, leaving such a deep imprint in popular American culture. “The frontier story has always been reformulated to fit the realities of our history, providing us with a national myth not only to "match our mountains" but to match the needs and aspirations of a new century.” (HINE and FARAGHER 2000, p. 225)

The first aim of this chapter will be to point out the general characteristics of the Myth of the West and, especially, the historical conditions that informed the development of the Old West Myth in the United States culture.

Further shorter subchapters will be dedicated to complementing that information. One seeking to identify a time and a place for the imagined Old West, another summarily explaining the development of Western stories in cultural media. Having contextualized the Myth of the Old West in its historical and physical qualities, another subchapter will be solely focused on examining its use in literary fiction through the lens of two important Western works of the 20th century. The spatial constraints of this thesis forces us to attempt a serious analysis of no more than those few examples, at the risk of seriously stretching the limitations of this dissertation.

That subchapter will focus on two particular aspects of our analysis of the American depiction of the West in fiction: the Character, who experiences and attributes human emotions and qualities to what surrounds him, of both a social or natural quality, and the physical space, in which the action takes place.

1.1. A Material and Historical Basis for the Mythic Construction of the West

Myths are stories drawn from a society's history that have acquired through persistent usage the power of symbolizing that society's ideology and of dramatizing its moral consciousness – With all the complexities and contradictions that consciousness may contain. (SLOTKIN 1992, p. 5)

There is not, at least not in the context of the Old American West, a central story out of which numerous aspects of this myth developed. It is a construction, an amalgamation of dozens of snippets of exaggeration and hyperbole, laboriously welded together over the course of at least two centuries and encompassing various generations.

Overall, it is the offspring of the enormous demand on the part of American society for a foundational story, one which could unite the entirety of this massive new nation and materialize the principles in which it was (supposedly) forged on.

The Frontier Myth supplies such a story to the USA. They are given a history, a strong set of morals and most importantly, a role-model, in the figure of the cowboy/gunman, an enhanced version of the frontiersman, whom he will replace as the frontier slowly gave way to the Old West myth. The cowboy holds, in his personality, all the characteristics that every individual ought to display. Being brave, unwilling to surrender his opinions and way of life to any pressure from groups or society, an individual in all its mythical grandeur.

In a period where the strength of the government subjugated the smaller centers of local political power in the United States of America (particularly after the American Civil War) and saw the industrial advancements of that age quickly replacing and overcoming the crumbling, centuries-old production systems (and in doing so fundamentally changing the modes of production and shaping the landscape itself), as the barbed wire slashed through the open country to divide it once and for all, some relief had to be found somewhere. That need for alienation came by means of the Myth:

(...) [Myth] also carries with it a promise of another mode of existence entirely, a possible way of being just beyond the present time and place. It is not only foundational (as in fertility and creation narratives), but also liberating (as in deliverance and in many heroic and literary narratives). (STERNE 2008, p. 9)

The process that would develop the Frontier Myth (and the Myth of the Old West) spans almost the entirety of the 19th century. As technology developed and opened the doors to increasingly powerful cultural industries (soon to include a wide international audience), the myth went on to dominate a considerable portion of 20th century cultural products. All forms of popular expression, despite being commonly identified as being high-culture, such as painting, or low-culture, such as performative arts, strengthened the stem from which the Myth flourished.

We can track its first iterations right from the start of the American process of ‘discovery’ of the West, “All the major exploring and surveying expeditions mounted by the federal government included artists assigned to record and document the land, animals, and peoples of the West” (HINE and FARAGHER 2000, p. 194). Paradoxically,

the thrust to accurately document the West also kick-started the process of imagining this unexplored land of opportunity that lay beyond the already occupied space, since some of those who went West were “artists who proved willing to bend what they saw to fit what they wanted” (HINE and FARAGHER 2000, p. 194). Thus, all that those who lived east of the Mississippi river had as a basis for their collective imagining of the unexplored West, were these distorted images. Alongside these, some other mediums of information, who had an even more significant impact on the Easterners, started to appear: the narratives about the man of the frontier.

Figures like David Crockett, which had “(...) the persona of a backwoods bumpkin who consistently bested his highborn opponents by using native wit and wisdom” (HINE/FARAGHER 2000, p. 65), or Mike Fink who “(...) may have been the original braggart” and who “(...) among a company of scoundrels, might have been the worst” (HINE/FARAGHER 2000, p. 58) began to gather widespread attention during the 1820’s for their anti-hero populist approach to the world. They would fight whomever they wanted and delve head-on into the wilderness without displaying an inkling of fear. Soon they began to be considered folk-heroes, with a multiplicity of fake or exaggerated stories on their belts.

Another type of Frontier character that developed even earlier than that period is best personified in Daniel Boone. Lacking the rowdy nature of Crockett, Boone appears to have been unable to keep himself from pushing further and further West. He was “(...) a man most at home in the wilderness, a world he understands and loves as the Indians do” (HINE and FARAGHER 2000, p. 191). John Filson, author of the 1783 narrative, *The Adventures of Col. Daniel Boone*, portrays a character perpetually moving in and out of the wilderness, appearing to be altogether oblivious to the suffering, the deaths, and the fierce combat that permeated each of his multiple forays. The story is mostly fictionalized. As rugged and tough a character as he was, he himself confided to never having killed any Native Americans, going as far as acknowledging that they were probably far kinder to him than his own kinsmen, something he could avow for he spent a considerable amount of time in their captivity. (HINE and FARAGHER 2000, p. 191)

These early mythical figures are going to subsequently inform the nature and position of the most important character in the Western genre, the Cowboy/Gunman, in essence, a mesh between these two somewhat different sets of frontier characters. Thus, during the 1820’s and onwards, there is a noticeable surge of stories fictionalizing the lives of the man beyond the Mississippi. James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of the*

Mohicans, published in 1826, grounds its plot in one of the adventures of Daniel Boone (the rescue of his daughters from their Native American captors), while David Crockett published his own autobiography — *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett, Written by Himself*— in 1834 and continued to have stories published about him well beyond his assumed death at the Battle of the Alamo in 1836. In spite of his deceased status, new stories would frequently pop up, having Crockett at the helm.

The Frontier romances of James Fennimore Cooper, published between 1832 and 1850, codified and systematized the representations of the Frontier that had developed haphazardly since 1700 in such diverse genres as the personal narrative, the history, the sermon, the newspaper item, the street ballad and the “penny-dreadful” (SLOTKIN 1992, p. 15)

The imagining of the man of the Frontier would, with the coming of the age of the cowboy, mesh the nature of the frontiersman and the gunman. They share many physical and mental traits; the humor, the courage, the desire for individual freedom; being excellent shots and formidable riders, and so on: “After an initial phase in which the still living hero provided genuine material for the legend to go with the “stretchers,” both Boone and Crockett became completely the creatures of fiction makers.” (SLOTKIN 1994, p. 180).

The discrepancies of Davy Crockett’s portrayal by the actor and director John Wayne in the 1960’s movie *The Alamo* and that of any other cowboy in Western movies of the 1950’s/60’s, many also portrayed by Wayne, are negligible. Crockett (Wayne) and his pack of Tennesseans are mostly distinguishable only in their wild Frontier fashion, blasting colorful, hairy, clothing. A dead raccoon takes the role of the beige cowboy hat in Crockett’s head, establishing conclusively in the eyes of the spectator that there, in that figure, was the representation of another era, of a supposedly different kind of man. In the end, the differences are purely cosmetic. He was still “a hero too much the man of the wilderness to blend his nature with that of civilization’s highest type” (SLOTKIN 1994, p. 163) mimicking the Cowboy’s overall reaction to city-folk.

They inhabited, and upheld, the ideals of the open country. Every man ought to do as he deemed right for himself; work on his ranch, drink and dance whenever he felt like, and ride all across that vast extension of a seemingly never-ending land. An idea that has become crystalized in North-American culture, consecrated in the ‘American Way of

Life' slogan, which, nonetheless, never really had any bearing in the material conditions of life in America. Wayne's Crockett pushes that idea shortly after his character appears in the movie:

Republic – I like the sound of the word. Republic means people can live free – talk free, go, come, buy or sell, be drunk or sober, however they choose. Some words give you a feeling – republic is one of those words that make me tight in the throat. Same tightness a man gets when his baby takes his first step, then when he shaves and then makes his first sound as a man. Some words can give you a feeling that makes your heart warm. Republic is one of those words. (WAYNE 1960, 0:30:00)

For the most part, from the start of Texas Revolution to the end of the great cattle drives, the Old West Myth occupies a similar place in the popular cultural imagining of the United States to the one occupied by the myth of the conquest of the Frontier. A blurred period, for one, which does not appear to have any frontiers delimitating it. Even if we would differentiate between these two myths (and we have already mentioned some specific differences dealing primarily with its main representative), they have for the most part merged together in the popular imagining of the 20th and 21st centuries.

The age of the Cowboy/Gunman started well before the first cattle drives, when the USA was beginning its process of internalizing the first Western States and Territories, a long and arduous process which established the boundaries of each territory and elected judicial representatives of the central government in a vast array of areas.

From 1845, with the annexation of Texas, to 1861, the United States complemented its expansion with the integration of California, Iowa, Oregon and Kansas territories as well as the Oregon territory, ceded by the British crown after a treaty in 1846. The country grew exponentially, coming close to finally establishing its final frontiers to the North and South: “With the acquisition of Oregon, Texas, California, and the new Southwest, the United States became a transcontinental nation. The unorganized territory of the trans-Mississippi West constituted 49 percent of the country's land” (HINE and FARAGHER 2000, p. 87).

The four years that comprised the American Civil War (1861-1865) halted the natural course of the country, fundamentally altering the power dynamics in the United States and giving birth to one of the most important developments in Western American

history. It not only drastically shaped it, in its material qualities, but transformed also our imagined perception of it.

The political war between anti-slavery republicans of the North and pro-slavery democrats of the South consecrated, as one of its by-products, a new frontier, one that had laid mostly abandoned from the Mississippi River to the new Californian lands.

In the 1850s, with the development of the railroad, came pressure for the settlement of the Great Plains, stimulated by the Kansas competition between the slave and the free states, and by propaganda of railroads interested in disposing of Great Plains land grants for operating capital. Interrupted by the Civil War, the development of this "internal" Frontier - this area bracketed by the former Frontiers of the Mississippi and California - lasted from 1854 to the 1880s, by which time much of the land was settled or in productive use for mining and grazing. (SLOTKIN 1994, p. 38)

“In order to win a national election, the Republicans, an antislavery party of northern interests, needed western support.” (HINE and FARAGHER 2000, p. 89). When the West voted massively for the Republican candidate, Abraham Lincoln, “The payoff came when Congress, purged of southern representation, enacted two of the West's most cherished political goals - a Homestead Act providing free land for settlers and a Pacific Railroad Bill to sew together the distant allies with steel.” (HINE and FARAGHER 2000, p. 90).

To delve too far deep into the events of the American Civil War, its causes, its struggles, would be a matter too big to even assume we could deal with it in what is essentially an introductory subchapter. The generalized consensus on the reasons that led the Southern States to secede from the Union and establishing the Confederacy are overall considered to have been: “The right to own slaves; the liberty to take this property into the territories; freedom from the coercive powers of a centralized government.” (McPHERSON 1988, p. 241)

It is equally important to notice that the march towards secession was not met with equal support on the population as a whole, either northerner or southerner, since “the partial correlation of cooperationism with low slaveholding caused concern among secessionists” (McPHERSON 1988, p. 242). The internal conflict that was raging in the Southern States (as to be expected, won by the stronger landowning and slaveholding elite) can be equally found in the midst of Northern Unionist states. Many representations of Old West characters either fought for, or against, the Confederacy, each holding

strongly disparate and contrasting reasons to justify their participation in either side. Famous examples can be found in movies such as *The Outlaw Josey Wales* (1976) or *Fort Apache* (1948).

Having in mind the focus of this work, the Old American West Myth, it is more significant to understand the aftermath of the American Civil War and how it informed the nation's identity going forward. The age of the Cowboy/Gunman, in all its glory, was at hand.

The Homestead Act (1862) and the Transnational Railway, two fundamental outcomes of the American Civil War, have already been mentioned. Both went on to significantly alter the West, but there are two other essential aspects which directly concern the Western Myth: the Great Cattle Drives, starting in 1866, and the ushering of the age of the Gunman: "During the Civil War hundreds of thousands of these weapons (Colt Handguns) were issued to troops, and the West was soon flooded with firearms of every type and description, from tiny pocket derringers to .50-caliber buffalo guns." (HINE and FARAGHER 2000, p. 90).

The first two of those outcomes, the Homestead Act of 1862 and the Transnational Railway, created the necessary material conditions for the Western Myth to develop. It populated the wilderness with an immense influx of people, from different backgrounds. Starting "From 1865 to 1890, the white population in the trans-Mississippi west increased some 400 percent to 8,628,000—a figure that includes both native-born and white immigrants" (McPHERSON 2008, p. 539). As well as having supplied the mythical narrative with a much needed 'discovery' background, a newfoundland, free, as of yet, of the corrupting interferences of the centralized government and social institutions. John Wayne delivering Davy Crockett's speech fits perfectly with this post-war period.

The end result of the Homestead Act was the massive repartition and occupation of Western lands. Ultimately, the United States government surrendered more than 115 million hectares of vacant land to anyone who could, and was willing, to work it:

Both men and unmarried women were eligible to file for up to 160 acres of surveyed land in the public domain, as long as they were over the age of 21 (...) Immigrants who affirmed their intention to become citizens were also eligible. As long as homesteaders lived on the land for five years, not only cultivating it but also "improving" it by building a house or barn, they could receive full title for a fee of only \$10. (McPHERSON 2008, p. 540)

The Transcontinental Railroad, whose construction started in the midst of the Civil War, 1863, and finished in 1869, effectively connected the Atlantic to the Pacific, opening important trade-routes for the Western states to start accumulating and moving capital, ushering in large-scale investors and effectively changing the relationship both new and older settlers had with the land and its resources. The value it added to the region and to the Western Myth can be seen in the 1968 Spaghetti Western *Once Upon a Time in the West*.

Together the railroads formed a lever that in less than a generation turned western North America on its axis (...) Railroads poured non-indigenous settlers into a vast region that nation-states had earlier merely claimed.(...) Having promoted new settlement, they helped integrate these settlers into an expanding world economy so that wheat, silver, gold, timber, coal, corn and livestock poured out of it. (WHITE 2011, p. 22)

The establishment of new modes of production showed the obvious contradictions of these two apparently benign measures (Homestead Act and the Railroads). The first would apparently consecrate that “Free land in the West would help prevent a system of perpetual wage labor, or ‘wage slavery,’ by allowing individual farmers to support themselves. Thus free land would ultimately help preserve American values of democratic individualism.” (McPHERSON 2008, p. 540) The steady arrival of massive bulky businesses — cattle being the most fitting example in this context — guaranteed that “Many ended up working for livestock companies, sometimes caring for herds they had once owned themselves. Eventually others ended up as miners, forced to become wage laborers.” (McPHERSON 2008, p. 543)

The social conflicts triggered by these two antagonistic forces, small individuals and the vast collective consortiums, is a major plotline in *Shane*. A number of individuals move West to work on their own plot of land while major business attempts to monopolize the whole territory, taking over from the homesteaders for their own economic benefit, through ‘mass production’ of cattle.

The same conditions that presented the West with the possibility of truly enacting its Myth would eventually, and in ever growing momentum, consume them. The unceasing rhythm of mass production in existence in the East was no match to the calm, collected, patient stare of the Cowboy. It demanded disproportionate quantities of product and, inevitably, consumed unending stretches of land to achieve its supremacy.

After a series of skirmishes between farmers and cattle owners and a number of episodes where thousands heads of cattle wreaked havoc through a significant amount of towns, the consequences were that “farmers grew increasingly aggressive, using barbed wire, patented in 1874, not only to protect their fields but also to block trails and fence off watering holes.” (HINE and FARAGHER 2000, p. 130)

The cattle drives that brought seemingly endless quantities of profit to the West, and supplied a demand for as many cowboys as could come, proceeded to create the conditions to the fencing of the entirety of open country, which had been, from the start, one of the hallmarks of the myth. The final blow did not come, however, from barbed wire. When a very strict winter killed off most of the herds, those cattlemen who had not left the business altogether, were made “(...) aware of just how precarious their business was. Eastern and foreign investors bailed out, cutting their losses. Some ranchers moved toward smaller, fenced spreads on which they could confine their cattle” (HINE and FARAGHER 2000, p. 130).

The age of the gunman greatly outlasted that of the cowboy, quickly ousted and locked away in perpetual languish in the real, and forgotten, West. “In spring 1866, cowboys hit the trail with 260,000 cattle in the first of the great drives.” (McPHERSON 2008, p. 545) It wasn’t long before “the days of the western open range came to an end, just twenty-five years after the first trail drives to Abilene” (HINE and FARAGHER 2000, p. 132).

All these aspects of the settlement of the West, involved violence. Violence is ever present over most periods of American history, permeating over the majority of the United States cultural products. The Cowboy/Gunman, the Gangster, the Pioneer, the Military Man and the multiplicity of Superheroes are figures easily identifiable by anyone who has attended mainstream cinema parlors regularly since the middle of the 20th century. All of them wield ungodly physical, or supernatural, powers. No one matches them, be it the police or the military, the Amerindian, the British, the Soviets or any kind of Alien entity. Violence is unavoidably present in most examples of visual media, film or TV series. The mainstream cultural production, those who help construct cultural identity, thrive in it.

It would be impossible to argue that any nation, of all continents and historical periods, has not had violence as one of its founding practices. Either to secure its borders, to assert its superiority against rival societies, tribes, religious rites. Violence was not an

invention of the USA; it has long been a staple of human practice, the very bedrock of all cultures and nationalities.

However, it is safe to call the United States a militarized nation. Minor or major, there is only a small period in its history where it has not either taken military action against other countries, or actively participated in external social and political conflicts, all around the world. The percentage of firearms owners² vastly exceeds that of any other society (almost 50% of the overall number of privately owned weapons in the world) as well as leading the charts when it comes to violent murders, compared to other first world countries.³

Handguns had been used in military conflicts over the 17th and 18th centuries and in hunting sports, for those who could afford them. The emergence of the Colt Revolver⁴ allowed for its mass production (built in interchangeable parts); successive shots could be taken without needing to reload, and, above all else, it was economically viable to the large majority of the American population. Scarcely twenty-five years after its introduction the West was invaded with firearms, as already mentioned.

We have established how the Transcontinental Railroad and the 1862 Homestead Act helped to settle and modernize the vast landscape that comprises most of the West space. How the cattle drives created an immense demand for all those who could run thousands heads of cattle through an inhospitable country on horseback. How those who used the Colt Revolver, and its subsequent iterations, did it as any other worker brandishes an axe or a hammer. How all that tremendous space was, indeed, home to untold opportunities to work, develop and accumulate vast amounts of profit. These are the summarized historical circumstances. Still, as Slotkin argues:

What is distinctively “American” is not necessarily the amount or kind of violence that characterizes our history but the mythic significance we have assigned to the kinds of violence we have actually experienced, the forms of symbolic violence we imagine or invent and the political uses to which we put that symbolism. (1992, p. 13)

² <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/10/03/americas/us-gun-statistics/index.html> - Accessed on the 22nd of June 2019

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_intentional_homicide_rate - Accessed on the 21st of June 201

⁴ “In 1836 Samuel Colt had patented the first modern revolver, an inexpensive weapon that had no utility as a hunting piece but was designed solely for violent human confrontations.” (HINE/FARAGHER 2000, p. 90)

This is the overall and rather generalized picture that the myth of the Old West aims to reproduce. It cannot, however, be considered to be the actual reality of the development of the West in the later part of the 19th century, which it glorifies. It is the narrative at the conjunction of those elements, which enables its weaving. Using only as much actual facts as it needs for it to be feasible, ignoring most of what could put that account into question.

Before delving into the characteristics of the Old West myth — what it imagines, what it aims to represent and what it actual represents in its cultural realization — it would serve us well to, first, quickly demystify all those quick components of the West we previously alluded to (The Homestead Act, the Transcontinental Railroad, the Cattle Drives and the omnipresence of the Revolver), and secondly, to have a factual understanding of what physically constitutes the space which we call The West.

1.2. A Time and a Space for the Old West

Despite the thousands of "high-noon" walkdowns of movie and television Westerns, cattle town newspapers made almost no mention of gun duels fought in dusty streets. Few wranglers went looking for trouble, and in fact few were even proficient with their six-shooters. Most gunshot wounds, it turns out, were accidental. Men shot themselves while working, while removing their guns from wagons or packs, and even while undressing. (HINE and FARAGHER 2000, p. 125).

The historical realities of a certain period are rarely in tune with the glorifications future generations wish to bestow unto them. The Middle Ages, for instance, of Arthurian renown, ripe with its chivalrous knights and unspoiled maidens is as truthful as Monty Python's over the top re-imagining of that epoch. Peasants hoarding vast amounts of mud and bringing out the dead in vast quantities, is still, despite its humorous ambitions, more in tune with the narrative of the never-ending darkness that supposedly thrived in Europe for almost 1000 years.

As accurate a view as we can get of the past tends to be found in the center of those, either damning or inflammatory, perspectives. Be that as it may, the Middle Ages were a "(...) period of exceptional creativity and laid the foundations of the development of Western Civilization." (LE GOFF 1992, p. viii) And so was the American West.

A definitive timeframe for the West, taking into account its imagined status, is impossible to establish with any degree of accuracy. Given the importance conferred onto the American Civil War, a good starting point would be somewhere before its start, in 1861. The Texas Revolution and The Alamo, as well as the Mexican-American War (1840's), all have a claim to belong to the Old American West imagery. This forces us to acknowledge that the period between 1835 and 1861 was a sort of prelude, contaminating by the Old West myth, since "He (the Cowboy) was, in fact, the offspring of a history of frontier mixing and mingling as old as the European invasion of the Americas itself." (HINE and FARAGHER 2000, p. 121).

It is perhaps easier to place a (symbolic) end to it. The prospection of crude oil in the West, particularly in Texas would permanently alter the landscape and the people's relationship to it by the beginning of the 20th century. Without a need for great cattle drives, as well as the plummeting prices in the beef market, the age of the cowboy was, by that time, effectively over. The chances of putting that dream, as imagined in the myth, into practice, were mostly gone. Nevertheless, as Hine and Faragher argue: "Yet despite the end of the big trail drives, cowboying continued on countless ranches throughout the West, and more than a century later, the Great Plains states remain the largest producers of beef in the nation." (2000, p. 121).

The same problem arises when attempting to enumerate which areas actually encompass the Old American West. An objective perspective would feel the need to include California or Washington among them, as they are to the West of the Mississippi River. Another perspective might be more inclined to consider Texas a Southern nation (it did secede from the Union in 1861) rather than a Western one, even though the production of cattle could be considered a Texan enterprise, since "the cattle kingdom had expanded until it stretched high, wide, and handsome from Texas north to the Canadian prairies." (HINE and FARAGHER 2000, p. 121)

The simplest search query, on the world's most used search engine (Google), using the name of any of the states beyond the Mississippi with the added term 'Old West', will result in thousands of touristic advertisements, all claiming to truthfully embody the spirit of the Old West. Using Washington state as an example, and taking only the first page of results into account, we are flooded with exclamatory sentences

such as: “Take a step back into the Old West.”⁵, “An Afternoon in the Old West!”⁶, “Washington's Wild West: Exploring Towns & Sites That Provide a Gateway to the Past”⁷.

In the end, there is no actual frontier of which to talk about. The commodification of the Western ideal required it to be a diffuse product, available for all to exploit emotionally and, eventually, commercialize. Something which could hold in itself the true grit of the American ideal, which could speak true to all Americans: “The Wests captured in paint, poem, and photograph (again, with particular reference to the nineteenth century) is synthetic.” (DEVERELL 1996, p. 37).

There is another way through which we can get a relatively generalized idea of which States constituted the Old American West. Through the gathering of physical and historical information from the narratives about the Old West, even when space does not appear to play a crucial role in them, we can retrieve a good amount of very significant information.

The landscape itself is one of the most popularized aspects of the Old Western myth. Monument Valley, a cluster of sandstone buttes of the Colorado Plateau, became a part of Old West imagery after appearing in a number of Hollywood Western films (such as *Stagecoach*, or *Once Upon a Time in the West*). The tumbleweed, a plant that, once dried out, rolls through the desert at the fancies of the wind, is commonly used to symbolize a solitary place, long forsaken to the desert by a society who had no use for such natural hardness. And we could add the sagebrush or the cactus, if the Western landscape in mind is the desert one.

Socially committed writers, like John Steinbeck, more thoroughly laid bare the violence enacted by the space itself, in his 1939 well-known novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*: “The surface of the earth crusted, a thin hard crust, and as the sky became pale, so the earth became pale, pink in the red country and white in the gray country” (STEINBECK 2014, p. 1). This was barely ever a part of the Cowboy’s narrative.

The Great Plains encompass the entirety of the States of Kansas, Nebraska and the Dakotas as well as significant parts of Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas and Wyoming. This portion of the Midwest is, perhaps, one that most accurately

⁵ <http://winthropwashington.com>, Accessed on the 24th of June, 2019

⁶ <https://www.travelyesplease.com/travel-blog-winthrop-washington/>, Accessed on the 24th of June, 2019

⁷ <https://www.10best.com/interests/explore/washingtons-wild-west-exploring-towns-sites-that-provide-a-gateway-to-the-past/>, Accessed on the 24th of June, 2019

matches the collective imagining of the space of the West. The most important historical developments in the history of the West, the cattle drives and the Homestead Act, were particularly significant to that specific area. Finally, as Walter Prescott Webb argues:

A plains environment such as that found in the western United States presents three distinguishing characteristics: 1 – It exhibits a comparatively level surface of great extent. 2 – it is a treeless land, and unforested area. 3 – It is a region where rainfall is insufficient for the ordinary intensive agriculture common to lands of a humid climate. The climate is sub-humid. (1959, p. 3)

The relationship between man and the natural space surrounding him, even if mostly ignored or undervalued in the Old West Myth, was of central importance in the transformation of cultural aspects in the area, forcing the throng of settlers that came pouring from the East of the United States to seriously and permanently transform their habits: “If the Great Plains forced man to make radical changes, sweeping innovations in his ways of living, the cause lies almost wholly in the physical aspect of the Land” (WEBB 1959, p. 10).

We have thus attempted to establish a framework for the period of the Old West. Lacking, as it may, any concrete answers towards a definitive conclusion over the timeframe under scrutiny, it allows us, however, to come to terms with two important aspects of this myth. Firstly, that the history of the American West is already, in the light of the 21st century, inescapably interweaved with the mythic imagery and morality, which the cowboy embodies, and thus confirming that, “Less comforting, and far less absolute, is the realization that history is frighteningly malleable if it can be run down, gathered up, packaged, and sold. Interpretation alters how the present views the past by virtually changing that past.” (DEVERELL 1996, p. 35).

Secondly, that despite its preponderantly imagined condition, the Myth, as it stands in the North American culture, holds a significant importance, whose symbols still resonate in the country’s population. On an aptly named exhibition titled ‘Made in America’, on July 2017⁸, the current United States President Donald Trump, picked up a

⁸ This week-long event was hosted in the White House and showcased products manufactured in all of the American States. In a speech made on the 17th of July 2017, Donald Trump proclaimed that day to be Made in America Day, to celebrate and support American manufacturers <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/president-donald-j-trump-proclaims-july-17-2017-made-america-day-week-july-16-july-22-made-america-week/> Accessed on the 16th of June, 2020

white cowboy hat and slowly, bidding his time, put it on his head. The crowd in attendance went from dead silent to ecstatic as soon as the hat was set. Trump is just the last in a long list of presidents that used the cowboy hat symbolism effectively, thus confirming that “Myth expresses ideology in a narrative, rather than discursive or argumentative, structure. Its language is metaphorical and suggestive rather than logical and analytical.” (SLOTKIN 1992, p. 6). From Theodore Roosevelt to Bush senior and Bush junior, from Ronald Reagan to John F. Kennedy and Barack Obama⁹, the enormous symbolic power of the cowboy is undeniable.

1.3. An Abridged Account of the Cultural Representation of the Old West

(...) we will discover that ‘mythology’ – the body of inherited myths in any culture – is an important element of literature, and that literature is a means of extending mythology. That is, literary works may be regarded as ‘mythopoeic’, tending to create or re-create certain narratives which human beings take to be crucial to their understanding of their world. Thus cultural and literary criticism may involve ‘mythography’, or the interpretation of myth, given that the mythic is an important dimension of cultural and literary experience. (STERNE 2008, p. 4)

Representations of the West in Popular Culture were being produced almost concurrently to the actual events they were depicting. The resources available to sell these stories were growing ever more accessible since there was rise in literacy among the young as well as an overall proximity that bound the nation through the Transcontinental railway. Among the successful examples of the commercial use of the Western imagery, Buffalo Bill has an important role:

"Buffalo Bill" Cody was the man who turned that myth into America's most bankable commercial entertainment. (...) He went on the stage playing himself and organized a troupe of cowboy and Indian actors who reenacted actual events in western history. In

⁹ See and article on this subject: <https://www.dallasnews.com/life/texana/2017/07/18/wore-best-cowboy-hat-photo-ops-presidential-tradition>, Accessed on the 25th of June, 2019

1882 Cody organized the greatest of his shows, "Buffalo Bill's Wild West," which toured America and the world for the next three decades. (HINE and FARAGHER 2000, p. 200).

America's own vaudevillian (or pantomime) variety show is the most famous and, perhaps, the most emblematic example of a crossover from the 'real' West. Cody was a man born in the frontier, who had, just like any other man, rushed to Colorado seeking a chance to make his fortune; a man who had tracked in some military campaigns against Native Americans; who had helped the construction of the railway through the hunting of nothing less than the mighty Western Buffalo itself; that very same man jumped out of the Great Plains directly into the mythical process, an agent of propaganda about his own life, jumbling the historical, personal and mythical lines of the West into a single, tangled knot.

Buffalo Bill is even more important to us, in this context, because of the way he achieved his fame. His first appearance in the 1869 dime-novel, *Buffalo Bill, King of the Bordermen*, written by Ned Buntline, exemplifies not only the status of his figure but also the importance of that cultural medium, which had developed after the American Civil War, becoming popular not only among the younger generations, but American society in general. Thus, it is not surprising that "Before Cody's death in 1917, he had been the subject of no fewer than fifteen hundred dime novels." (HINE and FARAGHER 2000, p. 200) His exploits, which were actually somewhat out of the norm, were consistently blown out of proportion, as well as having, in those narratives, a brand new moral conduct created for him, and, inevitably, for the "exceptional" Man of the West in general.

Dime novels, relatively small, mass-produced adventure stories, would significantly help to establish, during the second half of the 19th century, the symbols of the Wild West — the idea of it as Wild being one of them —, and it is not a surprise that "More than two-thirds of the 3,158 titles published between 1860 and 1898 were set in the West" (HINE and FARAGHER 2000, p. 193).

American cinema would build on the foundations set by the dime novels, effectively substituting them as the new mainstream media, and assuming the central role on the development of the Western mythic narrative and body of symbols. It was the perfect cultural industry for the United States; the same movie could be screened numerous times a day, consistently refreshing their audience (seeing as illiteracy was not a restriction for its consumption) any number of times a week. The discovery that they could be produced on a massive scale while also being consumed in mass proportions,

like never before seen in a cultural product, launched a veritable rush for its economic control. By the end of the 1920's, the film industry was already the 10th biggest in the United States, a situation which continued through the Great Depression.¹⁰

The stories were box-office successes at the same time as they informed the American audience (and even a part of the European) on the set of values they should adhere to, what they should uphold as their innermost beliefs and how to act on the face of certain injustices:

(...) movies began to project a moral sense and a set of American values which the audience should aspire to. In this way then, although films were silent, there was no doubt that they had the capacity to preach, and the films of this era did acquire a decided moral tone and didactic purpose. (McVEIGH 2007, p. 64).

The cowboy became a staple of American cinema, one of its most valued assets, even when the Western genre would, for a period of time, fall into a generalized disuse. Unsurprisingly, on such periods when the Western was overlooked by the American film industry, the hero celebrated in the films would still fit in with much of the characteristics attributable to the West, independently of the hero being the Depression era gangster or the World War soldier.

On the surface the ethically constant cowboy is at the opposite end of the moral spectrum from the criminality of the gangster. And yet, the gangster is in many ways connected to the Western hero, containing elements of individualism, violence, outlawry, masculinity and similar codes of dress and generic patterns in form and narrative. (McVEIGH 2007, p. 69)

The production of Westerns constitutes, to this day, one of central products of the American film industry. Just this last decade (2010's) we have seen numerous renowned directors successfully direct the genre, such as Quentin Tarantino's *The Hateful Eight* (2015), Joel and Ethan Coen's *True Grit* (2010) and *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* (2018), Kelly Reichardt's *Meek's Cutoff* (2010) and Alejandro Iñárritu's tale of the frontier, *The Revenant* (2015).

¹⁰ <http://eh.net/encyclopedia/the-economic-history-of-the-international-film-industry/> - Accessed on the 28th of June, 2019

Opening the frontiers of such a list to the entirety of the 20th century would take considerable time and effort to conclude satisfactorily. John Ford's *Fort Apache* (1948), *The Searchers* (1956) and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Vallance* (1962) or Sergio Leone's *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* (1966) and *Once Upon a Time in The West* (1968), and such films as Nicholas Ray's *Johnny Guitar* (1954) and Fred Zinnemann's *High Noon* (1952) are just some of the many fundamental movies in the history of cinema, full-fledged Westerns, this list but scratching the surface of the whole corpus of the Western movie genre.

Such is not the panorama when talking about Western literary fiction. The works that are recognized for their overall contribution to the development of Western literature are fewer and far between. The ones developed in the later part of the 20th century even more concerned with the deconstruction of the myth and its characters than upholding the semi-divine moral build of the cowboy.

To avoid a lengthy discussion on just what might constitute a Western literary work of fiction, we will confine our interest to those works, no matter how different or far apart, that are culturally accepted as Westerns. In the end our conclusion would be the same as when we attempted to find a time and a place to the Old West in history: "Western literature, then, is as slippery a term as it is elastic" (McVEIGH 2007, p. 39)

But what of the totality of works centered on the Western myth? The larger part of those in circulation were Pulp stories, "weekly or monthly magazines printed on cheap paper made of wood pulp" (HINE and FARAGHER 2000, p. 202), effectively substituting the dime novels in their role of conveying the Western ideal and myth to a widespread audience. "Pulp magazines had a different format from dime novels - they carried a miscellany of shorter fiction and additional features like poems, information, columns and advertisements but they dealt in the same kind of fiction." (BOLD 1983, p. 44)

Christine Bold and Stephen McVeigh express the view about the legitimacy of Pulp as another format of literary fiction. Dime novels and Pulp fiction were created with the sole intention of pandering to as big an audience as they could assemble, going as far as calling on the audience to contribute with ideas and characters that could perhaps turn some of the stories more to their appeal. It would be difficult to differentiate them from any other product on offer in the mass-market:

Everybody knows that westerns are a species of romance, which is characterized by programmatic and thematic structures. The conventions which develop in the most formulaic Westerns, however, are more insistent and derive not from the influence of literary genre, but from the pressures of the market-place. (BOLD 1983, p. 45)

At a glance, such a divide seems logical. Nonetheless, even if we are mainly concerned with the literary fiction written about the West, and, in general, those mass produced examples are of no real concern for our study, one cannot evade the fact that they actually helped to shape a concrete visual mythologized idea of the West.

Thus, while *The Virginian: A Horseman of the Plains* (1902) is born off just those very same kind of publications, its first chapters featuring in magazines as early as 1893, it is nonetheless widely considered to be “the birth of the modern Western” (McVEIGH 2007, p. 39)

Pulp fiction and dime novels played their part in constructing the Western Myth. Cinema and comics certainly helped to create a visual queue to those stories, lending a human face to the characterization of fiction, dressing it, enacting it. It was literary fiction, however, whether it be deemed to be high or low, that pioneered that Western world. Shaping it, initially, in its morality, in its ambitions, in its purpose and, subsequently exposing the lie subjacent to it all. In the end, the Old West that lies deeply entrenched at the heart of popular American culture has never been more than a representation of the collective aspiration of its people to a nobler identity.

In the next subchapter we will analyze two different works, which will enable us to attempt to get a clearer view on the American use of the West in fiction, namely *Shane* (1949) by Jack Schaefer and *The Border Trilogy* (1992-98) by Cormac McCarthy (*All the Pretty Horses, The Crossing, Cities of the Plain*). What Schaefer attempts to build, mainly “... [to] pare[d] the popular Western story down to its essential mythology, in a way that appealed to post-war America, and recast the cowboy as a hero for the Cold War era...” (McVEIGH 2007, p. 50), McCarthy destroys: “Everything about McCarthy’s fiction suggests that he has peered down that crack, that he understands society’s illusory truth.” (WOODSON 2017, p. 128)

In the midst of this conflict we hope to partly identify the how and the why the USA created such intricate webs of significance around the idea of the West, allowing us to, later, suitably compare it to the practice of literary fiction about the Sertão in Brazilian literature.

We will conclude this subchapter by reaffirming the fundamental role of Owen Wister and his *Virginian* to the whole of Western literary fiction in the 20th century. Its influence does not rest solely on the qualities of the book, but lies also in the opening up of the economical space for numerous other writers to put forward their contribution.

Apart from the model of Western heroism that the book established, it is worth pointing out that in so captivating the nation's imagination, *The Virginian* altered the American publishing industry by creating a substantial market among adults for quality Western fiction, a market that was amply supplied by the vast number of imitations that followed reworking the basic elements of Wister's novel. (McVEIGH 2007, p. 40)

1.4. The West in Literary Fiction

The bulk of our analysis of the West in literary fiction will be thus organized: an introductory subchapter dealing with the biographical information of the two authors, Jack Schaefer and Cormac McCarthy and their respective works. We will necessarily expand on the reasons why these particular examples were chosen, over other equally emblematic works.

The main part of the next subchapter will be divided into two distinct subjects: Character and Space. The objective behind such a split, even if the terms used are generally broad and open to numerous interpretations, is to try to help us narrow down the scope of our analysis to some bare essentials. Such will be fundamental when we compare the use of the West in literary fiction to that of the Brazilian Sertão (to which we will apply the same methodology), chancing the possibility that we might come to a point where we will have explored different characteristics of both literary cultures and end up with nothing with which to draw parallels on (or the exact opposite, to demonstrate antagonistic approaches of the same problem). Failing to do so would render this exercise meaningless.

1.4.1. *Shane* (1949) by Jack Schaefer

I was not reading Western stories then. I read history. I only read a few of the better Westerns. In fact, if I had known of the tremendous amount of bad Western writing that was flooding the market I wouldn't have written anything. (SCHAEFER 1983, p. 278)

It is perhaps no wonder that many of the early recognized Western writers of the 20th century were originally from the Eastern part of the United States. The West presented itself as a golden opportunity for all those who felt mismatched with the current state of the modern world and sought a simpler one, closer to their idealized version of the past. Of the triad composed by Owen Wister, Max Brand and Zane Grey only the later did not have a classical education, despite, like the others, having graduated from college.¹¹

Jack Schaefer followed closely on the path set before him by those authors, only ever setting foot on the West about ten years after he wrote *Shane*. He also had a somewhat similar upbringing, drawing heavily from classical Greek and Roman literature and majoring in English Literature in 1929.

While juggling two jobs, teaching and editorializing in a newspaper, he took up the practice of writing about Western subjects as an escape from that oppressive existence and the impoverished status that forced him to go as far as sell his own blood. His escapist relation to Western themes is made even more obvious when his stance on 'Eastern Literature' is taken into account: "I said good-bye to Westerns and started to write an Eastern. It was all it needed to be in form, heavily laden with symbolism, for example. I didn't like it, though. It was just hard work." (SCHAEFER 1983, p. 202)

A shorter version of *Shane* was first published in 1946 in three parts in a pulp magazine — *Argosy* —, having as its original title *Rider from Nowhere*. The story is narrated through Bob Starrett's double point of view (as an adult remembering what he saw as a child). We experience the arrival, actions and departure of Shane, a gunman seeking redemption who tries to put his past behind him by joining a group of homesteaders in Wyoming, particularly the Starrett family. The pressure exerted against the group by a big rancher, Fletcher, eventually leads to Shane donning his gun once

¹¹ "Wister was a Philadelphia lawyer who spent a few summers on Wyoming ranches in the closing days of the frontier era. Grey, a young dentist from upstate New York, was so enchanted when he first saw the West in 1905 that he moved there." (UDALL 2002, p. 184)

again, bringing an end to the conflict. He walks away from the scene, injured, onto an unknown future.

Shane is particularly relevant in the historical context in which it appeared. Post-World War II America was no longer the same country. Many things changed but, most importantly, it meant the USA were now globalized. They no longer had a physical last frontier on their continent to conquer, their commercial and diplomatic relations were now, forcibly, internationalized.

Many of the writers in this period exhibit an inability to conciliate the new version of America to the one they had been born and raised in. Their whole identity was built upon a vision of the world that they could no longer feel around them. Jack Kerouac's *Sal Paradise's* anguished question in the 1959 *On the Road* "(...) Whiter goest thou, America, in thy shiny car in the night?" (KEROUAC 2011, p. 108) aptly summarizes the anxiety of the 1950's, of an almost desperate attempt to recover something felt as long gone through what just might be one of the oldest traditions in American history, moving forward. *Shane*, in its own way, was also providing some answers:

In *Shane*, Schaefer created the ultimate Western morality tale, rich in meanings associated with community, sexuality, and family. Of perhaps greater importance for the onset of the 1950s, the Cold War, and the Atomic Age is the way the novel offered a means of thinking about violence and leadership that would resonate in American political culture in the coming decades. (McVEIGH 2007, p. 50)

Shane appears to America much in the same way as he shows up at the Starrett's, just as they were losing hope in their situation, facing the daunting tasks set before them. Shane is the symbol of the past, of the America that once was, come to mold the next generation, to shape them in his resemblance. His time, however, had come to an end. He was not caught unaware by this changing of the guard, on the contrary, what makes Shane, the character, and Shane, the symbol, particularly significant is that he appears to fully understand his own situation before everyone else around him can. America would be safe, regardless of the differences ushered in by the ages, as long as Shane's morality and the Old West myth was kept intact.

This is made even clearer in the 1953 film adaptation of the book, by the Western writer A. B. Guthrie Jr., where a new character is introduced with the sole purpose of

shooting Shane in the back. This allows Ryker (in the novel he is Fletcher) to have a very important piece of new dialogue before the shoot-out.

SHANE: You've lived too long. Your kind of days are over.

RYKER: My days? And yours, gunfighter?

SHANE: The difference is I know it. (STEVENS 1953, 1:51:15 – 1:51:25)

1.4.2. *The Border Trilogy* (1992-1998) by Cormac McCarthy

*“America is a provisional arrangement like no other country on Earth” says Cormac McCarthy. “An invention without history”.*¹²

The Border Trilogy is comprised of *All the Pretty Horses* (1992), *The Crossing* (1994) and *Cities of the Plain* (1998)¹³ and signaled the breakthrough of Cormac McCarthy into the commercial circuit, after 27 years of relative anonymity (even if, since his first published novel in 1965, *The Orchard Keeper*, he was well received by the critics). *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West* (1985) is generally considered to be his magnum opus, some even taking it to be one of the greatest works of American Fiction¹⁴. It was not, however, able to reach the commercial heights of *All the Pretty Horses*.

McCarthy is sort of a false recluse. Generally known for refusing such standardized practices as giving interviews and book-signings, he simply consciously decided not to pander to the whims of the literary celebrity culture, where the author is also, forcibly, a salesman for his own work. Those imagined characteristics blend in perfectly with the overall tone of his works and, most importantly, with the locations they are set in.

The West has been present in his writing ever since moving there in 1976, establishing himself first in Texas and later near Santa Fe, New Mexico. While his early

¹² Cormac McCarthy Interview with Der Spiegel, 1992, https://www.academia.edu/21895511/Cormac_McCarthy_1992_Interview_with_Der_Spiegel - Accessed on the 14th of August 2019

¹³ The editions used in this dissertation will be from the years 1999, 2010 and 2011, respectively.

¹⁴ <https://lithub.com/harold-bloom-on-cormac-mccarthy-true-heir-to-melville-and-faulkner/> - Accessed on the 30th of June 2020

novels are set mostly in the area of Tennessee, where he grew up after his family moved there from native Rhode Island, the South-West has been the backdrop of most of his work ever since.

The *Border Trilogy* is centered around two youths living in the West, mainly before and after the Second World War. John Grady Cole (*All the Pretty Horses*) from Texas and Billy Parham (*The Crossing*) from New Mexico. Both make their way into Mexico, sometimes accompanied, sometimes alone, on a search for something they can no longer find at home. The presence of modernity seems to be overwhelming and inescapable: “Through the front window he could see the starlit prairie falling away to the north. The black crosses of the old telegraph poles yoked across the constellations passing east to west.” (McCARTHY 1999, p. 7) Mexico presents itself as the open land dream of the Old West myth, untouched by civilization:

The grasslands lay in a deep violet haze and to the west thin flights of waterfowl were moving north before the sunset in the deep red galleries under the cloudbanks like schoolfish in a burning sea and on the foreland plain they saw vaqueros driving cattle before them through a gauze of golden dust. (McCARTHY 1999, p. 79)

All the Pretty Horses follows John Grady Cole, along with his friend Rawlins, as they move into Mexico seeking to escape the lack of options at home. The failure, on his part, to deter his family from selling the ranch they had lived in for some generations, is the last straw for a young man who has only ever known the cowboy life. Their trajectory is seriously harmed by the appearance of a reckless teenager in a stolen horse, Blevins, whose actions will lead to his own execution at the hands of the Mexican police and the arrest and imprisonment of Grady Cole and Rawlins, as they were beginning to establish themselves as workhands in a Mexican ranch. Rawlins returns to the United States as soon as he can, while Grady Cole, having had his marriage proposal to Alejandra, the Mexican ranch owner’s daughter, where he and Rawlins had been working, refused, retrieves Blevins’ horse in a violent shoot-out, whom he intends to return to his formal owner, back in the USA.

The Crossing is the story of the teenage cowboy Billy Parham’s three trips into Mexico. The first one is moved by his desire to return a female wolf, whom he had been trying to capture for a long time, to the wilderness of Mexico, which he considers to be the native land for such animals. The trip is met with a terrible end, as the she-wolf is

captured and killed for sport by having numerous dogs attacking her. It is young Parham himself who shoots the badly injured she-wolf on the head to prevent her more suffering. The second trip aims to recover his parents' horses, stolen by the same people who killed them, and who presumably have escaped into Mexico. He takes his brother Boyd with him, a kid who shares many similarities with Blevins, but the trip is once again fruitless, as Boyd is shot and, once recovered, runs away, leaving Parham who returns to the United States. In his third and final trip, Billy attempts to discover Boyd's whereabouts, only to find about his death. He manages to locate his grave and takes his brother's bones, only for them to be desecrated by some robbers as he looks for his way home.

Both characters' attempts to live out there, in the wilderness of Mexico, are quickly put to bed when the country proves to be wholly different from their aspirations. John and Billy persist in imposing their skewed perception of reality, despite a number of warnings from the natives of that land. Both are pushed back to their homeland, unable to deal with the physical consequences of their choices. Their descent into Mexico is, however, unavoidable, "He asked Billy where it was that they had come from and received the news with a certain sadness or resignation. As of things that could not be helped." (McCARTHY 2010, p. 158)

The final book, *Cities of the Plain*, unites the two characters, working on the same ranch in New Mexico, years after the events of both previous books. Billy Parham has grown to reject his previous delusion about Mexico, seeing it only has a place to drink and fornicate, while John Grady has not been wholly able to do so, resulting, ultimately, in his death. Billy roams the country ever since, before finally finding comfort, in old age, with an American family.

The ideal and the real are in a permanent state of confrontation all throughout *The Border Trilogy*. Its characters, no matter how smart and perceptive, fail, on the most part, to identify all the characteristics of the Western myth that are deeply rooted in themselves. They are representative of America's Western delusion, in their inability to free themselves from the chains of the myth, they themselves created.

They have a long life, dreams. I have dreams now which I had as a young girl. They have an odd durability for something not quite real.

Do you think they mean anything?

She looked surprised. Oh yes, she said. Don't you?

Well. I don't know. They're in your head. (McCARTHY 2010, p. 113)

1.5. A Man of the West

Lounging there at ease against the wall was a slim young giant, more beautiful than pictures. His broad, soft hat was pushed back; a loose-knotted, dull-scarlet handkerchief sagged from his throat; and one casual thumb was hooked in the cartridge-belt that slanted across his hips. He had plainly come many miles from somewhere across the vast horizon, as the dust upon him showed. His boots were white with it. His overalls were gray with it. The weather-beaten bloom of his face shone through it duskily, as the ripe peaches look upon their trees in a dry season. But no dinginess of travel or shabbiness of attire could tarnish the splendor that radiated from his youth and strength. (WISTER 2018, p. 5)

Having considered, even if only at a glance, the realities that constitute the historical backbone of the myth of the Old West, one is faced with the obvious fictionalized rendering made of most heroes of the novels, movies, comics, among others. They are all more eager to represent the ambitions of the American society as a whole, rather than the actual mannerisms and attributes of the cowboy and the population of the West. Americans flocked to cinemas to see better, and heavily adulterated, versions of themselves. They too, even if now only blue-collar factory wagers living on the brink of poverty, could have been one such intrepid adventurer, taming and vanquishing the all-powerful wilderness.

This is not to say that there is not some truth to the mythologized cowboy, that he was in every way different to the true cowpuncher, or that he is but a figment of the collective imagining of the American people. We want to see him as he was imagined in fiction, the clothes he wore, the choices he made, the relations he established with other inhabitants of the Old West. Moreover, we want to see how literary fiction dealt with the character when it assumes, at last, its fictional persona, how the cowboy reacts when it is faced with the harsh reality of his own romanticized nature.

While we examine the character in the Old West literary fiction we will restrict our focus on the most paradigmatic figure, the Cowboy/Gunman, meaning that, forcefully, some of the other personalities that inhabit this mythology will get little to no treatment in this dissertation. As important as they might be in the tradition of the Old West, their actions rely heavily on those of the cowboy. The Sheriff would have no one to arrest, the Fiancée/“Good Woman” would have no one to worry about, the

Prostitute/“Bad Woman” would have no one who could match her free spirit and the Native American would not have that much to worry about. All of them are in a dependent relation with the Cowboy, orbiting around his personality and his actions.

1.5.1 On the Flesh

He wore dark trousers of some serge material tucked into tall boots and held at the waist by a wide belt, both of a soft black leather tooled in intricate design. A coat of the same dark material as the trousers was neatly folded and strapped to his saddle-roll.

His shirt was finespun linen, rich brown in color. The handkerchief knotted loosely around his throat was black silk. His hat was not the familiar Stetson, not the familiar gray or muddy tan. It was a plain black, soft in texture, unlike any hat I had ever seen, with a creased crown and a wide curling brim swept down in front to shield the face.

(SCHAEFER 2017, p. 21)

Shane is first seen donning the classical cowboy attire, coated in a thin layer of dust, as becomes all those who ply on that particular trait. He is sporting the inevitable hat (although not the “familiar” Stetson one), there is a loose handkerchief hanging from his neck, his trousers are held in place by a large belt buckle. The cowboy portrayed by literary fiction in the first half of the 20th century is, with some occasional differences, similar to the one pictured in cinema, although the 1953 movie-adaptation of *Shane* is an obvious exception to the rule, since he wears a combination of leather jacket and trousers, in light colors, rather than the outfit Jack Schaefer originally picked out for him, one which itself escapes the usual black/white dichotomy.

Even though Shane’s clothing is what strikes the first impact in the narrator Bob’s young mind as something completely out of the ordinary, unusual in that farming country, Schaefer is quick to cast the outfit aside. He very sparingly references Shane’s clothes other than in two very significant moments. The first occurs with Shane’s decision to stay and work for homesteader Joe Starrett, which implies that he has to buy workingman’s clothes: “Shane came back with a pair of dungaree pants, a flannel shirt, stout work shoes, and a good, serviceable Stetson. He disappeared into the barn and emerged a few moments later in his new clothes, leading his horse unsaddled.” (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 75).

Bob is quick to remark how that effectively changes his perception of Shane, as he was “no longer a dark stranger but part of the place, a farmer like father and me.” (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 76).

The second occurs when Shane prevents Joe Starrett from meeting the villains Fletcher and Stark Wilson, by facing them himself. As soon as Shane decides it is time for him to act, his first move is to retrieve his former clothes:

He was dressed as he was that first day when he rode into our lives, in that dark and worn magnificence from the black hat with its wide curling brim to the soft black boots. But what caught your eye was the single flash of white, the outer ivory plate on the grip of the gun, showing sharp and distinct against the dark material of the trousers. (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 194)

The gun appears as the missing element, the one that finally completes the picture. With it, Shane is, at last, himself: “Belt and holster and gun . . . These were not things he was wearing or carrying. They were part of him, part of the man, of the full sum of the integrate force that was Shane.” (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 195).

These two events are significant in characterizing Schaefer’s use of the cowboy outfit. Much like Superman’s suit, Shane’s clothes are an extension of his self, indivisible from his being. His attempts to be a common man (like Superman attempted to be Clark Kent) are always placated by his need to return to his true nature. The cowboy outfit works as a signifier to Shane, the visual and physical manifestation of his nature: “This is my business. My kind of business. I've had fun being a farmer. You've shown me new meaning in the word, and I'm proud that for a while maybe I qualified. But there are a few things a farmer can't handle.” (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 196).

In the *Border Trilogy*, on the other hand, the physical traits of its characters are rarely mentioned, abstaining from indulging in long descriptions of what the protagonists (and antagonists) wear. McCarthy seldom fleshes out any of its characters in the three books that compose the trilogy, rather leaving them on a perpetual fluid and ambiguous foggy, unattached to any implication that a physical description might impose on a character.

Shane is seen for what he is at a glance. As soon as the reader is finished with Shane’s description he is sure (so long as one has minimal contact with western popular culture) to have a decent understanding of the motives and intentions of that character.

His clothes fatalistically condemn him to act accordingly, he is what he is, and there is no escaping it.

Lacking a detailed description of John Grady Cole and Billy Parham's clothing, McCarthy forces the readers to postpone any a priori judgements on their personalities. We are thus left wanting for a physical description since they are only able to fit a category as the narrative progresses and we can witness their choices and actions. This conscious withholding of information does not alter, as we will explore later, the deterministic nature of their destinies.

It is not only in that aspect that the *Border Trilogy* diverges from *Shane*. McCarthy mentions the use of articles of clothing at a steadier rate throughout the trilogy. Hats are mentioned 111 times in *All the Pretty Horses*, 193 times in *The Crossing* and 91 times in *Cities of the Plain*. Hats are persistently taken off, put back on, held, hanged, adjusted, reached for and are even, in some instances, stared at.

The same exercise could be made around boots. *All the Pretty Horses* mentions them 81 times, *The Crossing* 90 and *Cities of the Plain* 68 times. Boots are, among other characteristics, stomped, brushed, wiped, pulled off, put on, boots fill with water and blood, and, once again, they are looked at.

McCarthy manages to make the cowboy presence overwhelming throughout the Trilogy while at the same time not indulging in the aesthetic characteristics of the figure, rather favoring its consistent practical presence: "After a while he pushed his hat back and passed his hand across his eyes and across his mouth and pulled the hat down again and looked across the room." (McCARTHY 2011, p. 121). The outfit is condensed to a bare minimum, hats and boots and belts, which can still be easily identifiable and relatable to the reader as Old West imagery: "They reined up in the trail before him and hailed him in a manner half amused while their eyes took inventory of everything about him. Clothes, boots, hat. Horse and rifle. The mutilated saddle." (McCARTHY 2010, p. 68).

References to hats or boots in *Shane* are sparse (24 for hat, 8 for boots), and a significant portion of them are about feminine hats. Schaefer imbued Shane's character with the power of the cowboy from the start, as soon as he was presented to us, thus having no need to continually use them.

Despite the different approaches on the use of the cowboy outfit by both McCarthy and Schaefer we arrive at similar results. Shane, John Grady Cole and Billy Parham are all, irremediably, cowboys, their clothing but a natural extension of

themselves: “He reached to adjust his hat but he had no hat on so he scratched his head.” (McCARTHY 2010, p. 51).

We have thus seen just how relevant the cowboy’s dress code can be in the construction of a character in the literary fiction context. Even if we find differing ways of using it — Shane’s superhero cowboy costume, worn in its full might only when Shane has no other choice but to take matters into his own hands or Cole’s and Parham’s insistent reminder on their everyday use of cowboy clothing in a world that has long discarded them — both serve their purpose of conveying to the reader fundamental information about the personalities of those who make the conscious decision to use it. Shane fully embodies the mythological figure of the cowboy and both young men’s desire to be cowboys.

This is the general outward appearance of the cowboy, and we have now to expand on what we mean when we talk about the cowboy personality. What are his general mythological characteristics and how both *Shane* and the *Border Trilogy* use it to construct their respective versions of the man of the West.

1.5.2. The Man Inside the Hat

“In both "legends," the central theme is that of a man seeking self-renewal on the Frontier after experiencing moral or material ruin in the political and social struggles of the Metropolis. (SLOTKIN 1994, p. 163)

The “legends” Richard Slotkin alludes to are those of Davy Crockett and Sam Houston, both elected members of the United States House of Representatives who left office to lead the Texas Revolution. The Old West cowboy reacts in a very similar way when confronted with change, most of the time represented by the ‘moral and material ruins’ of the ways of the civilized East. Much like the myth itself, forever stagnated in a mystical realm that could not have existed for more than 20 years in very specific places, the cowboy’s foremost characteristic is its inability to accept the natural social transformation of the world he inhabits. He knows change will destroy him: “We’re like the Comanches was two hundred years ago. We don’t know what’s goin to show up here come daylight.” (McCARTHY 1999, p. 20).

1.5.3. The Cowboy's Foremost Struggle: Change

The cowboy's hostility to change does not manifest itself only in relation to the outside, to the new technologies that quickly replaced the cattleman's vocation and defaced the natural qualities of their world — "Through the front window he could see the starlit prairie falling away to the north. The black crosses of the old telegraph poles yoked across the constellations passing east to west." (McCARTHY 1999, p. 7) — but it is also evident in the inherent inability to change himself.

John Grady Cole, in an attempt to stop his grandfather's ranch from being sold, speaks to the family's lawyer so that he might get his mother to back down from her intentions. The lawyer attempts to get John Cole to understand that the world has changed, that a cattle ranch in the 20th century is far from being a desirable commodity: "Son, not everybody thinks that life on a cattle ranch in west Texas is the second best thing to dyin and goin to heaven." (McCARTHY 1999, p. 13).

The only solution that seems to go along with his interests, at that point, is to search for the idyllic place where he, a cowboy, can find solace, a world of the past. He thinks he can find in Mexico and aims for that direction not before making it clear that America no longer had a place for the Old West: "How the hell do they expect a man to ride a horse in this country? said Rawlins. They don't, said John Grady." (McCARTHY 1999, p. 25)

Many of the characters in the *Border Trilogy* follow this pattern. The adoption, in the extreme, by some Americans of the cowboy mindset, one their society deems desirable, inevitably leads to a mismatch between the perceived and the real. John Grady, Blevins, Billy and Boyd Parham act according to a role they believe is real, only to be confronted later by the harsh consequences of living in an imagined bubble.

The case of Billy Parham follows a slight variation in this predestined path. Like John Grady, Billy harbors the same resentment towards progress, while never being able to consciously understand what moves him across the frontier. His apparent obliviousness to the motives of his actions attests to how deeply rooted the Old West myth is established in 20th century American society:

What were you doin in Mexico?

I dont know. I just went down there.

You just got a wild hair up your ass and there wouldnt nothin else do but for you to go off to Mexico. Is that what you're tellin me?

Yessir. I reckon. (McCARTHY 2010, p. 115)

Unlike John Grady, Billy is set on fixing the contemporary world and make the clock turn back to that precursory, idyllic period. His first descent into Mexico — a place that in his delusion he perceives to be made in his own image — is, for example, motivated by the desire to return a wild she-wolf (whom he had tamed) to her native territory, attempting to save it from the prosecution of ranchers whose cattle it had killed. Both the wolf and in Mexico represent what he cannot experience in the USA, the natural wilderness, a place of truth, in opposition to the falseness introduced with technologies and the processes of modern economy. The wolf bears the same resentment towards domesticized cattle: “The ranchers said they brutalized the cattle in a way they did not the wild game. As if the cows evoked in them some anger. As if they were offended by some violation of an old order. Old ceremonies. Old protocols.” (McCARTHY 2010, p. 18).

Nevertheless, his good intentions are met with harsh failures. The wolf is taken away and savagely picked apart in a dog-fight while a crowd of Mexicans watch and his attempt to retrieve his family’s horses is fruitless. Boyd, his younger brother who had gone with him, runs away, and later he learns he has been killed. He seeks to return Boyd’s remains to the USA, and he ends up being viciously attacked by a group of Mexicans, who desecrate his brother’s bones.

Both Grady and Billy, Boyd and Blevins, refuse to accept both the reality of their condition and the cautionary remarks directed at them by both friends and foes in different parts of the *Trilogy*. In one instance, a rancher tries to deter Billy and Boyd from going ahead with their enterprise —

Let me advise you. I feel the obligation.

All right.

Return to your home.

We aint got one to return to, Boyd said.

Billy looked at him. He still hadnt taken off his hat.

Why dont you ask him why he wants us to go home, said Boyd.

I will tell you why he wants this, said the ganadero. Because he knows what perhaps you do not. That the past cannot be mended. (McCARTHY 2010, p. 146).

They fail to relent on their quarrelsome posture and are quick to read what is being said to them as an attempt to throw them off their track. The rancher is even more explicit with his next warning: “Your brother is young enough to believe that the past still exists, he said. That the injustices within it await his remedy. Perhaps you believe this also?” (McCARTHY 2010, p. 147).

Regardless of all the difficulties, the strength of their attachment to the idealized myth of the Old West is somewhat unfazed in *Cities of the Plain*. We find them both working in the same ranch in New Mexico, near the border with Mexico. The ranch is barely sustainable and the owners are being threatened by the Department of Defense which might claim it as a military area. John Grady Cole has grown quieter and lonelier, while Billy has become kind of foolish, drinking, boozing, cracking jokes and often times singing, “John Grady Cole was a rugged old soul, Billy sang” (McCARTHY 2011, p. 77). The novel shows the two possible outcomes for those locked within the myth. Billy is now aware of the path they had been trending.

When you're a kid you have these notions about how things are goin to be, Billy said. You get a little older and you pull back some on that. I think you wind up just tryin to minimize the pain. Anyway this country aint the same. Nor anything in it. The war changed everthing. I dont think people even know it yet. (McCARTHY 2011, p. 79).

Nevertheless, he seems unable to act according to this newfound understanding, as shown later by his adoption of a vagrant lifestyle, displaying a total incapacity to adapt to society. After the dream was taken from him, there was nothing in his sights, he is at an utter loss about what he truthfully is. Post-World War II America is personified in his figure, a complete failure on the part of the nation to adapt to a whole new reality.

If Billy Parham is America in its post-war incertitude, Magdalena, the prostitute from the Mexican brothel, with whom Grady Cole falls in love, embodies the mythologized Mexico. Both Magdalena and Mexico exist in a dual state of being, the real and the imagined. There is a real Mexico, its inhabitants, its history, its collective failures as well as an imagined, perceived Mexico, such as John Grady Cole sees it. Such is the condition of Magdalena, the person, and Magdalena the prostitute, whose job is to entice others through playacting.

Eduardo, the brothel's owner who also desires Magdalena, aptly points out this flaw in Grady's perception:

They drift down out of your leprous paradise seeking a thing now extinct among them. A thing for which perhaps they no longer even have a name. (...) By now of course longing has clouded their minds. Such minds as they may possess. The simplest truths are obscured. (McCARTHY 2011, p. 250)

Grady's vision is restricted to an imagined world, being utterly incapable of looking past the cowboy's idealization. He is oblivious to what actually surrounds him, as again Eduardo points out: "Your kind cannot bear that the world be ordinary. That it contain nothing save what stands before one. But the Mexican world is a world of adornment only and underneath it is very plain indeed." (McCARTHY 2011, p. 254)

Quite in opposition, Jack Schaefer's Shane is every bit the cowboy America dreamt of, or at least of what was expected of him — "For mother was right. He was there. He was there in our place and in us. Whenever I needed him, he was there. I could close my eyes and he would be with me and I would see him plain and hear again that gentle voice." (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 224) — thus appearing to be free from the pains of the existential crisis the *Trilogy* characters were immersed in.

Even if Shane is shown to be a sort of savior, not ostensibly troubled by his own identity, he does attempt to escape his past. Shane is determined to play the part, dressing up and acting like a farmer and refraining from taking action in the community's troubles, but we are given numerous hints to his complete inadequacy to the life of a workhand. We can see this in his refusal to sit with his back to doors and windows — "Shane was sitting opposite the door where he could directly confront anyone coming through it" (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 78) — and his ever-present vigilance, "For of course he was aware of it. He never missed anything." (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 103)

Shane is in every sense an agent of change, transforming the society (and possibly the landscape) of that valley forever. The story revolves around his victory over monopolist villain Fletcher, but there is another significant moment when, together with Joe Starrett, he destroys the last piece of evidence of the natural world, the enormous tree stump: "a big old stump, all jagged across the top, the legacy of some great tree that must have died long before we came into the valley." (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 40) Nature is tamed and law and order has been instituted. Prometheus-like Shane sacrificed himself for the new world.

Nevertheless, when Shane says, "A man is what he is, Bob, and there's no breaking the mold. I tried that and I've lost." (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 215), we see that the differences between Shane, Cole and Billy are not so disparate as we would instinctively think. Shane is as much a servant to his fate as Grady and Cole are, his attempts at personal freedom just as pointless. Some poor lonesome cowboys they are, and poor lonesome cowboys they will be, onto the end. The difference lies only in that Shane is seen as leaving a legacy as a result of his actions — the community's and possibly the country's future was consolidated — even if he himself remains the same, whereas in the trilogy nothing seems to come out of the characters' actions, except death and waste.

1.5.4. Inside the Cowboy's Psyche

Having identified the central struggle of the cowboys' existence, one which permeates deep into his actions and confers unto him a tragic quality, that of a man shackled to his destiny, it is important to touch on some minor aspects of the cowboy's character. What feelings does he convey and what feelings does he wish others to judge him by? What are the archetypal emotions of the literary fiction cowboy?

Shane allows us to get a clearer insight onto his emotional behavior and, by extension, that of "the true man of the West". He is, after all, plying his trade in the exact timeframe where we can perceive some of the conditions that helped both develop the myth and create the conditions for it to be absolutely impractical and unfit for the next generations. We witness the settlement of Joe Starrett and the homesteaders in what, to all effects, is vacant/open land and the consequences of their arrival (which would come to haunt John Grady Cole and Billy Parham in the future), the fencing and wiring of that same open land. In *Shane* we see the setting up of the conditions we find later in the *Border Trilogy*.

Furthermore, as *Shane* is narrated through the eyes of Bob Starrett, several years after he had experienced everything as a kid, there is an important mythical quality to the figure of Shane. He is not only seen by a child, who tends to exaggerate and be too immature to notice other aspects of that character, but is also seen in the context of Bob's past, his presence having crystalized over the years. In that sense Shane is twice as

valuable for our analysis of the cowboy. He is both the “real” cowboy of the 1880’s and the mythical persona of the 20th century.

We will shy away from what is the formative quality of the Cowboy and one that permeates his whole relation with society: the use of violence. It was a conscious decision to focus on some other traits of the character, less worked upon and farther away from the general public perception of the figure. Despite the choice we made, violence is present in almost everything we presented about the cowboy, from his violent refusal of a changing society to the violence intrinsic in his social interactions and their self-imposed condition of martyrdom.

1.5.5. Zoomorphism

Some impression it certainly did make upon them. The notion may seem out of reason to those who have never closely attended to other animals than man; but I am convinced that any community which shares some of our instincts will share some of the resulting feelings, and that birds and beasts have conventions, the breach of which startles them. (WISTER 2018, p. 32)

One of the first characteristics that stands out about Shane is his reliance on his animal-like instincts. As civilization progressed and grew ever more secure and self-reliable (allowing its members to focus on only one trade) a number of qualities, which we now relate with animals, started to disappear. What has progressively dissipated in the character of the civilized 19th century man is still very much alive in Shane: “Beneath them the eyes were endlessly searching from side to side and forward, checking off every item in view, missing nothing. (...) Yet even in this easiness was a suggestion of tension. It was the easiness of a coiled spring, of a trap set.” (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 22).

There are other examples of Shane’s natural qualities. In the bar brawl that pits Shane and Starrett against a bunch of Fletcher’s men he is seen indulging in a certain freedom conferred by the moment — “It was a soft laugh, soft and gentle, not in amusement at Red Marlin or any single thing, but in the joy of being alive and released from long discipline and answering the urge in mind and body” (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 146). As soon as he resumes being Shane, the cowboy, animal comparisons abound — “There was a catlike certainty in his every movement, a silent, inevitable deadliness” (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 201) or, in this other case, where he merges with his horse: “He

was rising into the saddle and the two shapes, the man and the horse, became one and moved down the road (...)." (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 203)

John Grady Cole's relationship with animals is even more emphasized. Just like Shane, he also finds his shadow entangled with that of his horse: "They rode out west with the sun at their back and their shadows horse and rider falling before them tall as trees." (McCARTHY 1999, p. 73) For Cole, however, it is not only about acting in a somewhat similar fashion to the instinctive nature of animals. It is rather a sort of compulsion to embody them, to live as them, soul-bound to the horses, seen as representations of an alternative reality absent of human intervention and development, and symbols of a revered past, as is clearly illustrated in the following passage:

THAT NIGHT he dreamt of horses in a field on a high plain where the spring rains had brought up the grass and the wild-flowers out of the ground and the flowers ran all blue and yellow far as the eye could see and in the dream he was among the horses running and in the dream he himself could run with the horses and they coursed the young mares and fillies over the plain where their rich bay and their rich chestnut colors shone in the sun and the young colts ran with their dams and trampled down the flowers in a haze of pollen that hung in the sun like powdered gold and they ran he and the horses out along the high mesas where the ground resounded under their running hooves and they flowed and changed and ran and their manes and tails blew off of them like spume and there was nothing else at all in that high world and they moved all of them in a resonance that was like a music among them and they were none of them afraid horse nor colt nor mare and they ran in that resonance which is the world itself and which cannot be spoken but only praised. (McCARTHY 1999, p. 135)

He falls back on this mantra regularly — "(...) he contemplated the wildness about him, the wildness within." (McCARTHY 1999, p. 50) — transposing himself to the position of the animal. It is both an escape mechanism and a genuine desire for the natural world:

That night as he lay in his cot he could hear music from the house and as he was drifting to sleep his thoughts were of horses and of the open country and of horses. Horses still wild on the mesa who'd never seen a man afoot and who knew nothing of him or his life yet in whose souls he would come to reside forever. (McCARTHY 1999, p. 99)

His experiences with the horses go beyond those of Shane. Cole is pulled into an immersive condition through intensive moments shared with the horse: "He found he was

breathing in rhythm with the horse as if some part of the horse were within him breathing and then he descended into some deeper collusion for which he had not even a name.” (McCARTHY 1999, p. 222)

Billy Parham lacks this reciprocal connection with horses. Still, his intimate relationship with the animals he encounters throughout his journeys exhibits the same association between them and the past. His decision to rescue the she-wolf, with whom he ends up building as big a relation as one could establish with a wild animal, is shown by the tenderness he manifests towards her: “When he touched her her skin ran and quivered under his hand like a horse's. He talked to her about his life but it didnt seem to rest her fears. After a while he sang to her.” (McCARTHY 2010, p. 67)

1.5.6. A Guardian to the Frail and Feeble

Your father and I in the months that followed were together a lot. He asked me to come here, to take care of you and his wife, and to protect you. He died of beatin's he got aboard ship, just before the rest of us got away from the ship. I was with him when he died, settin' beside his bed. Almost his last words were about you. (L'AMOUR 2012, p. 75)

Out of the intimate relation that binds man and animal, we can extrapolate an innate desire to protect those on a weaker position, those who are tormented either by man or social institutions. This is a pattern observable both in *Shane* and in the *Border Trilogy*.

Magdalena, the Mexican prostitute, is an example. Her weaknesses are obvious at a first glance: “A young girl of no more than seventeen and perhaps younger was sitting on the arm of the sofa with her hands cupped in her lap and her eyes cast down. She fussed with the hem of her gaudy dress like a schoolgirl.” (McCARTHY 2011, p. 6) She is much younger than she is pretending to be, the employment of the noun ‘schoolgirl’ is not as innocent as she herself seems, and she is both weak and unsure of her role in the whorehouse, shown by the nervous cupping of her hands and the eyes on the floor.

McCarthy's use of Christian imagery in the making of this particular narrative only strengthens the centrality of the cowboy's savior complex. Magdalene aptly takes her name from one of the most important followers of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, who,

according to popular culture, was a repentant prostitute, even if there is no actual evidence in the biblical scriptures to confirm this narrative. Cole assumes the role of Jesus Christ, who seeks to redeem the very lowest of sinners, — Mexican Magdalene is a prime candidate — only to suffer the consequences and pay with his life for their sins.

We are given another clear allusion to the biblical quality of Magdalene's relationship with Cole when she enters into a convulsive state during an epileptic attack: "The girl's mouth was bloody and some of the whores came forward and dipped their handkerchiefs in the blood as if to wipe it away but they hid the handkerchiefs on their persons to take away with them and the girl's mouth continued to bleed." (McCARTHY 2011, p. 73)

This denotes the mystical power attributed to her figure. The Eucharist rite, the partaking of the body and blood of Christ might have here a slightly altered meaning. While it is Cole who immediately takes up the role of savior, Magdalene might, in some way, be the redeemer of Cole himself, freeing him up from the mythical curse bestowed upon him.

The duality of Cole's condition, both redeemer and repentant, is observable at the very end, when Billy carries his dead body through the streets of Mexico. His body posture evokes that of Christ being taken to his grave, while children, symbols of purity, bless themselves and, his burden, the burden of the mythical cowboy, of defending an implacable set of morals as well as the weakest among them, is conferred unto the world.

The dead boy in his arms hung with his head back and those partly opened eyes beheld nothing at all out of that passing landscape of street or wall or paling sky or the figures of the children who stood blessing themselves in the gray light. This man and his burden passed on forever out of that nameless crossroads (...) (McCARTHY 2011, p. 263)

Shane and Billy Parham are perhaps less evocative than their counterpart but they also take the hard path of the lone redeemer. Shane takes the pains of the homesteaders upon himself. Only Marian, Joe Starrett's wife, and whose name might also have some symbolic meaning, understands the consequences Shane will face because of his intervention: "Look what you've done just because you got him to stay on here and get mixed up in this trouble with Fletcher! (...) "Oh, Joe, can't you see what I'm talking about? I don't mean what you've done to Chris. I mean what you've done to Shane." (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 126)

No cowboy seems to resist the urge to protect those he sees as being worthy, of being good, moral and whole. Shane only allows himself to leave when the homesteaders are definitely rid of Fletcher, Billy Parham seeks to protect the she-wolf and later his brother, even if he fails both times. He goes on to find the same ruinous bent in Cole and actively moves to protect him in Mexico, to no avail.

We can relate this characteristic, the desire to protect those in need, to the final aspect we wish to discuss on our analysis of some of the most important psychological traits of the cowboy: Humor.

1.5.7. “Comedy is a dead art form. Now, tragedy...that's funny!”¹⁵

“Who’s there?” asked the sheriff. “Who’s raisin’ hell and busting the laws in this here community?”

“I’m the Big Muddy,” answered the whooping voice within. “I got snow on my head, and stones on my feet, and the snows are meltin’, and I’m gunna overflow my banks. Come on in and take a ride!”

“Is that you, Destry?”

“I’m the Big Muddy,” Destry assured him. “Can’t you hear me roar? I’m beginnin’ to flow, and I ain’t gunna stop! I’m rarin’ to bust my banks, and I wanta know what kinda levees you got to hold me back. Wow!” (BRAND 2017, p. 13)

It is certainly one of the most fabled qualities of the cowboy. The quick-witted one-liner, delivered as fast and powerfully as a punch, just when the moment is at its most dramatic. There is no chance for the villain at that point, psychologically disarmed and publicly humiliated, his weaknesses laid bare for the world to see.

There are a number of such moments in *Shane*. Before taking up violence as a means to gain control over the valley, Fletcher’s men intimidate the homesteader population by making fun of them with humiliating remarks. The homesteaders, unused to social life, quickly fall prey to the provocations hurled at them. Since they are very simple and adhere to a very strict moral code, the subversion of reality that is implied by

¹⁵ COHEN, David X. (Writer) AVANZINO, Peter (Director). (1999, December 19) X-mas Story [Television series episode]. In GROENING, Matt (Creator) *Futurama*, New York: Fox Broadcasting Company

sarcasm, quickly confuses and forces them to take imprudent action: “Father, while it galled him, could keep it from getting him. The other homesteaders, though, could not help being irritated and showing they felt insulted.” (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 116)

This is further evidenced when the homesteader Ernie Wright recalls one such incident in the “comical warfare” waged by Fletcher. The continued insistence on the idea that the homesteaders are raising pigs leaves Ernie baffled. He knows their intentions, but is still helpless to contain himself in the face of the scorn:

"I can't stomach much more," Ernie Wright was saying. "You know the trouble I've had with those blasted cowboys cutting my fence. Today a couple of them rode over and helped me repair a piece. Helped me, damn them! Waited till we were through, then said Fletcher didn't want any of my pigs getting loose and mixing with his cattle. My pigs! There ain't a pig in this whole valley and they know it. I'm sick of the word." (SCHAEFER 2017, pp. 117-118)

Even Joe Starrett, seen as a leader of the group, struggles with the sneering remarks directed at him. The insinuations burn and diminish him: “But they liked best to catch father within earshot and burn him with their sarcasm.” (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 116) Out of all the characters in *Shane* there is only one who is apparently left unfazed by the sting of the joke, Shane himself. Unlike all the other characters, good or evil, he is both able to be the target of the joke and its instigator.

The dialogue he maintains with Chris, one of the youngest in Fletcher’s payroll, in the town’s saloon is evidence of his ability to tolerate sarcasm and use it in his favor. Chris attempts to bring him down a level from the start: ““Hello, farmer," he said. He said it as if he did not like farmers.” (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 108) Shane easily avoids being goaded by the poignant jokes Chris insists on making, one after the other: "Did you hear that? This farmer drinks whiskey! I didn't think these plow-pushing dirt-grubbers drank anything stronger than soda pop!" (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 109) to which Shane answers in a friendly tone: “Some of us do," said Shane, friendly as before.” (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 109) His reaction is considerably different from the homesteaders.

Shane does what no other character is capable of: he is able to cross to the other side. Being undoubtedly a force for good, he does not refrain from using qualities and attributes commonly associated with evil guys, be it guns, or, in this particular instance, humoristic humiliation. Shane exhibits here another quality of the good bad guy. In the

following excerpt he displays strength from the start, calling Chris a child and does the unexpected at the same time, calling Chris's bluff and ordering some Soda Pop as if for himself: "'You've had your fun and it's mighty young fun. Now run home and tell Fletcher to send a grown-up man next time.'" He turned away and sang out to Will Atkey. "Do you have any soda pop? I'd like a bottle.'" (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 109)

The only other main character, in the context we are working in, who appears to be able to adopt a humorous posture is Billy Parham. We have already briefly touched upon the extrovert personality Billy displays in *Cities of the Plain*, where his desire to protect is still very much alive even if he has dropped the sober personality of the cowboy in favor of a sarcastic disposition. We can see that bitter sarcasm in his first sentence in the book, in reference to Cole, "Where's the all-american cowboy at?" (McCARTHY 2011, p. 3)

Billy and Shane have in common a perception that their time (of the cowboy) is over and we see them both act accordingly. We have no information on Shane's past but we can assume that it is riddled with episodes of violence and loneliness, similar to Billy's own experience, losing all his family early on and going through some extremely violent situations in Mexico. Eventually he attempts to settle down and integrate a family structure, and the same, albeit futile, goes for Shane.

From the shared experiences of these characters, both on a similar path, we can infer the reason for their rare proficiency in humoristic discourse. The consciousness of their condition, the tragedy of their situation as men out of touch with the new world around them, allows them to indulge in what no other is capable of doing.

Other characters have a more contentious relation with it. Blevins acknowledges that much, when he falls from his chair in the presence of Rawlins, Cole and a family of Mexicans, whose daughters clap with delight at Blevins's flailing acrobatics:

Are you all ready to go? he whispered.

We aint done eatin, said Rawlins.

He looked around uneasily. I caint set here, he said.

He was sitting with his head lowered and was whispering hoarsely.

Why caint you set there? said Rawlins.

I dont like to be laughed at. (McCARTHY 1999, p. 44)

Cole is rarely seen smiling or joking in both *All the Pretty Horses* and *Cities of the Plain*. He insists regularly that Rawlins stop pushing and scorning Blevins and he cannot help himself from being irritated when his words elicit laughter in Alejandra: “He only knew it made her smile and that had not been his intent.” (McCARTHY 1999, p. 110) He maintains his sober posture contrasting sharply with the Mexicans he comes to deal with in *All the Pretty Horses*, who many times smile at him, even in a benevolent and affectionate way. He only allows himself some sarcasm when talking about those whom he left behind in America, evidencing the disdain he feels for society on its whole, the people and their worries: “Well, he said, probably they're havin the biggest time in the world. Probably struck oil. I'd say they're in town about now pickin out their new cars and all.” (McCARTHY 1999, p. 30)

One of the captains of the Mexican police, who sees Cole's and Blevins' distrustful and reserved posture in himself, accurately describes the relation that people like them, deeply concerned with questions of honor, have unto the laughter of others: “When I come back there is no laughing. No one is laughing. You see. That has always been my way in this world. I am the one when I go someplace then there is no laughing. When I go there then they stop laughing.” (McCARTHY 1999, p. 152)

In most of the situations we have looked at, we see that humor is often used as a passive form of violence. No matter who is on the receiving end, (Shane, Rawlins or Billy Parham) the hostility felt by a joke, a pun or an insinuation, is sure to inevitably spark a violent reaction: “The big room was so quiet the stillness fairly hurt. Chris stepped back involuntarily, one pace, two, then pulled up erect. And still nothing happened. The lean muscles along the sides of Shane's jaw were ridged like rock.” (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 110) This description of the aforementioned exchange of provocations between Shane and Chris could just as easily been taken from a physical struggle. The room is quiet and tense, instead of the rapturous joy one would expect, just as Shane is. The muscles on his face show us just how physically taut his muscles are, as an animal on the verge of attacking. On the other hand, Chris acts just like if he has been hit, staggering back just as if punched by an actual powerful blow.

We have seen how humor, far from being a light-hearted pastime, is yet another field of battle in which the cowboy is obliged to participate. The humorous skirmishes that we have seen enacted on our case studies frequently display the relations of power (either conscious or unconscious) in existence between the characters. Thus, humor is the display of the cowboy's intellectual prowess, he might not be a cultured man, but his wits,

sharpness and shrewdness prove that it is not only at the physical level the cowboy asserts its dominance.

1.6. This Land was made for You and Me

He let go of me and turned slowly, gazing out across the far sweep of the valley silvered in the moon's glow. "Look at it, Bob. Hold it in your mind like this. It's a lovely land, Bob. A good place to be a boy and grow straight inside — as a man should."
(SCHAEFER 2017, pp. 202-203)

As mentioned in the introduction to this work, space will be taken as objectively as possible, refraining from entering the sundry debate over its many possible interpretations. Space is, for the purposes of this dissertation, merely the objective natural environment that surrounds the events of our case studies: the weather, the landscape or the geographical place.

The environment never seems to be problematic in the Old West stories. Western narratives have tended to focus mainly on the human conflicts which might seem odd if we take into account the harshness of some areas in the West. Wyoming, where *Shane* is set, has low precipitation and a mostly semi-arid climate, while New Mexico and Texas, homelands to John Grady Cole and Billy Parham in the *Border Trilogy*, are semi-arid to arid regions, with even lower precipitation than Wyoming and a proneness to drought.

Yet, we can only find sporadic mentions to the difficulties brought upon by the place they inhabit, mostly taken as nothing more than basic scenery. Marian Starrett drops a minor hint about the troubles that are sure to exist in their place, when the narrator states: “That was one thing she learned back home, she would often say, that was of some use out in this raw land.” (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 28)

The wild strength of that raw land is soon forgotten and we are treated to a number of scenes, one after the other, where the group is delightedly treated to plentiful meals, such as: “I slept late and stumbled into the kitchen to find father and our visitor working their way through piles of mother's flapjacks.” (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 34) Later, that same day, they will be treated with trays of biscuits — “Out came the biscuits. She piled as many as she could on a plate, popping one of the leftovers into her mouth and giving me

the rest” (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 29) — and as soon as they are done with it, a pie is being prepared: “She was peeling apples in the kitchen, humming gaily to herself.” (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 58)

This is a land of apparent abundance. There is more than enough land for all to enjoy. There is barely any mention of drought, disease or tempest to torment this bunch of homesteaders, thoroughly enjoying their time, but for the one problem that still haunts them — Fletcher. It is perhaps no coincidence that the only one who had to face nature’s violence was Fletcher himself: “A series of bad years working up to the dry summer and terrible winter of '86 had cut his herds about the time the first of the homesteaders moved in and he had not objected too much. But now there were seven of us in all and the number rising each year.” (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 98)

It is nonetheless important to see how natural phenomena are received by the characters. Schaefer is very simplistic when it comes to establishing relationships between the emotional mood of the characters and the environment. The sun is persistently equated with happiness and well-being — “Then the warm sunlight was flooding over us, for father was smiling and he was speaking with the drawling emphasis that meant he had made up his mind.” (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 26) — while the rain and cold bring with them ideas of sorrow and sadness: “And the rain outside was a far distance away and meaningless because the friendly feeling in our kitchen was enough to warm all our world” (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 39). The rain is unable to impose its coldness and dampness, its discomfort, as the group is inside the house, the general feeling described as warm and friendly. The sun is soon shining over the land, rapturously received by all living things in its brilliant fresh glory.

This is repeatedly reflected in Starrett’s delight: “Marian, the sun's shining mighty bright at last. We've got ourselves a man.” (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 74) Or in Bob’s apprehensions: “And then, staring at that dark and deadly efficiency, I was again suddenly chilled, and I quickly put everything back exactly as before and hurried out into the sun.” (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 83).

Overall, we can identify two different functions for place in *Shane*. First, it adds another dimension to the emotional range of the characters, from that information we can draw more comparisons and better contextualize the diverse range of emotions expressed by the characters; secondly, while using the mystical qualities of nature, Schaefer is able, to a certain extent, to immerse both Shane and the valley on the same spiritual and almost sublime level.

He would be standing there, one arm on the smooth arch of the horse's neck, the fingers gently rubbing around the ears, and he would be looking out over our land where the last light of the sun, now out of sight, would be flaring up the far side of the mountains, capping them with a deep glow and leaving a mystic gloaming in the valley. (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 128)

McCarthy, on the contrary, is far more expansive on his integration of the places around his characters, which permeates the fabric of all three narratives of the *Border Trilogy*. Descriptions of space are not merely indicative and objectively serve a purpose that far exceeds the passive nature in *Shane*. Instead of serving mostly as a vehicle to complement the emotions of the characters, space, in the trilogy, acts as an agent itself, setting both the place and the emotional climate of a scene. Characters react to that atmosphere and are influenced by it.

It has its own character, it owns a personality, something which we see, as in this instance: “You'll see things on the desert at night that you cant understand. Your horse will see things. He'll see things that will spook him of course but then he'll see things that dont spook him but still you know he seen somethin.” (McCARTHY 2011, pp. 124-125) Space is treated as if a higher entity, an old mystical god, mysterious: “Before him the mountains were blinding white in the sun. They looked new born out of the hand of some improvident god who'd perhaps not even puzzled out a use for them. That kind of new.” (McCARTHY 2010, p. 22).

Its old and ancient power inevitably draws the characters to it, as in the case of Cole: “Dark and cold and no wind and a thin gray reef beginning along the eastern rim of the world. He walked out on the prairie and stood holding his hat like some supplicant to the darkness over them all and he stood there for a long time.” (McCARTHY 1999, p. 1)

McCarthy frequently humanizes his descriptions of the natural world, such as trees or mountain ranges, by attributing qualities frequently used to characterize human beings: “The winter that Boyd turned fourteen the trees inhabiting the dry river bed were bare from early on and the sky was gray day after day and the trees were pale against it” (McCARTHY 2010, p. 2). The trees inhabit and they seem to consciously oppose the rising gray day.

There is yet another significant aspect in the trilogy. The intensity of the lights and shadows, as well as color. Not only that, the climate has a real influence on the

environment and the characters. This contrast starkly with the mild ambience of *Shane*, of shining suns and light drizzles, where nothing is ever excessively hot or dramatically cold. In the trilogy, the sun beats down hard upon the land, coloring the plains in red and black overtones.

They rode out to see what the day would bring and within the hour they sat the horses on the eastern rim of the escarpment and watched while the sun ballooned like boiling glass up out of the plains of Chihuahua to make the world again from darkness.” (McCARTHY 2010, p. 136),

“(…) the western Sierras black against the bloodred drop of the sky” (McCARTHY 2010, p. 264).

In the *Trilogy*, the environment seems to mirror the actions of the man dwelling inside it and vice versa. Violent and uncompromising, a world of polar opposites, of black and white.

It is hard to establish a pattern for the use of space in the literary fiction of the West, in the context of this case study. The differences we found on the use of character between them were mostly stylistic, both shared, generally, the same ambitions and were able to identify the same conflict inherent to the Old West myth. The use of place, in this case, has shown two disparate approaches and understandings of its role in literary fiction, leading us to conclude, based solely on *Shane* and the *Border Trilogy*, that there is a wide range of considerations when it comes to this matter. *Shane* setting the paradigm and the *Border Trilogy* looking to present it in all its violent manifestations (and this is done either by way of weather events or the extremes of the color pallet). A further study would be required, supporting itself on a significant number of other representative examples of Western literary fiction, for a sure conclusion to be found.

Chapter Two. The Brazilian Sertão

Se a seca chegasse, não ficaria planta verde. Arrepiou-se. Chegaria, naturalmente. Sempre tinha sido assim, desde que ele se entendera. E antes de se entender, antes de nascer, sucedera o mesmo — anos bons misturados com anos ruins. A desgraça estava em caminho, talvez andasse perto. Nem valia a pena trabalhar. (RAMOS 1981, p. 23)

The Sertão is not a place for middle grounds, or complementary contrasts. It is shown to us in all its mighty brutal strength. The land is dry and withered, the sparse vegetation is of a shriveled brownish color. And the sun. The sun is ruthless in its unbearable vigilance, day in and day out, bright, red and burning.

One has to wonder, going through the narratives about the lives of its inhabitants, what could have possessed these people to endure what the Sertão does to them. Even when the focus is not on the brutal circumstances that surround the frequent, unavoidable, droughts that have plagued that particular region of Northeastern Brazil, since its settlement, the basis for every story is one of immense suffering and violence. Both men and the environment are responsible for that scenery.

The movements of the drought are, paradoxically, similar to those of the waves. Death swoops through the Sertão during those periods, animals die, the wells dry-up, the ground cracks, dehydrated, and the people are pushed out in its wake, in different directions. A purge. When it finally relents in its impetus, the backwash slowly brings with it the survivors, determined once more to, somehow, conjure a living out of the devastated landscape.

Fabiano, the father of the family depicted in Graciliano Ramos's *Vidas Secas*, released in 1938, aptly expresses the dread of this eternal return. It is never a question of if but when the drought will naturally arrive. It is the past and it is the future of the Sertão, the antithesis of the ocean, while still being just as inhospitable, just as unrelenting. An intense desire to see the Sertão transformed will feed a plethora of messianic prophecies and movements — "... Em 1896 hade rebanhos mil correr da praia para o sertão; então o sertão virará praia e a praia virará sertão." (DA CUNHA 2000, p. 99) — which we will deal with in due course.

When Brazil finally starts emerging as a united nation, integrating all the different spaces and practices that make up its immense territory and which for centuries has mostly functioned on an almost independent basis, it will be in the Northeast, but especially in the bare stretch of the Sertão, that it will find its main antagonist. The one area that will resist all collective efforts, on the part of the Nation, towards modernization and civilization:

A relação entre o sertão e a civilização é sempre encarada como excludente. É um espaço visto como repositório de uma cultura folclórica, tradicional, base para o estabelecimento

da cultura nacional. (...) a civilização devia, no entanto, ser levada ao sertão, resgatando essa cultura e essas populações que aí viviam. (MUNIZ DE ALBUQUERQUE JR. 1999 p.67)

The Brazilian Northeast became the object of an intensive process of inscription in the myth, starting in the 1920's. It involved not only its detractors in the South and within the Modernist movement, but also some important intellectual figures from the area (and not only from the Sertão), who, in an attempt to defend their region, used and abused all of the available stereotypes.

Hunger and drought featured extensively in all forms of media, setting the spotlights of the entire information industry directly at it, for the consumption of a largely middle-class cosmopolite audience with an avid desire for stories of criminality, banditry and suffering. Never again would the northeast be able to shed away what was bestowed upon them.

The popularity of TV soap operas like *Gabriela, Cravo e Canela* (1975) and *Roque Santeiro* (1985), both in Brazil and in Portugal, attest to the embeddedness of the myth of the northeast, not only in cultural media, but in the more than 60 million spectators that made them such astounding commercial successes. Both tell tales of an old northeast, with an economy grounded in monoculture and the absolute power of the colonels and of a culture haunted by draught, poverty and a desperate messianic context, independently of the actual reality of any of its narratives and the concrete conditions of the area.

Uma região dividida entre momentos de tristeza e de alegria. Mesmo para quem dela sai, o migrante, o Nordeste aparece como este espaço fixo da saudade. O Nordeste parece estar sempre no passado, na memória; escovado como o espaço para o qual se quer voltar; um espaço que permaneceria o mesmo. Os lugares, os amores, as famílias, os animais de estimação, o roçado ficam como que suspensos no tempo a esperarem que um dia este imigrante volte e reencontre tudo como deixou. Nordeste, sertão, espaço sem história, infenso às mudanças. Sertão onde a fogueira esquenta o coração, sem rádio e sem notícia das terras civilizadas. (MUNIZ DE ALBUQUERQUE JR. 1999, p.98)

This chapter will thus start, at first, by identifying the central aspects of the myth of the Northeast, its characteristics, its most relevant characters and the narratives that would

quickly overwhelm the cultural production of both the Northeast and the South, while simultaneously weaving a simple and concise history of the region, from the colonization of the shoreline by the Portuguese to the occupation of the Sertão. It is fundamental that, while we dwell with this particulars, we expose the numerous and irreconcilable natural elements of the Northeast region (the Sertão and the plantations).

There are two other facets of the myth of the Northeast that merit our attention and those will be the object of two subchapters. One pertains to the timeframe of the myth, where we will attempt to place the narratives in a specific period of Brazilian history, as well as establishing the natural confines of the Sertão within that particular area; another concerns the presence of the Sertão in the cultural production of Brazil, across a plethora of different mediums but focusing specifically on the literary output dealing with the Sertão.

The same method will be used here, as was in the chapter about the Old West myth. Having chosen two seminal works who deal primarily with the Sertão itself, its effects on those who live and struggle within it, we will seek to trace a clear portrait of the most significant qualities and trends dealing with the presence of the Sertão in literary fiction, taking always into account the spatial limitations of the dissertation. Once again our focus will mostly be set on the place of the action as well as the characters that populate it.

2.1. A Material and Historical Background for the Narrative of the Northeast

Organizada a sociedade colonial sobre base mais sólida e em condições mais estáveis que na Índia ou nas feitorias africanas, no Brasil é que se realizaria a prova definitiva daquela aptidão. A base, a agricultura; as condições, a estabilidade patriarcal da família, a regularidade do trabalho por meio da escravidão, a união do português com a mulher Índia, incorporada assim à cultura econômica e social do invasor. (FREYRE 2003, p. 65)

The emergence of the modern-day perception of the Northeast has little to do with what the area meant for the whole of Brazil from the start of its colonization process by the Portuguese, in the first half of the 16th century. Even if it was, for some time, set aside

in favour of other colonies, in Africa and India, as soon as its expanses were gradually occupied, the large-scale exploitation of its riches was put into unstoppable motion. The Northeast was filled to the brim with riches and, the most relevant of them all, was its soil. It is out of the massive sugar-cane plantations that the nation will begin to take shape in all its complexities.

A verdade é que foi no extremo Nordeste – por extremo Nordeste deve entender-se o trecho da região agrária do Norte que vai de Sergipe ao Ceará – e no Recôncavo Baiano – nas suas melhores terras de barro e húmus – que primeiro se fixaram e tomaram fisionomia brasileira os traços, os valores, as tradições portuguesas que junto com as africanas e as indígenas constituiriam aquele Brasil profundo, que hoje se sente ser o mais brasileiro. (FREYRE 2013, p. 55)

We will abstain, at present, from entering the problematic debate on what exactly are the qualities of the ‘Brazilian’ individuals and which region better personifies them, as this last quotation by Gilberto Freyre would have us do. Let us begin first by clarifying what aspects are attributable to the population and space of the Northeast, the narratives that so discredit and belittle that population as a whole. One that was once among the mightiest and richest in the whole of South America.

The “Nordestino”, the man out of the Northeast, assumes the role of the “other” in contemporary Brazilian society. He is everything that the country in the early decades of the 20th century did not wish to be, and, in many aspects, is truthfully not any more. A figure from the past, still deeply ingrained with his colonial past, acting and reacting according to the precepts of a civilization that no longer had a place in the Brazil of the future.

The South had become the center of economic and political power ever since the advent of the independence, directly contrasting with the trajectory of the Northeast. As São Paulo grew at a steady pace, becoming one of the most important cities in the whole Southern Hemisphere, coming out from relative irrelevance, the North was in fast decline. When the Paulistas looked up, they saw only the miseries that had once befallen upon them, a disgust for what they once had been.

More intriguing is the fact that when the “nordestinos” looked at themselves they saw those exact same things, only under a different, more benevolent, light. They revealed in their colonial past, their European-styled houses on their immense estates (Casa

Grande/Big House), the power of the old colonels, the profound religiosity of the people, a shared heritage, split up between the Brazilian natives, European colonizers and their African Slaves, as Muniz de Albuquerque Jr. argues:

Não é à toa que as pretensas tradições nordestinas são sempre buscadas em fragmentos de um passado rural e pré-capitalista; são buscadas em padrões de sociabilidade e sensibilidade patriarcais, quando não escravistas. Uma verdadeira idealização do popular, da experiência folclórica, da produção artesanal, tidas sempre como mais próximas da verdade da terra. (1999, p.91)

Both the South and the North would, collectively and from radically divergent perspectives, construct a new characterization for the newly depleted Northeast. The South doing so out of ill will, bearing the deadweight of that region in an effort to build a Brazilian “nationality”. The North out of a genuine desire to hold on to its identity, as much as it could, safeguarding it against the cold rumble of the modernity machine.

Creating a strong and powerful regional identity was a task that forcibly involved the whole population of the Northeast, both the people and the political and cultural institutions. To such an end, a vast array of old stories of a somewhat bygone era were rescued, telling of the inescapable hardships and the tense relationship of their forbearers with the fauna and the flora of the once virgin land, alongside the communal penitence for the failures of their kind, the “cangaço” and the follies of the messianic movements.

Um Nordeste construído com narrativas de ex-escravos, de pessoas sem sobrenome, com histórias ouvidas na infância, com histórias que circulavam em toda a área; histórias de cangaceiros, de santos, de coronéis, de milagres, de secas, de cabras valentes e brigões, de crimes, de mulheres perdidas, do sertão mítico, repositório de uma pureza perdida, nostalgia de um espaço ainda não “desnaturalizado” pelas relações sociais burguesas. (MUNIZ DE ALBUQUERQUE JR. 1999, p.130)

It was within the most powerful cultural institutions of the Northeast (the newspaper *Diário do Pernambuco* is a pertinent example) that a significant push for the mythical construction of the region was registered. Gilberto Freyre was particularly instrumental, not only because of his sociological work concerning the area and the economic relations within it — focusing particularly in the relationship between slaves and the masters — but as a lead promoter of the *Congresso Regionalista do Recife*. This was a semi-political,

semi-cultural gathering, which took place in 1926 and in which a manifesto by Freyre is supposed to have been read (there are some who assert that the manifesto was only written well into the 1950s). Whatever the case, Freyre's ideas would effectively sanctify the emergence of a patriotic regionalism, in defence of the historical ways of the region, as can be seen in his own words:

Procurando reabilitar valores e tradições do Nordeste, repito que não julgamos estas terras, em grande parte áridas e heroicamente pobres, devastadas pelo cangaço, pela malária e até pela fome, as Terras Santas ou a Cocagne do Brasil. Procuramos defender esses valores e essas tradições, isto sim, do perigo de serem de todo abandonadas, tal o furor neófilo de dirigentes que, entre nós, passam por adiantados e "progressistas" pelo fato de imitarem cega e desbragadamente a novidade estrangeira. (1996, p. 2)

This perception of a regionalism merely interested in upholding the traditions, as well as a history, which would otherwise be forgotten by the cold indifference of progress, contrasts rather substantially with the conclusions in the book *Nordeste*, also by Freyre, released just 10 years after the congress. Even though he recognizes the deficiencies of the Northeast culture, he emphatically asserts its foundational position in the history of Brazil:

A antiga civilização do açúcar no Nordeste, de uma patologia social tão numerosa, dá-nos essa mesma impressão, em confronto com as demais civilizações brasileiras - a pastoril, a das minas, a da fronteira, a do café. Civilizações mais saudáveis, mais democráticas, mais equilibradas quanto à distribuição da riqueza e dos bens. Mas nenhuma mais criadora do que ela, de valores políticos, estéticos, intelectuais. (FREYRE 2013, p. 240)

The 1930's would go on to be one of the most fruitful in Brazilian literary history, as numerous writers converged in their ambitions of relaying to the public their own, personal relationship with the region and its past, heavily influenced by each individual life story. It is through this body of works that the vision the regionalists had sought to bring to life since the 1920s was materialized, even if each work conveyed a different interpretation and exposed the significant political ambitions behind them.

Se, do ponto de vista estritamente literário, o regionalismo nordestino não existe, ele existe como discurso literário que procurou legitimar, artisticamente, uma identidade regional que havia sido gestada por inúmeras práticas regionalistas e elaborada sociologicamente por Gilberto Freyre. (MUNIZ DE ALBUQUERQUE JR. 1999, p.124)

We will, later on, focus on the works of the 1930s, while dealing with the cultural production surrounding the body of myths of the Northeast. It is fundamental, meanwhile, that we learn about the occupation of both Northeast and the Sertão, the role it played in the political and economic history of Brazil and, further on, explore the violence imposed by the climate on the population and how it influenced and potentiated the banditry of the “Cangaço”, the beatitude of the messianic movements, and the overall despair that enhanced miraculous solutions to earthly problems.

The process by which the Portuguese laid their roots in the Northeast — and from where, at a pace, they claimed other stretches of Brazil — was, at best, muddled. The lack of a human contingent that could successfully install large-scale settlements both in the interior and on the coastline meant that, for the first few decades of the 16th century, the small number of fixed colonists were merely those who chose to stay behind in-between trips to export Pau-Brazil, as Buarque de Holanda argues: “Essa exploração dos trópicos não se processou, em verdade, por um empreendimento metódico e racional, não emanou de uma vontade construtora e enérgica: fez-se antes com desleixo e certo abandono. Dir-se-ia mesmo que se fez apesar de seus autores.” (1995, p.43)

Even when, later, the process of turning the tropical woodlands of the Northeast into arable land was underway, it was mostly through the intervention of a few relatively wealthy Portuguese families, who built their steadings, brought in the animals, bought the farming supplies and tools, which, as Freyre argues, implied a rural context: “A partir de 1532, a colonização portuguesa do Brasil, do mesmo modo que a inglesa da América do Norte e ao contrário da espanhola e da francesa nas duas Américas, caracteriza-se pelo domínio quase exclusivo da família rural ou semi rural.” (FREYRE 2003, p. 80).

They would soon emerge as Brazil’s aristocracy, the de-facto rulers of the colony, lords over endless expanses of land, challenged only, at times, by the King himself.

Para preservar seus interesses, ameaçados pelo cunhadismo generalizado, a Coroa portuguesa pôs em execução, em 1532, o regime das donatarias. (...) As donatarias, distribuídas a grandes senhores, agregados ao trono e com fortunas próprias para

colonizá-las, constituíram verdadeiras províncias. Eram imensos quinhões com dezenas de léguas encrestadas sobre o mar e penetrando terra adentro até onde topassem com a linha das Tordesilhas. (RIBEIRO 1995, p. 38)

There are two important factors that fashioned the unspoiled colony of Brazil into an affluent commercial power. Both will be integral in shaping the world of the regionalists: the institution of the sugarcane, used in intensive monocultures, and the emergence of a workforce capable of setting such an undertaking in motion — African slavery.

Paradoxically, the story of the Brazilian Sertão starts in what might just be one of the most prosperous territories in the tropics, rich in nutrients, variety and brimming with water. The warm, humid, conditions of the Northeast (whose rich soil is known as “massapê”) were ideal for the mass-plantation of the sugarcane, something which could not be successfully achieved in continental Europe.

O massapê é acomodaticio. É uma terra doce ainda hoje. Não tem aquele ranger de areia dos sertões que parece repelir a bota do europeu e o pé do africano, a pata do boi e o casco do cavalo, a raiz da mangueira-da-índia e o broto da cana, com o mesmo enjoo de quem repelisse uma afronta ou uma intrusão. A doçura das terras de massapê contrasta com o ranger da raiva terrível das areias secas dos sertões. (FREYRE 2013, p. 50)

As Freyre’s words suggest, it could not be more perfect to the Portuguese mercantile interest: a high-in-demand product that could be cultivated on a massive scale through the most rudimentary processes. The colonizers first instinct was set on tearing out as much profit as they could from the land, setting aside any logic that would guarantee the sustainability of the soil and environment.

Since the Portuguese lacked any acute knowledge on the practice of large scale farming, as well as any real desire (or amount of workforce) it would take to tame the woodlands, the solution was found on the African slave, as Buarque de Holanda argues: “Cumpria apenas resolver o problema do trabalho. E verificou-se, frustradas as primeiras tentativas de emprego do braço indígena, que o recurso mais fácil estaria na introdução de escravos africanos.” (1995, p.48)

Foi a circunstância de não se achar a Europa industrializada ao tempo dos descobrimentos, de modo que produzia gêneros agrícolas em quantidade suficiente para

seu próprio consumo, só carecendo efetivamente de produtos naturais dos climas quentes, que tornou possível e fomentou a expansão desse sistema agrário. (BUARQUE DE HOLANDA 1995, p.47).

African slaves were quickly brought in and rapidly spread throughout the sugarcane expanses, far exceeding, in some areas, the Portuguese population: it is estimated that in 1700 both populations numbered in the 150 thousand each.

The role of the African slave far exceeded the constraints of straightforward manual labor in the “Engenho de Cana”. He was present in every instance of social and cultural significance in that society, participating in the Catholic rites, the processions, the parties in honor of the multiplicity of saints celebrated in Brazil. He served as the representative of the master, of the “Senhor do Engenho”, his right-hand man, imposing his law. He was inside the master’s house, cooking his meals and cleaning the house; it was the slave who breastfed the master’s sons and daughters, and took upon themselves the task of raising the little princes of sugar into full grown indolent masters. The slave was the sexual object of the “engenhos”, used, at will, by the masters and their sons, and whom they, mostly unwillingly, introduced to sexual manhood.

Once again the Northeast, land of contrasts, shows us another dubious facet of that space. Unlike the perception commonly held about the role of the African slave, which supposedly did not exceed that of the mere beasts of burden, the African slave in Brazil had, most unwillingly, a strong grip in the construction of its historical future, providing all different kinds of functions in the sugarcane society. Through intense miscegenation, mostly through the rape of the slave by its owners, the Brazilian “mestiço” came into existence.

O intercurso sexual de brancos dos melhores estoques - inclusive eclesiásticos, sem dúvida nenhuma, dos elementos mais seletos e eugênicos na formação brasileira - com escravas negras e mulatas foi formidável. Resultou daí grossa multidão de filhos ilegítimos, mulatinhos criados muitas vezes com a prole legítima, dentro do liberal patriarcalismo das casas-grandes; outros à sombra dos engenhos de frades; ou então nas "rodas" e orfanatos. (FREYRE 2003, p. 531)

The “mestiço” would become a symbol of Northeast culture. The South started to create a logic grounded on fundamentally racial motives to denigrate them, on the grounds of

them not knowing how to work, of being prone to banditry, poorness, slothfulness and, evidently, of an inferior intelligence to the whiter south. The North would, accompanying its campaign of creation of a regional identity, celebrate miscegenation, its richness, its abundant cultural and social dynamics, the contribution of thousands of Portuguese, Natives and Africans involved in the process (it is never enough to point out how this undertaking was not often voluntary).

The Portuguese were even exhorted, on more than one occasion, to populate the land with the offspring of their relations with the natives: "Longe de condenar os casamentos mistos de indígenas e brancos, o governo português tratou, em mais de uma ocasião, de estimulá-los, e é conhecido o alvará de 1755, determinando que os cônjuges, nesses casos, não fiquem com infâmia alguma (...)." (BUARQUE DE HOLANDA 1995, p. 56)

Nevertheless, the relationship of the centralized Portuguese government to those of mixed African origins, was much harsher, refusing to accept their holding of public office. Despite this, the masters of the Engenho were those who effectively held power, and the "mestiço" was thus involved in the day to day running of the plantations: "Surge, assim, a área cultural crioula, centrada na casa-grande e na senzala, com sua família patriarcal envolvente e uma vasta multidão de serviçais." (RIBEIRO 1995, p. 44)

This veritable sugar civilization would last for a considerable long time, its practices and ambitions left unscathed, but long outlasting the expiration due to any such social organisms that had developed in the Northeast. When modernity finally caught up with it, there was little that the Engenhos could do to retain their power.

Other competitive sources of producing sugar entered the international markets around the 1700s and starting in the 19th century, the Engenhos faced an ever growing contest. Internally, they met with the resistance of the slaves, some of which formed Quilombos, self-sufficient communities and gathering places for escaped slaves, and externally, in the largest cities of the Northeast, such as Bahia and Recife, the first evidences of class conflict, which had hitherto been seen as irrelevant, began to emerge:

O mais célebre deles [Quilombo], Palmares, sobreviveu, combatendo sempre, por quase um século, reconstituindo-se depois de cada razia. Ao final, concentrava cerca de 30 mil negros em diversas comunidades e dominava uma enorme área encravada na região mais rica da colônia, entre Pernambuco e a Bahia. Sua destruição exigiu armar um exército de

7 mil soldados, chefiado pelos mais experimentados homens de guerra de toda a colônia, principalmente paulistas. (RIBEIRO 1995, p. 132)

The decline of the Engenho culture came with the abolition of slavery in 1888, as well as the implementation of the Republic in the following year. This did not mean the complete destruction of the rule of the Engenho, but permanently scarred the production of sugar in the area as well as insured that the political influence exerted by those characters shifted to those not intimate with the previous regime. “1888 representa o marco divisório entre duas épocas; em nossa evolução nacional, essa data assume significado singular e incomparável.” (BUARQUE DE HOLANDA 1995, p. 73). It is in the aftermath of this irrecoverable slump that we will find the regionalist movement.

What led to the occupation of the Sertão — the “backlands” of the Northeast — is not as clear as that of the coastline. There was no institutional, or national scheme, set in paper towards its development. Its soil lacked much of the qualities of the coastal massapê, so it was barely in the large-scale interests of the crown or the civilization of sugar to pay it any mind.

Having already broached slightly upon the social and economic characteristics that stemmed from the process of colonization of the Northeast as a whole, and to which the region of the Sertão owes a large portion of its historical origins, it is fundamental that we discuss the social movements that populated it and defined the future narratives about the Northeast and specifically the Sertão.

2.2. Of Those Who Peopled the Backlands

O beato continuava, indiferente, não sabia sequer que seu nome provocava tanta discussão. As aves vinham pousar em seu ombro, os violeiros cantavam em sua honra, as mulheres beijavam a ponta do seu camisu, e as cobras enroscavam-se em seu braço magro, aninhavam-se em seu peito cavado. Essas coisas se passaram no sertão, onde a fome cria bandidos e santos.
(AMADO 1971, p. 244)

It is indispensable, for a generalized understanding of the narratives about the Northeast, to evaluate the contributions made by the three largest social movements that characterized the Sertão, especially the way in which they permanently transformed the

collective dynamics of all of its inhabitants. These figures pullulate the cultural production about the Sertão, omnipresent in both cultural and political narratives, in which they play the role of servants to the arid desert, answering only to it, only them being truly able to understand its language. The lesser and older of those three are the “Bandeirantes”, while the other two coexisted for a number of centuries, the “Cangaceiros” and the Messianisms.

The “bandeirantes” are relevant because they were some of the first to venture into the Sertão, mapping and occupying a significant portion of what was, previously, unknown (to the colonizers). The inhabitants of what is now the state of São Paulo were, in the 16th and 17th centuries, disconnected with the economical riches provided by the coastal Northeast. In need of sources of income which could guarantee the mediocre sustainability of their colony in Piratininga, the capture and sale of natives for slavery and the search for mineral riches in the Sertão proved to be essential for the survival of their colony.

“É de supor que paulistas tenham vendido mais de 300 mil índios, principalmente missioneiros, aos senhores de engenho do Nordeste.” (RIBEIRO 1995, p. 164) The Bandeiras had no other chance to guarantee the sustenance of their own economy other than to catch and sell the greatest amount of natives they could get their hands on, since an African slave sold for as much as 5 times the value of a Native American, leaving them with no choice but to organize enormous expeditions (the Bandeiras¹⁶), out of their comfort zone, to compensate for the lack of value of their most significant resource.

O índio era o maior dos bens materiais. Figurava entre os valores arrolados em inventários, nos dotes de casamento, nos pecúlios deixados em testamento. Além disso, era instrumento de comercio. Por isso tudo, foi como um ponto de apoio da sociedade bandeirante. (BUARQUE DE HOLANDA 2007, p. 308)

As the tribes started moving into the Sertão, escaping from the physical centers of colonialism and slavery in the figure of the engenhos, the “bandeirantes” followed suit. They soon became the shock-troops of the Sertão, useful to capture slaves escaping

¹⁶ “As maiores delas compreendiam cerca de 2 a 3 mil pessoas, uma terça parte das quais era constituída de “brancos” que seriam quase todos mamelucos. Iam homens, mulheres, velhos que ainda podiam andar e combater e crianças, divididos por famílias, como uma vasta cidade móvel (...)” (RIBEIRO 1995, p. 164)

inward from the engenhos, destroying and murdering the inhabitants of the quilombos and enslaving thousands of potentially rebellious natives.

Em decorrência dos fatores econômicos, o bandeirismo tornou-se uma profissão criada pelo meio e uma escola por excelência, onde os adolescentes paulistas eram preparados para a caça ao índio e para o sertanismo em geral. Tornou-se um negócio até. Aquele que não podia partir para o sertão tratava alguém que fosse por sua conta (...). (BUARQUE DE HOLANDA 2007, p. 306)

The progressive weakening of the “sugar civilization” impacted the economic lifestyle of the “bandeirantes”, forcing them to find alternative means of income. The Bandeiras would have a prominent role in the 18th century as pioneers of the mining expeditions that would bring hundreds of thousands towards previously unpopulated areas in search of fortune: “Em poucos anos, aquelas regiões desertas transformaram-se na área mais densamente povoada das Américas, concentrando cerca de 300 mil habitantes por volta de 1750.” (RIBEIRO 1995, p. 167)

The process of independence from Portugal (1821-1825) also resulted in a strengthening of the border control between the Iberian countries, limiting their scope of action. Still, their actions left a severe impression in the course of Brazilian development and, in particular, of the Sertão, inaugurating a period (particularly from the end of the 19th century into the beginnings of the 20th) of social violence and groupings that would inform the Cangaço.

The production of cattle, key to the everyday running of the sugar plantations for its provision of food, leather and the brute force of the oxen, would continue the process initiated by the “bandeirantes” in not only exploring the Sertão, but effectively settling it. As the coastline was to be solely dedicated to the sugarcane, more and more people, devoid of job opportunities in consequence of the overwhelming reliance on slavery, pushed further into the Sertão, facing the natural consequences of working in such harsh environments, and consequently creating a particular kind of economic and social context:

No agreste, depois nas caatingas e, por fim, nos cerrados, desenvolveu-se uma economia pastoril associada originalmente à produção açucareira como fornecedora de carne, de couros e de bois de serviço. Foi sempre uma economia pobre e dependente. Contando,

porém, com a segurança de um crescente mercado interno para sua produção, além da exportação de couro, pôde expandir-se continuamente através de séculos. Acabou incorporando ao pastoreio uma parcela ponderável da população nacional, cobrindo e ocupando áreas territoriais mais extensas que qualquer outra atividade produtiva. (RIBEIRO 1995, p. 151)

Unable to pursue any other viable activity in the Sertão, the whole of its population was left with only two choices: to keep livestock, assuming the role of “vaqueiros”/cowboys (in the driest places of the Sertão only the goat was feasible) or to seek a more decent life in more developed areas of Brazil (the south was particularly attractive to those who had experience with cattle). For the former the return was very poor and the consequences of the drought potentially lethal. Another threat was that state politicians could award enormous land grants to whomever they wanted, evicting or charging rent to those who had for decades worked in a specific place. The outcome was a continuous nomadic push towards the interior of the Sertão, as Ribeiro states:

As atividades pastoris, nas condições climáticas dos sertões cobertos de pastos pobres e com extensas áreas sujeitas a secas periódicas, conformaram não só a vida mas a própria figura do homem e do gado. Um e outro diminuíram de estatura, tornaram-se ossudos e secos de carnes. Assim associados, multiplicando-se juntos, o gado e os homens foram penetrando terra adentro, até ocupar, ao fim de três séculos, quase todo o sertão interior. (1995, p. 153).

There were two more covert choices that the “sertanejo” could take, any of them forcing him to abandon any pretense to accept the law and the power of political institutions: joining the Cangaço or following a messiah.

The term Cangaço alludes to a wooden implement (a sort of yoke) that was used in the Northeast to secure cargo to the backs of horses or oxen, alluding to the nomadic nature of the inhabitants of the Sertão. In practical terms, the Cangaço were groups of outlaws who were constantly on the move and who, mainly through violence, etched out a living, either by pillaging small communities or large estates or serving any political power in need, as again Ribeiro states:

Até meados da década de 1930, quando se acelerou a construção de estradas através do mediterrâneo sertanejo, operava, como forma de revolta típica da região, o cangaço. Foi

uma forma de banditismo típica do sertão pastoril, estruturando-se em bandos de jagunços vestidos como vaqueiros, bem-armados, que percorreram as estradas do sertão em cavalgadas, como ondas de violência justiceira. (1995, p. 158)

The term used to describe the “cangaceiro” working on a payroll, defending an estate or attacking another rival gang, is “jagunço”. Until the first decades of the 20th century, the “cangaceiro” was an ever-present character in the Sertão, assuming, often enough, both the role of enforcer and lawmaker. Two sets of narratives sprang up in relation to this poor outlaw figure in “vaqueiro/cowboy wear”: on the one hand, the narrative of the South, horrified by the gratuitous violence of the poor man and his refusal to accept the established rule of law and the modern capitalist mode of production; on the other hand, the northeastern narrative about the downtrodden man, who takes matters into his hands when society fails, who is brave enough to face the institutional powers, and generous enough to redistribute the wealth among the poorest of the Sertão.

Both narratives will coexist and develop a complex identity for the “cangaceiro”; existing, simultaneously, as a hero and a villain, he is the product of an unfair reality and a consequence of an inherent brutality. The romanticized “cangaceiro” enters into the imaginary of the Brazilian people, a sort of anti-hero, a genuine character driven by his natural instincts and striving for a dignified life. His belonging to a timeframe when violence and strength — the ideals of masculinity and honor — are held in the highest regard, will ensure that the Cangaço becomes one of Brazil’s founding myths, in all its contradictory forms.

The inhabitants of the Sertão had no relationship with the centralized governmental institutions of Brazil. Power was exerted, and recognized only through violence. This might explain why class differences appear not to affect the structures of the Cangaço. Men from both the upper to the lower classes led successful groups of “cangaceiros”, some being motivated by matters of honor, others by revenge, some even joining the Cangaço for political ambitions. Power, in the Sertão, was not exercised by suggestion.

One of the main characters in Guimarães Rosa’s *Grande Sertão: Veredas* (1956), a rich estate owner, is a testament to the variable strange logics involved in the adherence to the Cangaço. He genuinely despises the ways of the “cangaceiros”, prompting him to gather a group himself, solely interested in destroying those others, whom he considers despicable:

A gente devia mesmo de reprovar os usos de bando em armas invadir cidades, arrasar o comércio, saquear na sebaça, barrear com estrumes humanos as paredes da casa do juiz-de-direito, escramuçar o promotor amontado à força numa má égua, de cara para trás, com lata amarrada na cauda, e ainda a cambada dando morras e aí soltando os foguetes! Até não arrombavam pipas de cachaça diante de igreja, ou isso de se expor padre sacerdote nu no olho da rua, e ofender as donzelas e as famílias, gozar senhoras casadas, por muitos homens, o marido obrigado a ver? (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 131)

José Lins do Rego's 1938 book, *Pedra Bonita*, does not portray the Cangaço in a positive light, part of the narrative depicts a group of "cangaceiros" ready to commit a myriad of atrocities, rape and murder, for the simple pleasure of afflicting them to an innocent crowd. At the same time, the "volantes", military expeditions to control criminality in the Sertão, prove to be just as bad, just as violent, as the "cangaceiros" themselves. This is reflected in the hopelessness felt by one of the characters, threatened and abused on all fronts: "Vamos deixar clarear, Bentinho. A gente se agasalha ali na caatinga por debaixo de um imbuzeiro qualquer. De manhãzinha a gente volta p'ra ver direito. Vida de sertanejo é esta que tu está vendo. Quando não é cangaceiro, é a volante fazendo essa desgraça que tu está vendo." (LINS DO REGO 1988, p. 162)

The "sertanejo" could only find solace on the bane his existence consisted in, only in the hope of a place, somewhere, some time, that might mitigate his violent life. The colonels were exploitative and prone to usurp the land and the "cangaceiros" represented a constant threat, unpredictable as they were "(...) até Sô Candelário, que se prezava de bondoso, mandava, mesmo em tempos de paz, que seus homens saíssem fôssem, para estropelias, prática da vida." (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 170). The representatives of the central government, materialized in the figure of the policeman and the soldier, were even more feared and distrusted, because at least the "cangaceiros" were also "sertanejos".

The material and social conditions were set for the population of the Sertão to cling on to any encouraging Messianic figure who promised an end to earthly suffering and the coming of an age of abundance and peace, as Muniz de Albuquerque Jr. argues:

O misticismo e a visão sacralizada da natureza e da sociedade faziam parte deste mundo tradicional, onde a influência religiosa de todos os matizes, desde o catolicismo popular

português, marcado pelo sebastianismo e pelo milenarismo, passando pelo animismo e o fetichismo negro e indígena, possuía uma lógica contrária ao materialismo e à racionalidade crescente da sociedade moderna que se instalava, notadamente, nos centros urbanos. O Nordeste é, pois, visto como o palco das crenças primitivas em oposição às crenças racionalizadas, às utopias político-sociais. (1999, p.145)

This need for a Messiah, however, was not particular to the Sertão. The impetus to baptize and convert both Natives and African slaves to Catholicism, was underway early on during the process of colonization, led chiefly by missionaries from the Company of Jesus, the Jesuits.¹⁷ To integrate the variety of pagan beliefs they encountered in Brazil, the missionaries were ready to make some concessions that would make Christianity, heavily dogmatized, acceptable to the nature-worshipping polytheist indigenous or African religious practices, as Freyre adds:

Um catolicismo ascético, ortodoxo, entravando a liberdade aos sentidos e aos instintos de geração teria impedido Portugal de abarcar meio mundo com as pernas. As sobrevivências pagãs no cristianismo português desempenharam assim papel importante na política imperialista. As sobrevivências pagãs e as tendências para a poligamia desenvolvidas ao contato quente e voluptuoso com os mouros. (1996, p. 330)

No other event could so definitely tie Messianism to the Sertão and the Northeast identity than the War of the Canudos (1896-1897). Previous instances of Messianism had already captured the nation's interest, such as the incidents at Pedra Bonita (Lins do Rego's book, mentioned above, is loosely based on the aftermath of that event) where a messiah-like figure declared himself king, established a polygamist society, and proclaimed that King Sebastian, the young Portuguese king who had died/disappeared in the Battle of Alcacer-Quibir, also known as the Battle of the Three Kings, would return, if enough human sacrifices were made to cover that particular stone in blood. After the first attempts, the community decided instead to sacrifice their king and, eventually, an estimated one hundred people were killed before and after Brazilian troops arrived to put a stop to the situation,.

¹⁷ “Mesmo realizada artificialmente, a civilização dos indígenas do Brasil foi obra quase exclusiva dos padres da Companhia; resultado de esforço seu a cristianização, embora superficial e pela crosta, de grande número de caboclos.” (FREYRE 1996, p. 219)

Canudos however, was a wholly different episode. Antônio Vincente Mendes Macial, known as “Antônio Conselheiro” (Antônio, the Counselor), a teacher and a salesman who started to wander the Sertão after learning of his wife’s betrayal, was himself a product of his society. It was easier to understand the harsh realities through mystic wonderment, and thousands were willing to do just that, as Euclides da Cunha argues:

No seio de uma sociedade primitiva que pelas qualidades étnicas e influo das santas missões malévolas compreendia melhor a vida pelo incompreendido dos milagres, o seu viver misterioso rodeou-o logo de não vulgar prestígio, agravando-lhe, talvez, o temperamento delirante.” (2000, p. 126)

Many people started to join Conselheiro in his random pilgrimage through the Sertão, rebuilding churches and atoning for their sins. Conselheiro was strictly opposed to slavery and considered monarchy to be a sanctified office bestowed onto a deserving man, as well as a believer in the myth of Sebastianism. Abolition freed about five million people from servitude and significantly bolstered his ranks, while the advent of the Republic was seen as an irrefutable sign of an intention to start the persecution of Catholics.

The catalyst for the war was a simple and, in light of what came to happen next, rather innocuous incident: the Republic, having declared the autonomy of the municipalities, posted public notices for the collection of taxes, a right that the Conselheiro did not recognize in the Republic: “Ao surgir esta novidade Antônio Conselheiro estava em Bom Conselho. Irritou-o a imposição; e planeou revide imediato. Reuniu o povo num dia de feira e, entre gritos sediciosos e estrepitar de foguetes, mandou queimar as tábuas numa fogueira, no largo.” (CUNHA, 2000, p. 138). Three hundred troops were sent to stop them, retreating at once, after the “conselheiristas” fiercely defended themselves, and marched into the Sertão.

Eventually the group established itself in an abandoned estate, Canudos, and started to build up a city, simultaneously erecting a cathedral. “Sertanejos” joined them by the thousands, topping the city at about thirty thousand souls, at its highest, from a variety of classes, sexes and ethnicities (including “cangaceiros” and “jagunços”, instrumental in the military organization of the community). A total of four military expeditions were sent against Canudos who were living in complete communalism and conformity to the strictest religious practices. Each expedition was surprisingly defeated

until the Brazilian army finally managed to conquer it, when a force of over eight thousand soldiers armed with cannons and machine guns stormed the city.

The War of Canudos, an event that culminated in 1899, right on the verge of the 20th century, defined the history of the Sertão. The accounts about what the troops had seen and faced in the middle of the backlands was one of utter astonishment. They had faced a breed of man about whose existence they were completely unaware of. Resistant to the harshest of climates and the strictest deprivations, completely dedicated to his faith and fearless to the point of marching against modern armies provided only with wooden clubs. It was a bizarre sight for a modern world, a glimpse into a done and dusted past, struggling, to the death, for its right to exist, as da Cunha exemplary details:

Fechemos este livro. Canudos não se rendeu. Exemplo único em toda a história, resistiu até ao esgotamento completo. Expugnado palmo a palmo, na precisão integral do termo, caiu no dia 5, ao entardecer, quando caíram os seus últimos defensores, que todos morreram. Eram quatro apenas: Um velho, dois homens feitos e uma criança, na frente dos quais rugiam raivosamente cinco mil soldados. (2000, p. 465)

The ensuing sub-chapters will be attempting to, first, synthesize the space and the climatic conditions of the Sertão, focusing chiefly on the impact of the droughts on the populations, and, secondly, to develop a synthesized understanding of the presence of the Sertão in the cultural production of Brazil, singling out the important role of the authors of the 1930s in establishing the mythology of the Northeast and its respective characters.

2.3. The Sertão Giveth, but it Always Taketh Away

Rebulir com o Sertão, como dono? Mas o sertão era para, aos poucos, se ir obedecendo a êle; não era para à fôrça se compor. Todos que malmontam no sertão só alcançam de reger em rédea por uns trechos; que sorrateiro o sertão vai virando tigre debaixo da sela. (GUIMARÃES ROSA, 1956, p. 370)

There are four distinct geographical areas in the Northeast, all of them displaying significantly different climatic conditions, ranging from the tropical humid weather of the Zona do Mato (the Atlantic coastline) to the Sertão, a semi-arid zone, larger than the other

three, and extending through the states of Alagoas, Bahia, Ceará, Paraíba, Pernambuco, Piauí, Rio Grande do Norte and Sergipe.

What is of central importance in the climate of the Sertão is its lack of rainfall. With an average of less than 750mm³ per year and, in some places, less than 500mm³, it is the driest area in the whole of Brazil:

Toda a paisagem natural, desde a topografia, as características do solo, a fisionomia vegetal, a fauna, a economia e a vida social da região, tudo traz marcado, com uma nitidez inconfundível, a influência da falta de água, da inconstância da água nesta região semidesértica. (DE CASTRO 1975, p. 202)

Therefore, the landscape is obviously constrained by the availability of this scarce resource, decreeing the region's struggle for water:

A flora de toda a região é do tipo xerófito, adaptada aos rigores da secura ambiente: à falta de água no solo e do vapor da água na atmosfera. As espécies arbóreas reduzem seu porte, se arbustizam em posturas nanicas para sobreviver. O frondoso cajueiro da praia (...) na caatinga adusta se inferioriza em arbusto, o cajuí do sertão (...), em cajueiro anão das chapadas arenosas. As folhas se reduzem ao mínimo para evitar a evaporação, os caules se impermeabilizam, as raízes se espalham em todas as direções para sugar a umidade escassa. Todos os órgãos da planta se apresentam nesta luta incessante contra a falta de água. As espécies que sobrevivem o fazem, ou à custa de uma economia rigorosa em seus gastos, ou à custa da formação de reservas aquosas nos bulbos, raízes e caules. (DE CASTRO 1975, pp. 205-206)

Even though these conditions might be harsh, for both animals and plants alike, the drought is the defining element in the life of the Sertão. The rivers, which, in normal circumstances, are already sparse and subjected to a continuous process of evaporation, dry up. Plants shed all that is non-essential for their survival and the animal world, both beasts and humans, become indistinguishable on their march looking for a safe haven. Those who undertake the great long march out of the Sertão, abandoning their homes and, by then, mostly deceased livestock, come to be known as the Retirantes. This kind of situation is depicted by Ramos:

Mas quando a fazenda se despovoou, viu que tudo estava perdido, combinou a viagem com a mulher, matou o bezerro morrinheiro que possuíam, salgou a carne, largou-se com a família, sem se despedir do amo. Não poderia nunca liquidar aquela dívida exagerada. Só lhe restava jogar-se ao mundo, como negro fugido. (1981, p. 116)

These characters, who have just barely escaped the closing-up of the Sertão, will come to national attention for the exact opposite reasons of the “cangaceiros” and the messiahs of Sebastianism. Their fragility and helplessness will guarantee that the now-opulent South declares the drought a national emergency. Public opinion is dominated by the urge to send relief efforts to the Northeast while the government will go on to establish an institution solely focused on studying and mitigating the effects of the droughts, IFOCS (Inspetoria Federal de Obras Contra as Secas), created in 1919:

A seca de 1877-79, a primeira a ter grande repercussão nacional pela imprensa e a atingir setores médios dos proprietários de terra, trouxe um volume considerável de recursos para as “vítimas do flagelo” e fez com que as bancadas “nortistas” no Parlamento descobrissem a poderosa arma que tinham nas mãos, para reclamar tratamento igual dado ao “Sul”. A sua torna-se a partir daí o problema de todas as províncias e, depois, dos Estados do Norte. (MUNIZ DE ALBUQUERQUE JR. 1999, p. 83)

The fact that it was IFOCS the first to use the term “Nordeste”, is symptomatic of how ingrained in Brazilian culture that process of otherness had become. The Northeast, which had for so long been a shining example in Brazil, full of riches, diversity and people, had suddenly been brought totally at the mercy of the drought narrative. The Sertão had taken control over the entire region and dried the cultural imagining of the sugar engenhos, replacing it with the Caatinga bushes among which, living in dried mud huts, lived yellowed and wrinkled people, starved, dressed in rags.

From that point on, it was not difficult for the South to construct the idea of a Northeast where the most hideous atrocities were committed on a regular basis, a Northeast without morals, where everyone had to fend off for themselves, against nature and each other. The “retirantes” and the drought are the material conditions for the creation of the mythological figures of the “cangaceiro” and the messiah. The pictures that came out of the Sertão were so harsh and the violence so unbearable, in the eyes of

the South, that every act of violence and barbarity, no matter how implausible, was objectively taken as reasonable, again as Muniz de Albuquerque Jr. adds:

Todas as demais questões são interpretadas a partir da influência do meio e de sua “calamidade”: a seca. As manifestações de descontentamento dos dominados, como o banditismo as revoltas messiânicas e mesmo o atraso econômico e social da área, são atribuídos à seca, e o apelo por sua “solução” torna-se um dos principais temas dos discursos regionalistas.” (1999, p. 72)

Still, on the backs of those squalid figures, walking for miles in the burning sun, through an ocean of dried bushes and the mummified corpses of both cattle and men, comes more than this pitiful bundle. They were bringing along with them the conditions for their own mythic process, the myth of the Sertão and the “sertanejos”.

2.4. An Abridged Account of the Cultural Representation of the Sertão

(...) desde o discurso acadêmico, passando pelas publicações em jornais de artigos ligados ao campo cultural, à produção literária e poética de romancistas e poetas nordestinos ou não, até músicas filme, peças teatrais ,que tomaram o Nordeste por tema e o constituíram como objeto de conhecimento e de arte. As obras são tomadas (...) como produtoras de realidade (...) As obras de arte têm ressonância em todo o social. Elas são máquinas de produção de sentido e de significados. Elas funcionam proliferando o real, ultrapassando sua naturalização. São produtoras de uma dada sensibilidade e instauradoras de uma dada forma de ver e dizer a realidade. (MUNIZ DE ALBUQUERQUE JR. 1999, p. 41)

We have previously discussed how the myth of the Northeast was historically developed, the antagonisms it held against the modernity of the South, how the Northeast and its cultural production was focused, on the most part, on the traditional popular narratives, legends, about the past and the people’s struggles. In this sub-chapter, we will try to center our attention on the literary production of the 1930s, “O Romance dos Trinta”, intimately attached with the growth of Regionalism, the Sertão, and the

Northeast, and quickly skim through some other cultural products that cemented this narrative on the identity of Brazil.

Regionalist literary fiction would only really establish itself as an expression of the specific, natural and human characteristics of a region after *Os Sertões*, by Euclides da Cunha, was released in 1902¹⁸. Up until that point the regions of Brazil had, for the most part, figured merely as colorful backgrounds to unrelated stories, grounded mostly in a fairly long period of Romanticism, for whom the matters of droughts, “massapê” land and the origins of banditry were far from being a topic of interest. Meanwhile, Machado de Assis’ realism, brought about, in the late 19th century, as well as Naturalism, quickly influenced the Brazilian novel.

In *Os Sertões* we find some early concerns about the social condition of man and the space that surrounds him, within the new logics of Regionalism. Euclides writes about the War of the Canudos from the standpoint of someone who felt, initially, a strong dislike for those following the Conselheiro’s figure. We experience, through the several chapters, the original prejudice falling apart, while witnessing the courage, determination and abnegation of those struggling against the much stronger and technologically advanced power of the army. He recognizes in them the very soul of the Brazilian identity, as Muniz de Albuquerque Jr. argues:.

Os Sertões de Euclides da Cunha, publicado em 1906 [sic], é sempre tomada como um marco dessa produção nacional, tropical, naturalista. Nas décadas seguintes, os críticos vão atribuir a este livro o início da procura pelo verdadeiro país, pelo seu povo, tendo posto por terra as ilusões de nos proclamarmos uma nação europeia e mostrando a importância de sermos americanos. Com ele, teríamos iniciado a busca da nossa origem, do nosso passado, da nossa gente, da nossa terra, dos nossos costumes, das nossas tradições. Teríamos ficado conhecendo, com ele, a influência do ambiente sobre o nosso carácter e a nossa raça em formação. (1999, p. 66)

The 1920’s will turn out a number of works that, in on one way or another, will set forth the same characteristics that the “Romance dos Trinta” will expound upon later. *Bagaceira*, by José Américo de Almeida, written in 1928, is widely considered to have been the most significant of them all. Centered around the events of the drought of 1898,

¹⁸ Curiously, Owen Wister’s *The Virginian*, considered the first “serious” western and which helped in the construction of the myth of the West, was published in that very same year.

it will not only focus on the plight of the “retirantes” but also on the conflicts between this sorry mob and the populations of the coastline, particularly the figure of the colonel, master of the engenho. The Sertão, like in the work of Euclides, is portrayed as an astoundingly powerful entity, remorseless, destined to, again and again, evict its inhabitants in a process of all-out destruction:

Sobreveio a seca de 1898. Só se vendo. Como que o céu se conflagrara e pegara fogo no sertão funesto. Os raios de sol pareciam labaredas soltas ateando a combustão total Um painel infernal. Um incêndio estranho que ardia de cima para baixo. Nuvens vermelhas como chamas que voassem. Uma ironia de ouro sobre azul. O sol que é para dar o beijo de fecundidade dava um beijo de morte longo, cáustico, como um cautério monstruoso. (AMÉRICO DE ALMEIDA 2004, p. 53)

The body of works developed in the 1930s would successfully provide the Regionalist movement with a cultural production to match its ambitions. Popularly called “Romance dos Trinta”, the authors broadly considered to be its most significant proponents, José Lins do Rego, Rachel de Queiroz, Jorge Amado and Graciliano Ramos, shared few stylistic literary motives among them. They can also hardly be considered to have shared a structured political ideology to inform their Neo-Realistic approach, since Amado and Ramos were, or later became, influential members of the Communist Party while Lins do Rego and Américo Almeida (later Rachel de Queiroz in the second military coup) were part of the first government of Getúlio Vargas. What united all these authors was their desire to express in their literary work their own personal experience and view of their region, the Northeast, each focusing on particular themes derived from their lives, their upbringings and social conditions.

Se, do ponto de vista estritamente literário, o regionalismo nordestino não existe, ele existe como discurso literário que procurou legitimar, artisticamente, uma identidade regional que havia sido gestada por inúmeras práticas regionalistas e elaborada sociologicamente por Gilberto Freyre.” . (MUNIZ DE ALBUQUERQUE JR. 1999, p. 124)

In the midst of the aggressive struggle being waged between the North and the South, between modernity and traditionalism, between the capitalist mode of production and the

large scale feudal process of the big estates, the authors of the 30s opposed the richness and opulence of the modernist experimentalism of the South, embodied in the works of Mário and Oswald de Andrade, portraying their reality, in many instances, with the same barrenness and scarcity that they found in the arid expanses of the Sertão. Their approach was Neo-Realist in form, no need for ornate linguistic displays of skill, the story was clear and evident, the violence plain, clear and direct.

The counterpart to this literary effervescence in the Northeast is the “cordel” literature, an equivalent of pulp fiction, which became especially important in popular culture following the events in Canudos. Focusing on the mythical narratives of the Northeast and the Sertão, these became the predetermined place for adventure and entertainment: “ (...) o que é, especificamente, o “vasto universo” representado na crônica cordeliana. Em sentido geral, é o Nordeste do Brasil, o Brasil do século XX e a sua visão do mundo.” (CURRAN 2003, p. 28).

These small leaflets, hung on strings, and sold in vast quantities, specialized in the lawless figures of the “cangaceiros”, and they reflected the interest of the public, as well as a sort of metanarrative, as Muniz de Albuquerque Jr. states:

O cordel fornece uma estrutura narrativa, uma linguagem e um código de valores que são incorporados, em vários momentos, na produção artística e cultural nordestina. Como a produção do cordel se exerce pela prática da variação e reatualização dos mesmos enunciados, imagens e temas, formas coletivas enraizadas numa prática produtiva e material coletiva, este se assemelha a um grande texto ou vasto intertexto, em que os modelos narrativos se reiteram e se imbricam e séries enunciativas remetem umas às outras. (1999, p. 129)

At the beginning of this chapter we alluded to the importance that the creation of two TV soap operas represented in the cultural history of Brazil, reaching audiences far beyond the tens of millions. The visual representation of the Sertão, unlike what might have appeared from the literary-centric view of its narratives, was fundamental, in some aspects even more so than literature, in outlining the characters and the colors of the Sertão. Two names appear above the others because of the way they visually portrayed the logics of Regionalism, Candido Portinari, painter, and Glauber Rocha, part of the Cinema Novo group. Both, alongside the softer representations in soap operas, were some

of the most important figures, outside literature, to bring the desolated spaces of the Sertão to the whole enormous land of Brazil.

2.5. The Sertão in Brazilian Literature

The bulk of our analysis of the Sertão in literary fiction will be structured in the same way as the previous chapter relating to the American West:

An introductory subchapter dealing with the biographical information of the two main authors, Graciano Ramos and João Guimarães Rosa and their respective works, taking the opportunity to expand on the reasons why both these particular examples were chosen over other equally emblematic works.

As before, the bulk of the subchapter will be divided into two distinct subjects: Character and Space, in terms similar to those used in the previous analysis, to guarantee we will have a basis for comparing both of the perspectives in the last chapter.

2.5.1. Graciliano Ramos and *Vidas Secas* (1938)

Acho que as massas, as camadas populares, não foram atingidas e que nossos escritores só alcançaram o pequeno burguês. Por quê? Porque a massa é muito nebulosa, é difícil interpretá-la, saber de que ela gosta. Além disso, os escritores, se não são classe, estão em uma classe, que não é, evidentemente, a operária. E do mesmo jeito que não puderam penetrar no povo, não podem dizer o motivo pelo qual não conseguiram isso. (...) Talvez seja isso mesmo: talvez porque um escritor não sente os problemas como o povo, este não o deixe penetrar nele. (MORAES 2012, p. 703)

Even though Graciliano Ramos de Oliveira (1892-1953) had been writing for a long time, both as a journalist and an editor in the Northeast, and even contributing with literary pieces (under pseudonyms) to several publications, it seems that he unintentionally stumbled into becoming a novelist.

Unlike some of the other significant figures of the “Romance dos Trinta”, Ramos was not part of the aristocratic class of the Northeast. Born into a middle class family, he

juggled his journalistic career with the menial administration of his father's small shop and, later, the running of a fabrics store. His election as mayor of Palmeira dos Índios, only further accentuates how his life appeared to progressively distance itself away from a literary career. Coincidentally, it is through the handling of the everyday bureaucratic responsibilities of his elected post that his reports got the attention of Augusto Frederico Schmidt, an editor, who came to promote his work. His first novel appears in 1933, just 20 years before his death, when he was already 41 years old.

His imprisonment in 1935, because of his alleged connection to the Communist uprising of that year, is followed by the release of two of his most significant works, crucially assisted on doing so by José Lins do Rego — *Angústia* (1936) and *Vidas Secas* (1938).

The novel explores the events surrounding the life of a family of four, parents (Fabiano and Sinha Vitória) and their two children, in the middle of the Sertão, right after a drought and just before the inevitable arrival of another. During this period the family slowly regains what they had previously lost, recovering weight and finding a place to live and work in, while simultaneously having to face the consequences of their poor education and illiteracy.

Ramos attempts to bring the man of the Sertão to the spotlight, freeing his character from all the useless paraphernalia that the regionalist movement had covered him in, showing the absolute bareness of both his poor build and underdeveloped psyche:

Ramos procurará mostrar o reverso do Nordeste açucarado de Freyre: O Nordeste dolorido do sertão. Verá por sob o verde dos canaviais o sangue e o suor que corriam. Falará de um Nordeste que se cria na e pela reversão da linguagem, da textualidade e da visão tradicionalista. Um Nordeste falado por um “narrador inculto”, um narrador fora da ordem discursiva, fora dos códigos de “bem expressar”. (MUNIZ DE ALBUQUERQUE JR. 1999, p. 256)

Vidas Secas emerges as the counterpoint to a literary tradition about the Northeast that was allowing itself to become too sentimental about the past, about its characters, too romantic about a place that did not really offer itself to such condescending and hopeful narratives. As Álvaro Lins points out in an afterword to the 1981 edition of the novel, both the environment and the people are depicted in a very different light: “O ambiente que os envolve tem qualquer coisa de deserto ou de casa fechada e fria. Nenhuma

salvação, nenhum socorro virá do exterior. Os personagens estão entregues aos seus próprios destinos. E não contam sequer com a piedade do romancista.” (RAMOS, 1981, p. 137)

There is another significant aspect about *Vidas Secas*, along with his reformulation of the social narrative of the Sertão, that makes it one of the most singular works to come out of the richness and diversity of the “Romance dos Trinta”. Ramos’ perception of language strikingly differs from that of his peers, whose work he sees as another vehicle for alienation, especially in its perception of the working masses, since they silence the real language used by the populations of the Northeast.

Thus, in *Vidas Secas* the majority of the characters own nothing more than the sparsest vocabulary. They find themselves at odds even to effectively understand and express their feelings and rationalize the conditions they are living in. They are rendered to a sort of servitude towards language, one that controls their lives through remitting them to an imposed silence and beastliness, by depriving them of the words that could free them:

Graciliano constrói, na própria textura da linguagem, uma imagem da região: minguada, nervosa, áspera e seca. (...) Nordeste do vaqueiro que se entendia melhor com o cavalo do que com os outros homens, que falava uma linguagem cantada, monossilábica, gutural, cheia de exclamações e onomatopeias. Homem incapaz de nomear as coisas do espaço mais alargado das cidades, que tinha poucos nomes para poucas coisas, que não nomeia porque não sabe e não sabe porque não pode. O Nordeste segmentado entre os que gritam, mandam e a maioria que obedece, que silencia. (MUNIZ DE ALBUQUERQUE JR. 1999, p. 258)

2.5.2. João Guimarães Rosa and *Grande Sertão: Veredas* (1956)

Se você me chama de "o homem do sertão" (e eu realmente me considero como tal), e queremos conversar sobre este homem, já estão tocados no fundo os outros pontos. É que eu sou antes de mais nada este "homem do sertão"; e isto não é apenas uma afirmação biográfica, mas também, e nisto pelo menos eu acredito tão firmemente como você, que ele, esse "homem do sertão", está presente como ponto de partida mais do que qualquer outra coisa. (GUIMARÃES ROSA (1965, January) personal interview)

João Guimarães Rosa (1908-1967), despite being a contemporary of the authors of the “Romance dos Trinta”, is usually considered among a later literary generation, active in the 1950s, such as Clarice Lispector and João Cabral de Melo Neto. These were both intent in expressing their relation to their native Northeast, but did not overlook a more modernist and innovative approach to language.

Similar to Graciliano, Guimarães Rosa led, for many decades, the kind of life which would not, at first glance, show an intent to dedicate himself to literature, in spite of having published a few short-stories in newspapers, during his time as a medicine student (1930). His career as a doctor was short-lived and, following an equally speedy experience as a military doctor during the period of the Constitutionalist Revolution (1932), Guimarães Rosa began his diplomatic service. While working as an assistant-counsel in Hamburg, Germany, he played a significant role in guaranteeing the means for escape to hundreds of Jews, out of Nazi Germany.

During this period, while working as a doctor and a diplomat, his works were few and far between: *Magma*, a collection of poetry in 1936 (won the Brazilian Academy of Letters award), a collection of short-stories in 1946 entitled *Sagarana*, where he first attempts to portray the Sertão and its people. Ten years will separate that collection from his only novel *Grande Sertão: Veredas*. In 1952, Guimarães Rosa embarks on a trip to the Sertão where he collects an extraordinary amount of information on the plants, animals and inhabitants of the Sertão’s semi-arid expanses on notebooks he carried along. This would prove paramount to the production of *Grande Sertão: Veredas* as Viggiano argues:

(...) as andanças dos cangaceiros se desenvolviam num sentido lógico, isto é, seguiam não só as trilhas naturais do Sertão e os leitos dos rios, como também as localidades se sucediam na narração e no mapa em uma mesma ordem, provando assim que Guimarães Rosa não só utilizou de anotações detalhadas para fazer seguir seus jagunços , como também os fez andar na mesma ordem em que ele se movimentou para o recolhimento desse material (VIGGIANO 1987, p. 14)

In *Grande Sertão: Veredas* Riobaldo narrates the events that encompass his life, to an unknown character, from his childhood to his last moments as a “jagunço”, going through the extensive travels he undertook in between those two moments. Riobaldo quickly

becomes a “jagunço”, influenced by the enormous respects his godfather holds towards them. He rises through the ranks of any group he finds himself in, thanks to the marksman qualities and his uncommon literacy. The narrative is driven, first, by Riobaldo’s loving relationship with Diadorim, a fellow “jagunço” (later we learn he is a female), daughter to the great leader Joca Ramiro, whose assassination gives rise to the second plot point, the revenge of the “jagunços” against the murderer, Hermógenes. Once this has been achieved and Hermógenes and his gang has been destroyed (at the cost of Diadorim’s life) Riobaldo retires from his life as a “jagunço” and lives out the rest of his life in the company of some of the friends that accompanied him in his journey.

Grande Sertão: Veredas would achieve a singular place in Brazilian literature. The novel links realist perspectives while the mystical qualities of the Sertão are also present. The Sertão is for once shown at a real and imaginary level, as Bueno argues:

Para um intelectual como Guimarães Rosa, que, ao contrário de Graciliano Ramos, via com suspeita a racionalidade, sentindo falta de uma ligação forte do homem com a terra, a sua própria natureza, o pobre, o sertanejo, o menino, o violeiro, o maluco, o jagunço não se diminuem em seu alheamento do mundo da intelectualidade. É bem o contrário disso. Sua estatura é aumentada, pois é da sua ligação ainda possível com o cosmo, por via da terra, que pode surgir a grandeza. (2006, p. 24)

João Guimarães Rosa’s choice to portray the Sertão in all its minute details, never surrendering geographical accuracy for the sake of the fictional structure, is another reason for which *Grande Sertão: Veredas* is fundamental for the objective we set ourselves up to: exploring the multiple perspectives of the literary world in regards to the events of the Sertão and how each author looked onto similar episodes in a different light.

2.6. People of the Sertão

Órfão de conhecença e de papéis legais, é o que a gente vê mais, nestes sertões. Homem viaja, arrancha, passa: muda de lugar e de mulher, algum filho é o perdurado.

Quem é pobre, pouco se apega, é um giro-o- giro no vago dos gerais, que nem os pássaros de rios e lagoas. O senhor vê: o Zé-Zim, o melhor meeiro meu aqui, risonho e habilidoso. Pergunto: – “Zé-Zim, por que é que você não cria galinhas-d’angola, como

todo o mundo faz?” – “Quero criar nada não...” – me deu resposta: – “Eu gosto muito de mudar...” Está aí, está com uma mocinha cabocla em casa, dois filhos dela já tem. Belo um dia, ele tora. É assim. Ninguém discrepa. (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 43)

Who are the central main characters of the Sertão? Previously, while exploring the historical and physical conditions of the Sertão, we identified three fundamental characters that are inextricably linked with the story of the Sertão, and of which two became the chief representatives, the “Cangaceiro” and the Messiah.

However, it is important to clarify the extreme permeability of these characters. Any one of them is bound to turn into the other. The “jagunço” — the mercenary “cangaceiro” — quickly turns into a pious worshipper, while the pious and simple god-fearing religious man can turn into the bravest fighter in the whole region. None of them are of a substantially different class from the rest of the working people of the Sertão. On the contrary, they are merely different expressions of the intimate relation kept by the inhabitants of the Sertão with both violence and devoutness. They are all, indiscriminately, people of the Sertão, bolstering the ranks of the destitute, limited by the very same reality of lack and need.

Having in mind the extent of this dissertation, the following analysis of the use of character in the literary fiction about the Sertão, is to be limited to *Vidas Secas* and *Grande Sertão: Veredas*, since the former focuses on a working family and the latter on the exploits of groups of “jagunços”. Our target is set on the people who live in the Sertão, their plight and their most fundamental characteristics.

2.6.1. On The Flesh

Naquele momento Fabiano lhe causava grande admiração. Metido nos couros, de perneiras, gibão e guarda-peito, era a criatura mais importante do mundo. As rosetas das esporas dele tilintavam no pátio; as abas do chapéu, jogado para trás, preso debaixo do queixo pela correia, aumentavam-lhe o rosto queimado, faziam-lhe um circulo enorme em torno da cabeça. (RAMOS 1981, p. 47)

Fabiano’s description matches what is widely considered to be the typical attire of the “boiadeiro”, a keeper of cattle (bois/oxen), the Brazilian equivalent to the cowboy.

Most of his clothing is made out of tanned hide — the “perneiras” (chaps), the “gibão” (a kind of jerkin) and the “guarda-peito” (a shorter jerkin) — an important by-product of the cattle industry in the Sertão, allowing them to endure the numerous thorns and branches of the “caatinga” vegetation.

The whole outfit has objective purposes. The “boiadeiro” needed to protect himself from the vegetation, hence the leather clothing, fashioned so as to allow as much ventilation as possible, as the hot weather of the Sertão would make a full leather attire absolutely unbearable. The “perneiras”, for example, only protected the front of the legs, leaving the back uncovered, except for the strips to hold them in place. He wears a hat to protect himself from the sun and the spurs required for horse-riding.

Graciliano Ramos does not go into any detailed description of the day-to-day attire of the family. Other than their work clothes, the references are few and far in-between, mostly just as a passing statement. Most references are only made with the intention of pointing to something else, to shine a light on other matters, as is the case of Fabiano’s footwear — “As alpercatas dele estavam gastas nos saltos, e a embira tinha-lhe aberto entre os dedos rachaduras muito dolorosas. Os calcanhares, duros como cascos, gretavam-se e sangravam.” (RAMOS 1981, p. 5). They are only mentioned because they could not prevent extreme damage to his feet, damaged as they were, exposing the poverty and the hardships Fabiano endures.

The only real moment when the clothing of the family is talked about in detail, the only moment where it holds any real significance to the story is the trip to the nearest town for the Christmas festivity. Fabiano acquires about ten meters of white fabric to make what he thinks to be the appropriate clothing for himself, his wife and children. Even if the result is barely suitable, the family, as a whole, feels immediately strange in them.

The children wear jackets and trousers for the first time in their lives — “Os meninos estreavam calça e paletó. Em casa sempre usavam camisinhas de riscado ou andavam nus.” (RAMOS 1981, p. 71). Sinha Vitória is obviously a stranger to high heels: “equilibrava-se mal nos sapatos de salto enorme” (RAMOS 1981, p. 71). While Fabiano compares his new clothes to the feeling of being imprisoned: “(...) apertado na roupa de brim branco feita por Sinhá Terta, com chapéu de beata, colarinho, gravata, botinas de vaqueta e elástico, procurava erguer o espinhaço, o que ordinariamente não fazia.” (RAMOS 1981, p. 71)

Theirs becomes a ridiculous attempt to emulate the ways of civilization, of the life of the city. None of them are minimally aware that they are acting while dressing as they are, but still, nonetheless, they seek to portray what they see in others: “Impossível dizer porque Sinha Vitória levava o guarda-chuva com biqueira para cima e o castão para baixo. Ela própria não saberia explicar-se, mas sempre vira as outras matutas procederem assim e adotava o costume.” (RAMOS 1981, p. 73).

They wore it because others wore it: “E sempre vira, desde que se entendera, roupas de festa assim: calça e paletó engomados, batinas de elástico, chapéu de baeta, colarinho e gravata. Não se arriscaria a prejudicar a tradição, embora sofresse com ela. Supunha cumprir um dever, tentava aprumar-se.” (RAMOS 1981, p. 76).

The clothing of the “sertanejo”, for Ramos, is not worn out of pride, of a desire to exult in his identity. On the contrary, it signifies and amplifies class distinction, between the poverty-ridden countryside and the modern polis. They have no choice over what they wear, they are forced, on one hand, to wear a utilitarian attire to work and, on the other, an outfit they could not begin to understand, to better appease the civilized ones: “Comparando-se aos tipos da cidade, Fabiano reconhecia-se inferior.” (RAMOS 1981, p. 76).

In a similar way, João Guimarães Rosa avoids drawn-out descriptions of the clothing each of the characters wears. Through the narrator Riobaldo we are given minute bits of information. When a leader of “jagunços”, Zé Bebelo, arrives in the company of five strange men, the reader, as well as Riobaldo, can only perceive what is directly in front of him, through assumptions: “De chapéu desabado, avantes passos, veio vindo, acompanhado de seus cinco cabras. Pelos modos, pelas roupas, aqueles eram gente do Alto Urucuia. Catrumanos dos gerais. Pobres, mas atravessados de armas, e com cheias cartucheiras.” (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 89)

There is nothing special or mystical about the clothing of the Sertão. More than anything, it is at the service of a harsh materialist approach, as is the case in *Grande Sertão: Veredas*. What appears, at a glance, as nothing more than a passing remark at a particular characteristic of one’s wear, holds, in itself, the extent to which the class divide is felt all through the Sertão and, consequently, on the groups of “jagunços” themselves. Riobaldo, a landowner himself (though he never takes an active role in the running of those properties), is shown, on a number of occasions, to be clothed with articles that exhibit him in a position of a much higher standing than that of many of his companions: “E o Reinaldo, doutras viagens, me deu outros presentes: camisa de riscado fino, lenço e

par de meia, essas coisas todas. Seja, o senhor vê: até hoje sou homem tratado.” (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 145).

There is a sharp contrast with the figures of the five companions of Zé Bebelo and even more pronouncedly with the strange figures he meets in the forgotten recesses of the interior of the Sertão:

Um eu vi, que dava ordens: um roceiro brabo, arrastando as calças e as esporas. Mas os outros, chusmote deles, eram só molambos de miséria, quase que não possuíam o respeito de roupas de vestir. Um, aos menos trapos: nem bem só o esporte de uma tanga esfarrapada, e, em lugar de camisa, a ver a espécie de colete, de couro de jaguacacaca. (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 377)

In general terms, both Graciliano and Guimarães Rosa chose not to dwell on the matter of clothing, relegating this subject to moments where there is indeed a need to make clear the class conflicts permeating the communities of the Northeast. Especially in the case of *Vidas Secas* where it is made clear the disparity between the objective nature of clothing in the life of the “sertanejo” and the purely esthetical life of the metropolis, fashioned with the foremost intention of display and little to no practical purpose.

In the following subchapter we will attempt to convey the intricacies of the mind of the “sertanejo”, his mythological and literary predisposition to violence and religiousness, as well as a number of other general characteristics, both behavioral and moral, that emerge as unavoidable for a complete as possible general understanding of the man of the Sertão.

2.6.2. Under the Sun

- Pode aprovar, seu doutor. Até João Brandão, que foi patente no clavinote, deu volta, quando passou por aqui... Meu pai viu isso... João Brandão vinha vindo p'ra o norte, com os seus homens, diz-se que ia levando armas p'ra o povo de Antônio Conselheiro, mais de uns vinte burros, com as cangalhas encaçadas... Na passagem de onde hoje é a ponte de Quininha, tiveram um tiroteio com os soldados... Isto aqui é uma terra terrível, seu doutor... Eu mesmo... O senhor me vê mansinho desse jeito, mas eu fui batizado com água quente (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1946, p. 234)

To begin our examination of the “sertanejos” role in the chosen literary works, we will start by inspecting the consequences of fate in the narratives, how in every story the “sertanejo” seems to be forever tied on a small leash, always taking him back to his beginnings. We will focus, after that, on exploring some of the most significant characteristics of the “sertanejos” character: their propensity for violence and religiosity, which has led thousands to bolster the ranks of social movements like the “cangaço” and track miles all over the “caatinga” servicing some ragged messiah; Their intimate connections established with animals of the Sertão, both domesticized and exotic, and, at last, the relationship of the hardened, hot-headed, “sertanejo”, baptized in hot water, with laughter and humor.

2.6.3. Eternal Return

São milhares e milhares se sucedendo sem parar. É uma viagem que há muito começou e ninguém sabe quando vai terminar porque todos os anos os colonos que perderam a terra, os trabalhadores explorados, as vítimas que perderam a terra, juntam seus trapos, seus filhos e suas últimas forças e iniciam a jornada. E enquanto eles descem (...) sobem os que voltam, desiludidos (...) É a viagem que jamais termina, recomeçada sempre por homens que se assemelham aos outros como a água de um copo se assemelha à água de outro copo. (AMADO 1971, p. 60)

Vidas Secas goes full circle. We have already mentioned the wave-like behavior of the Sertão, how the drought quickly spreads through the “caatinga”, pushing everything, mercilessly — whether plant-life, animals and its inhabitants — in its wake, and then, it recedes, bringing everything back with it. Life starts anew, slowly rebuilding from what was left behind, until there is, once again, the need to escape and retrace the same steps, out of the Sertão.

This process is central to Graciliano Ramos’ novel. The story starts with the return of the population to the Sertão, including Fabiano’s family, after a period of drought. We follow their process of reconstruction until the inevitable moment when they have no other choice but to escape, leaving behind all that they own, physical or emotional. By the time the family goes to the Christmas celebrations in the nearby town, Fabiano is wearing new footwear and Sinha Vitória’s body has regained its forms, but we

will see how their circumstances progressively deteriorate, once again, to the conditions we found them at the start. The feet will be bloody and the shoes will barely protect the soles. Their bodies will lose their shape, from lack of any proper nourishment. The cycle of the Sertão will be complete then: “Falou no passado, confundiu-o com o futuro.” (RAMOS 1981, p. 119)

Grande Sertão: Veredas is not as explicit in its representation of the cycle of the Sertão, especially since it is not primarily focused on the drought or the plight of the working man of the backlands. This does not mean that the idea of perpetuation is not present in Guimarães Rosa’s novel. The same themes of persistence, of repetition, of inevitability are perceptible in several instances of the narrative, especially because it focuses on the lives of the “jagunços”, who are after all an important product of the Sertão.

In spite of the changes that are perpetually occurring in the different groups of “jagunços”, with some men coming, others leaving, many dying or being killed, the common practices of the groups remain steadfast. One after the other, people keep joining or abandoning the world of “jagunçagem”, which continues just as resolutely as before, even after the retirement of Riobaldo and his closest companions. Everything will be repeated:

Dali a hora, mesmo, ele pegou caminho. Para o sul. Vi quando ele se despediu e tocou – com o bom respeito de todos ; e fiquei me lembrando daquela vez, de quando ele tinha seguido sozinho para Goiás, expulso, por julgamento, deste sertão. Tudo estava sendo repetido. (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 431)

The “sertanejos” are stuck in a repetitive process in Guimarães Rosa’s narrative. The cycle seems unbreakable, and all male characters that we meet in Riobaldo’s story are immediately available to indulge in the aggressively violent world of “jagunçagem”, only to, if lucky, return to the already violent realities of everyday life, the one depicted in *Vidas Secas*. Riobaldo ponders on the possibility of leaving the Sertão but, just like the river, he is sentenced to recurrently be thrown back into its midst, eternally returning:

Sensato somente eu saísse do meio do sertão, ia morar residido, em fazenda perto da cidade. O que eu pensei: ... rio Urucuia é o meu rio – sempre querendo fugir, às voltas, do sertão, quando e quando; mas ele vira e recai claro no São Francisco... . (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 562)

2.6.4. Mysticism and the Urge for Violence

Às vezes eu penso: seria o caso de pessoas de fé e posição se reunirem, em algum apropriado lugar, no meio dos gerais, para se viver só em altas rezas, fortíssimas, louvando a Deus e pedindo glória do perdão do mundo. Todos vinham comparecendo, lá se levantava enorme igreja, não havia mais crimes, nem ambição, e todo sofrimento se espraiava em Deus, dado logo, até à hora de cada uma morte cantar. Raciocinei isso com compadre meu Quelemém, e ele duvidou com a cabeça: – “Riobaldo, a colheita é comum, mas o capinar é sozinho...” – ciente me respondeu. (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1946, p. 59)

Trying to summarize the history of the Sertão’s catholic conversion would exceed the limits of this dissertation. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that African and tribal deities secured their continued existence by being hidden in plain sight, their figures and rites maintained in ways acceptable for general catholic consumption. In this subchapter we will focus on the displays of religiosity by the characters in *Vidas Secas* and *Grande Sertão: Veredas*. It is an attempt to make out some common perception, worked out on the part of the authors, of the inner workings of the religious impulses of the “sertanejos”.

The main characters in *Vidas Secas*, Fabiano and Sinha Vitória, confirm the very practical and mystical nature of religion among the poorer “sertanejos”. Living completely out of the religious influence of a priest or missionary, they have developed, by themselves, a practice in which prayer, for example, is just another natural resource available to them to heal wounds or fix a range of remedial problems, as we can see in several instances: “Tinha vindo ao mundo para amansar brabo, curar feridas com rezas, consertar cercas de inverno a verão. Era sina.” (RAMOS 1981, p. 96) and “Felizmente a novilha estava curada com reza. Se morresse, não seria por culpa dele.” (RAMOS 1981, p. 21). When their dog, Baleia (Whale), gets sick they make a rosary out of corn and hang it on its neck.

Faith is also the substitute for Fabiano and Sinha Vitória’s dreams, to which they recur when trying to fulfil their hopes and desires. It assumes that role on the minds of those who cannot do it on their own, who have no other way by which to manifest a wish that goes further than their most objective practical needs, as is the case with the leather bed so devoutly longed for by Sinha Vitória. They know that their situation is irreversible once the drought sets in, since they have experienced it before. Nevertheless, they fall

back to praying it away, not so much because they have any faith in their fates turning, more so that prayer manifests the enormous fear they hold towards another one of those periods, a fear which their lack of literacy prevents from rationalizing:

A VIDA na fazenda se tornara difícil. Sinha Vitória benzia-se tremendo, manjava o rosário, mexia os beiços rezando rezas desesperadas. Encolhido no banco do copiar, 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. Pouco a pouco os bichos se finavam, devorados pelo carrapato. E Fabiano resistia, pedindo a Deus um milagre. (RAMOS 1981, p. 116)

Previous subtler expressions of this can be found in the cogitations of Sinha Vitória, when the impending doom is only a faint memory, well in the past: “Chegou à porta, olhou as folhas amarelas das catingueiras. Suspirou. Deus não havia de permitir outra desgraça.” (RAMOS 1981, p. 43). This God is simultaneously all-powerful and lacking any substance, the catholic rites are unknown to them, their small participation in the church is but a reflex learnt from times immemorial. Sinha Vitória’s reluctance to abandon her rosary displays the closest relationship anyone in the family has with the sacred rites, since the two kids seem to be oblivious to any notion of God or church. “Nova dificuldade chegou-lhe ao espirito soprou-a no ouvido do irmão. Provavelmente aquelas coisas tinham nomes. O menino mais novo interrogou-o com os olhos. Sim, com certeza as preciosidades que se exibiam nos altares da igreja e nas prateleiras das lojas tinham nomes.” (RAMOS 1981, p. 84)

Graciliano Ramos opens up very little space for religion in *Vidas Secas*. For the most part it is reserved to complement the general illiteracy of the family, their inconsequential expressions of anger and aspiration. He allows them to hope for a miracle, only to enslave them once again, bound by the need to survive one more drought. There is no miracle for Ramos, no miraculous chance of escape in their mystical illusion, only useless alienation.

We could not devise a more different approach to this subject than the way in which the mysticism of the people of the Sertão is presented in *Grande Sertão: Veredas*. In the first section of the book, when Riobaldo is still expounding the theme of his monologue, we are forewarned about the approach to the mystical qualities of the “sertanejo”:

O senhor deve de ficar prevenido: esse povo diverte por demais com a baboseira, dum traque de jumento formam tufão de ventania. Por gosto de rebuliço. Querem-porque-querem inventar maravilhas glorionhas, depois eles mesmos acabam crendo e temendo. Parece que todo o mundo carece disso. Eu acho, que. (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 75)

The wider range of Guimarães Rosa's novel allows for frequent digressions, since it is all being narrated in the first person, rambles are to be expected, and several shorter stories are told. These serve to characterize the whole of the Sertão, as well as to explore the psychological qualities of the numerous characters that populate this Sertão:

Essas coisas todas se passaram tempos depois. Talhei de avanço, em minha história. O senhor tolere minhas más devassas no contar. É ignorância. Eu não converso com ninguém de fora, quase. Não sei contar direito. Aprendi um pouco foi com o compadre meu Quelemém; mas ele quer saber tudo diverso: quer não é o caso inteirado em si, mas a sobre-coisa, a outra-coisa. (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 197)

Guimarães Rosa portrays the “sertanejos” rather as a people able to accept and even revel in the myriad of intricacies that are created by the physical limitations of the space than the ball-and-chains kind of prisoners, perceived by Ramos. This allows for stories like the one below, one that perfectly characterizes the kind of religious emotions that helped the appearance of Canudos, which was, to Guimarães Rosa, a hallmark of the region and its culture:

Assim, olhe: tem um marimbu – um brejo matador, no Riacho Cizlá se afundou uma boiada quase inteira, que apodreceu; em noites, depois, deu para se ver, deitado a fora, se deslambendo em vento, do cafofo, e perseguindo tudo, um milhão de lavareda azul, de jãdelãfo, fogo-fá. Gente que não sabia, avistaram, e endoideceram de correr fuga. Pois essa estória foi espalhada por toda a parte, viajou mais, se duvidar, do que eu ou o senhor, falavam que era sinal de castigo, que o mundo ia se acabar naquele ponto, causa de, em épocas, terem castrado um padre, ali perto umas vinte léguas, por via do padre não ter consentido de casar um filho com sua própria mãe. A que, até, cantigas rimaram: do Fogo-Azul-do-Fim-do-Mundo. Hê, hê?... (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 75)

Grande Sertão: Veredas has a far richer connection with the mysticism of the “sertanejo”, showing its importance and significance on popular culture, how its unique perspective was able to promote a different approach to religiosity when compared to other areas of Brazil.

In broad strokes, there are two examples of how Guimarães Rosa viewed mysticism and how he put it into practice in *Grande Sertão: Veredas*. One of the major part of the plot deals with Riobaldo’s anguished need to discover if the Devil actually exists; at one point, convincing himself that he had sold his soul to the Devil, so as to be able to kill his rival Hermógenes, that question still torments him years after, when he is telling his story:

Mas minha alma tem de ser de Deus: se não, como é que ela podia ser minha? O senhor reza comigo. A qualquer oração. Olhe: tudo o que não é oração, é maluqueira... Então, não sei se vendi? Digo ao senhor: meu medo é esse. Todos não vendem? Digo ao senhor: o diabo não existe, não há, e a ele eu vendi a alma... Meu medo é este. A quem vendi? Medo meu é este, meu senhor: então, a alma, a gente vende, só, é sem nenhum comprador... (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 475)

The other important aspect of mysticism in Guimarães Rosa’s work, which greatly differs from *Vidas Secas*, is his attribution of godly, all powerful characteristics to the Sertão itself. We will delve into this matter further on when we talk about the representations of space in the Sertão in both works, but it is nonetheless important to, on this matter, single out how the aggressiveness and uniqueness of the physical Sertão were constructed, by its population, into a full-fledged autonomous deity. This belief helps us to understand just how important to the “sertanejo” (according to Guimarães Rosa’s view) his surroundings were, immersed as he was in a space that was, itself, mystical in nature:

O senhor faça o que queira ou o que não queira – o senhor tôda-a-vida não pode tirar os pés: que há-de estar sempre em cima do sertão. O senhor não creia na quietação do ar. Porque o sertão se sabe só por alto. Mas, ou ele ajuda, com enorme poder, ou é traçoeiro muito desastroso. O senhor... (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 521)

Guimarães Rosa and Ramos’ approaches to mysticism are disparate, with the former celebrating this heritage while the latter attempts to portray it as nothing more than a

useless reaction on the part of the weakest among the population of the Sertão. The same cannot be said about their characters' inclination towards violence.

This is not to say that both main characters are mostly violent, that they are unable to exhibit any other emotional reaction other than aggressiveness and hatred. On the contrary, Fabiano and Riobaldo express freely a wide range of emotions: they are confused, they are fearful, they are hopeful, and they are in love, with their world, their friends and family, with their animals. It is interesting that, despite all this, they still find themselves wishing to perform (and in Riobaldo's case, putting them into practice) feats of extraordinary violence against other people, be it their enemies or anyone or anything that represents a threat.

Fabiano is especially interesting when we try to perceive the origin of his aggressiveness, one that does not seem to have any direct correspondence with his relation towards his family or even against those who trample him, like his landlord and the yellow soldier who beats him up: "Aquela cambada só servia para morder as pessoas inofensivas. Ele, Fabiano, seria tão ruim se andasse fardado? Iria pisar os pés dos trabalhadores e dar pancada neles? Não iria." (RAMOS 1981, p. 105). It does seem that the violence of his thoughts is directly connected with the violence of the environment, human or natural. The recollection of his beating links with what appears to be the beginning of another drought, and opens up a world of instinctive desire to go on a killing spree against all governmental institutions and its representatives:

Fabiano passara semanas capiongo, fantasiando vinganças, vendo a criação definhar na catinga torrada. Se a seca chegasse, ele abandonaria mulher e filhos, coseria a facadas o soldado amarelo, depois mataria o juiz, o promotor e o delegado. Estivera uns dias assim murcho, pensando na seca e roendo a humilhação. (RAMOS 1981, pp. 66-7)

This is also not the first time he expresses this desire, to completely abandon his life and responsibilities as a worthless farm laborer and join the "cangaço", the representatives of an alternative law and order in the Sertão, where he can finally be a man, honorable, strong, and independent:

Carregaria a espingarda e daria um tiro de pé de pau no soldado amarelo. Não. O soldado amarelo era um infeliz que nem merecia um tabefe com as costas da mão. Mataria os donos dele. Entraria num bando de cangaceiros e faria estrago nos homens que dirigiam

o soldado amarelo. Não ficaria um para semente. Era a idéia que lhe fervia na cabeça.
(RAMOS 1981, p. 38)

He will frequently fall back into this desire to be respected, to be regarded as a real man, one who is feared and that does not stand for any kind of provocation and abuse: “Talvez estivesse preso e respeitado, um homem respeitado, um homem. Assim como estava, ninguém podia respeitá-lo. Não era homem, não era nada. Agüentava zinco no lombo e não se vingava.” (RAMOS 1981, p. 111). His decision, further on, not to use violence to get revenge on the soldier shows us, to complement this position, that he does not really wish to enact violence, but rather to be recognized as strong, to see himself as more than a beast of burden to be trodden on. The fear he instills on the soldier is enough to satisfy his urges of revenge on the repressive nature of institutions, while also showing just how cornered he has been, forced into impotence by a lifetime of oppression.

Riobaldo is an institution in the Sertão. He represents, as he eventually comes to lead a significant party of “jagunços”, one of the two established powers in operation, the soldiers representing the government with the “jagunços” as a counterbalance. Even though he relishes the power he holds — “Mas somente prezar que eu era Riobaldo, com meus homens, trazendo glória e justiça em território dos Gerais de todos esses grandes rios que do poente para o nascente vão, desde que o mundo mundo é, enquanto Deus dura!” (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 434) — Riobaldo is nonetheless aware of just how different his life would have been, had he been born on the wrong end of the rifle:

Ah, o que eu agradecia a Deus era ter me emprestado essas vantagens, de ser atirador, por isso me respeitavam. Mas eu ficava imaginando: se fosse eu tivesse tido sina outra, sendo só um coitado morador, em povoado qualquer, sujeito à instância dessa jagunçada? A ver, então, aqueles que agorinha eram meus companheiros, podiam chegar lá, façanhosos, avançar em mim, cometer ruindades. (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 400)

All that Fabiano could only dream of doing, to punish his exploiters and abusers, is a reality for Riobaldo. One of the most significant moments in *Grande Sertão: Veredas* is the pursuit to revenge the assassination of the most important leader of the “jagunços”, Joca Ramiro. Riobaldo, Diadorim and their companions make themselves available to punish the murderer at all costs, their lives included, giving chase in a fiery and unforgiving fashion:

Mas nós passávamos, feito flecha, feito faca, feito fogo. Varamos todos esses distritos de gado. Assomando de dia por dentro de vilórios e arraiais, e ocupando a cheio todas as estradas, sem nenhum escondimento: a gente queria que todo o mundo visse a vingança! (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 296)

In a sense, Riobaldo is the incarnation of Fabiano's desire for emancipation: having the ability to defend himself, to be able to exert his will onto others, onto his own life. In Riobaldo's case, violence is exercised as matter-of-factly as possible, without joy or sorrow, he does it because that is the way of his world:

Ao modo que eu nem conhecia bem o estorvo que eu sentia. Pena. Dos homens que incerto matei, ou do sujeito altão e madrugador – quem sabe era o pobre do cozinheiro deles – na primeira mão de hora varado retombado? Em tenho que não. (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 216)

Violence is not a matter of pleasure, or a compulsion, it is a necessity in the reality he is immersed. This is further evidenced by the repulse he feels for Hermógenes, even before the murder of Joca Ramiro permanently taints their relation, because of the latter's enjoyment of the suffering of others:

Ele gostava de matar, por seu miúdo regozijo. Nem contava valentias, vivia dizendo que não era mau. Mas, outra vez, quando um inimigo foi pego, ele mandou: – “Guardem este.” Sei o que foi. Levaram aquele homem, entre as árvores duma capoeirinha, o pobre ficou lá, nhento, amarrado na estaca. O Hermógenes não tinha pressa nenhuma, estava sentado, recostado. A gente podia caçar a alegria pior nos olhos dele. Depois dum tempo, ia lá, sozinho, calmoso? Consumia horas, afiando a faca. Eu ficava vendo o Hermógenes, passado aquilo: ele estava contente de si, com muita saúde. (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 170)

Notwithstanding the differences in the main characters' practical relation with violence, something stands out in this analysis of the topic in the two novels: violence permeates all relations in the Sertão, natural or human, especially infiltrating the relationship between different social classes, as well as being an element felt to be necessary in the construct of masculinity. Thus “justified” violence is not condemned; only when

undertaken for its own sake by such characters as the institutional yellow soldier or the hellion Hermógenes, is violence considered to be evil.

2.6.5. Zoomorphism

— *Fabiano, você é um homem, exclamou em voz alta. (...) Olhou em torno, com receio de que, fora os meninos, alguém tivesse percebido a frase imprudente. Corrigiu-a, murmurando: — Você é um bicho, Fabiano. Isto para ele era motivo de orgulho. Sim senhor, um bicho, capaz de vencer dificuldades.* (RAMOS 1981, p. 18)

Very rarely, if ever, do we see Riobaldo, or any other character in *Grande Sertão: Veredas* diminishing themselves to the level of animals. Riobaldo is very proud of his condition as a human being, as a creature capable of the conscious choice between good and evil. For that reason, animals are, for the most part, the object of either abuse, which in itself demonstrates their inferior condition in comparison to human beings, or compliment (used to denote a certain good quality, usually strength or other physical qualities). Hermógenes is often compared to, or called, a dog, and we have to recall that dogs were biblically considered to be the protectors of demons and hell: “(...) mas depois ficou [Hermógenes] artimanhado, com uma tristeza fechada aos cantos, como cão que consome raivas.” (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 278) He uses the term himself to diminish Zé Bebelo, another “jagunço”, as seen in: “Veio [Zé Bebelo] a pago do Governo. Mais cachorro que os soldados mesmos... Merece ter vida não. Acuso é isto, acusação de morte. O diacho, cão!” (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 261). Hermógenes is also seen adopting the qualities of a donkey, another animal culturally seen as inferior, as a servant: “(...) que o Hermógenes encheu os peitos, e soltou um rinchado zurro, dos de jumento velho em beira de campo.” (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 214).

One of the great differences between *Vidas Secas* and *Grande Sertão: Veredas*, has to do with the zoomorphic qualities. Fabiano sees himself much more like an animal than a human being. Both he and his sons frequently act and are described with terms associated with lower animals: “Os calcanhares, duros como cascos (...)” (RAMOS 1981, p. 12); “(...) deixava os filhos soltos no barreiro, enlameados como porcos” (RAMOS

1981, p. 21); or “A égua alazã e o bode misturavam-se, ele e o pai misturavam-se também.” (RAMOS 1981, p. 49) Only Sinha Vitória retains a closer relationship with human traits, as shown by her continued desire to sleep in a bed not made of canes: “Outra vez Sinha Vitória pôs-se a sonhar com a cama de lastro de couro.” (RAMOS 1981, p. 44).

Graciliano Ramos’ and Guimarães Rosa’s differ also in their depiction of the men’s feelings towards their horses. Riobaldo sees his horse as an extension of his own body, such was the closeness between them: “Senti meu cavalo como meu corpo.” (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 243). While Fabiano is but another animal, standing on top of the other, “Montado, confundia-se com o cavalo, grudava-se a ele.” (RAMOS 1981, p. 19). One is seen as the commanding figure, the rider, in an intimate and commanding connection with its subordinate, while the other is on the same level, both on an equal standing, poor and survivors.

2.6.6. Rir Mamente

Só ele sentado [Zé Bebelo], no mocho, no meio de tudo. Ao que, cruzou as pernas. E: “Se abanquem... Se abanquem, senhores! Não se vexem...” – ainda falou, de papeata, com vênias e acionados, e aqueles gestos de cotovelo, querendo mostrar o chão em roda, o dele.

Arte em esturdice, nunca vista. O que vendo, os outros se franziram, faiscando. Acho que iam matar, não podiam ser assim desfeiteados, não iam aturar aquela zombaria. Foi um silêncio, todo. Mandaram a gente abrir muito mais a roda, para o espaço ficar sendo todo maior. Se fez. (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 256)

In this quotation, the roles are reversed. The prisoner, Zé Bebelo, is standing trial for having waged war on the ruling group of “jagunços” in the region. He is alone amongst a crowd of fierce and excitable enemies, yet, he mocks them. The “jagunços” are relegated to the condition of guests, his guests, under his ruling. Bebelo is still the one being prosecuted, at the mercy of the decisions of the armed group of men whom he is diminishing, men who kill and employ violence for a living. His attitude is risky but the results are automatic: this simple inversion of logic has established him as brave and fearless, even in that very harsh and complex situation his power is now undeniable.

Joca Ramiro, the leader of the rival “jagunços”, is smart enough not to fall prey to the situation and, instead of rash displays of unbound rage and calls for revenge, he matches Zé Bebelo’s bluff light-heartedly. Just as the remaining “jagunços” had recognized Bebelo’s provocation, they recognize just how bright Ramiro’s response is:

Mas, de repente, Joca Ramiro, astuto natural, aceitou o louco oferecimento de se abancar: risonho ligeiro se sentou, no chão, defronte de Zé Bebelo. Os dois mesmos se olharam. Aquilo tudo tinha sido tão depressa, e correu por todos um arruído entusiasmado, dando aprovação. Ah, Joca Ramiro para tudo tinha resposta: Joca Ramiro era lorde, homem acreditado pelo seu valor. (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 256)

This short episode in *Grande Sertão: Veredas* is very relevant for our understanding of the role of humor in these texts on the Sertão. All through his trial Zé Bebelo brandishes humor as a shield against the overall feeling of punishment prevalent among the crowd and especially by Hermógenes, whose predisposition towards violence and aggression, prevents his grasp of humorous discourse. His inability is made clear through his response to some provocations by Bebelo, when instead of answering in the same fashion, like Joca Ramiro did, Hermógenes immediately calls for his right to kill him over the offences made to his person: “– “Tibes trapo, o desgraçado desse canalha, que me agravou! Me agravou, mesmo estando assim vencido nosso e preso... Meu direito é acabar com ele, Chefe!” (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 262) Quite curiously, one of the over fifty different terms used to describe the Devil is “O-que-nunca-se-ri” (“The one who never laughs”) (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 41)

This is not the only instance of a humoristic duel in the novel. There are frequent instances when opposing sides face off against each other wielding insinuation, gross exaggeration or the simple inversion of logic. A more conflictual exchange happens when some “jagunços” joke about the perceived lack of masculinity in Diadorim:

Mas Diadorim sendo tão galante moço, as feições finas caprichadas. Um ou dois, dos homens, não achavam nele jeito de macheza, ainda mais que pensavam que ele era novato. Assim loguinho, começaram, aí, gandaiados. Desses dois, um se chamava de alcunha o Fancho-Bode, tratantaz. O outro, um tribufu, se dizia Fulorêncio, veja o senhor. Mau par. A fumaça dos tições deu para a cara de Diadorim – “Fumacinha é do lado – do delicado...” – o Fancho-Bode teatrou. Consoante falou soez, com soltura, com propósito na voz. A gente, quietos. Se vai lá aceitar rixa assim de graça? Mas o sujeito não queria

pazear. Se levantou, e se mexeu de modo, fazendo xetas, mengando e castanhetando, numa dança de furta-passo. Diadorim se esteve em pé, se arredou de perto da fogueira; vi e mais vi: ele apropriar espaços. Mas esse Fancho-Bode era abusado, vinha querer dar umbigada. (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 159)

Diadorim answers this provocation by punching the jester and threatening to cut his throat with a knife. When the situation finally subsides, the group once again resorts to laughter to disperse the tension of the moment. The idea that pervades the entire narrative is that mockery is only allowed when directed to persons you dislike or when there is no particular relationship. Zé Bebelo never makes fun of Joca Ramiro, something which he does quite successfully against Hermógenes. Fulorêncio dislikes Diadorim, thus he mocks and diminishes him. Riobaldo loves Diadorim, hence: “E digo ao senhor como foi que eu gostava de Diadorim: que foi que, em hora nenhuma, vez nenhuma, eu nunca tive vontade de rir dêle.” (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 285) Riobaldo uses scornful laughter when in contact with the extremely poor Catrumanos, as well as when he is openly antagonizing Zé Bebelo, who feels especially frightened by it: – “O senhor, chefe, o senhor é amigo dos soldados do Governo...” E eu ri, ah, riso de escárnio, direitinho; ri, para me constar, assim, que de homem ou de chefe nenhum eu não tinha medo. E ele se sustou, fez espantos. (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 159)

There are a number of other snippets where the “jagunços” have fun together, though mostly in passing. They show us that humor is not always a weapon to be swung at each other, friends tell hilarious stories to one another, laughter is had in dinner parties, where all are well and comfortable, but still, none of them are really relevant to the overall narrative, just references made in passing. The previous scenes we have discussed presented us with a different picture, one of humor as another expression of violence, humor as a challenge. Only then, when laughter and humor can be interpreted as hostile, is it possible to laugh “màmente” (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 473) — with bad intentions.

The dryness of *Vidas Secas* can also be felt in its main character’s inability to express joy or put laughter into practice. Fabiano’s laughter comes around only twice in the entirety of the book. One happens to express his astonishment when faced with a contradiction: he feels cold in the middle of a very hot day, and another is the case of something which we could describe as laughing “màmente”; when the soldier is at his mercy, and he realizes the contradiction of the situation: the soldier being completely

harmless and him feeling an enormous dread over the contact he had just established with a symbol of authority. When he gets over this first hesitation, he can finally relish in all the power and strength he holds over that life, weak and feeble, and him, his whole life downtrodden, holding all the chips in his hand. He feels powerful, so he laughs: “Tinha medo e repetia que estava em perigo, mas isto lhe pareceu tão absurdo que se pôs a rir. Medo daquilo? Nunca vira uma pessoa tremer assim. Cachorro. Ele não era dunga na cidade? Não pisava os pés dos matutos, na feira?” (RAMOS 1981, p. 100)

Perhaps what best describes Fabiano’s usual character is the fear he expresses over being mocked. He does not know how to fight back, he is weak, feels exploited, he is a servant, unable to assert his will or opinion. He tries to avoid the soldiers, and refrains from entering into a discussion with his landlord, in spite of knowing that he is in the right. He desperately avoids mockery. Having endured all kinds of aggressions his entire life, mockery would irreversibly weaken his whole being, rob him of any little dignity he might have left. To those who cannot hit back, the power of laughter, particularly scornful laughter, is unbearable: “A necessidade de consultar o irmão apareceu e desapareceu. O outro iria rir-se, manganhar dele, avisar Sinha Vitória. Teve medo do riso e da manganhação. Se falasse naquilo, Sinha Vitória lhe puxaria as orelhas.” (RAMOS 1981, p. 47)

2.7. Na Planície Avermelhada/In the Red Plains

O senhor tolere, isto é o sertão. Uns querem que não seja: que situado sertão é por os campos-gerais a fora a dentro, eles dizem, fim de rumo, terras altas, demais do Urucuia. Toleima. Para os de Corinto e do Curvelo, então, o aqui não é dito sertão? Ah, que tem maior! Lugar sertão se divulga: é onde os pastos carecem de fechos; onde um pode torar dez, quinze léguas, sem topar com casa de morador; e onde criminoso vive seu cristo-jesus, arredado do arrocho de autoridade. O Urucuia vem dos montões oestes. Mas, hoje, que na beira dele, tudo dá – fazendões de fazendas, almargem de vargens de bom render, as vazantes; culturas que vão de mata em mata, madeiras de grossura, até ainda virgens dessas lá há. 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 opiniões... O sertão está em toda a parte. (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 9)

As the above quotation suggests, the Sertão is imposing, overbearing in all of its domineering characteristics. This space allows the “jagunços”, “cangaceiros”, messiahs and their pious followers, the lowly farmhand, the rambling “boiadeiro” (cowboy) to bid their existence, in these dried and empty areas until, ultimately, the Sertão decides that it is enough, that the living, breathing masses have to abandon their lives. It might be better understood as a deportation rather than a conscious escape. The Sertão looks like the God of the Old Testament...

O senhor faça o que queira ou o que não queira – o senhor toda-a-vida não pode tirar os pés: que há-de estar sempre em cima do sertão. O senhor não creia na quietação do ar. Porque o sertão se sabe só por alto. Mas, ou ele ajuda, com enorme poder, ou é traçoeiro muito desastroso. O senhor... (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 521)

Almost simultaneously, the Sertão might also embody the God of the New Testament, kind and forgiving, peaceful, inclusive and loving. The Sertão is a multifaceted creature of astonishing beauty, of gigantic expanses whose subjects are fiercely involved in its defense against all those who try to either dominate or transform it. In spite of all the hardships that it might impose on its inhabitants, spellbound as they are, everything outside of the Sertão is a mirage, another world, another reality. They belong there, they are the Sertão, and the Sertão is all of them: “Sossegava. Mas, tem horas em que me pergunto: se melhor não seja a gente tivesse de sair nunca do sertão. Ali era bonito, sim senhor.” (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 283)

Fabiano, the primary representative of the victims of the rash temper of the Sertão, keeps believing in the remote possibility that he and his family might actually experience what it is like to lead a prosperous existence, without want or suffering. He forgives the Sertão even when it has forced him to walk mile upon mile with his bloody feet, empty stomach and chapped lips, dragging alongside the bare boned figures of his two sons and wife. In the end, he still believes in the Sertão:

Ia chover. Bem. A catinga ressuscitaria, a semente do gado voltaria ao curral, ele, Fabiano, seria o vaqueiro daquela fazenda morta. Chocalhos de badalos de ossos animariam a solidão. Os meninos, gordos, vermelhos, brincariam no chiqueiro das cabras, Sinha Vitória vestiria saias de ramagens vistosas. As vacas povoariam o curral. E a catinga ficaria toda verde. (...) A fazenda renasceria — e ele, Fabiano, seria o vaqueiro,

para bem dizer seria dono daquele mundo. (...)Uma ressurreição. As cores da saúde voltariam a cara triste de Sinha Vitória. Os meninos se espojariam na terra fofa do chiqueiro das cabras. Chocalhos tilintariam pelos arredores. A catinga ficaria verde. (RAMOS 1981, pp. 15-16)

The presence of the Sertão in both *Vidas Secas* and *Grande Sertão: Veredas* is quite unique. The Sertão's standing is dubious, whether its existence is one of consciousness or unconsciousness, whether it feels desired or hated, or if it is only a distinctive and unintentional characteristic of the "sertanejo", who cannot help but be dumbfounded in the face of all that enormous size, the boiling heat, that burning sun, the depths of that unrelenting blue sky, and unable to explain it any other way: "(...) azul terrível, aquele azul que deslumbrava e endoidecia a gente." (RAMOS 1981, p. 13) Thus making him (the "sertanejo") believe that there must be a mystical existence that controls the immense natural powers that surround him.

Just like the poor French farm laborer of the 12th century, dazzled by the chromatic glare reflected from the stained-glass windows of the Saint-Dennis Cathedral, the "sertanejo" is in a perpetual state of rapture, mystified by the glory of the Sertão.

O senhor sabe o mais que é, de se navegar sertão num rumo sem termo, amanhecendo cada manhã num pouso diferente, sem juízo de raiz? Não se tem onde se acostumar os olhos, toda firmeza se dissolve. Isto é assim. Desde o raiar da aurora, o sertão tonteia. Os tamanhos. A alma deles. (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 311)

Before we point out the differences that are bound to exist between these two different novels, let us try to single out the most important characteristics of the Sertão, the foremost qualities of the place. Not the real ones, which we have already mentioned, but the ones that are perceived and imagined by both authors.

The Sertão is almost infinite; The incredulity of all characters when describing it attests to the sheer vastness of its expanses. It goes beyond the limits of human comprehension, the depth of it all, of its land and its sky, the sun and the silence, all holding within them the capacity to disrupt a man's mind: "Esses Gerais em serras planas, beleza por ser tudo tão grande, repondo a gente pequenino." (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 312)

Fabiano is thrown off by the deep blue sky, he feels simultaneously encapsulated, covered, and enveloped by it; it weighs down on his scant figure, persistently, remorseless, on those bright drought periods. Riobaldo is equally affected during his travels, day in and day out, always surrounded by the Sertão, nothing human to ground him to human society, only space, wearing on the hearts of his men. The first attempt to cross the Liso do Sussuarão, a desert area without water or animals, is met with failure almost instantly, sending the almost entirety of his group into a frenzy, thrown off by its size, its silence. On top of this, another characteristic seriously affects them: the scorching sun.

The Sertão burns. This is another aspect that is recurrently featured in both narratives: the heat, the power of the sun, the influence it has on the lives of men, animals and plants. *Vidas Secas* is especially attentive to this aspect but it also appears frequently in *Grande Sertão: Veredas*, as is the case with the episode of the Liso:

O sol vertia no chão, com sal, esfaiscava. De longe vez, capins mortos; e uns tufos de seca planta – feito cabeleira sem cabeça. As-exalastrava a distância, adiante, um amarelo vapor. E fogo começou a entrar, com o ar, nos pobres peitos da gente.” (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 49)

Or later, when Riobaldo delves deep into the heart of the Sertão and once again is faced with the consequences of heat on its maximum power:

Mas, quando estiou o tempo, de vez, não sei se foi melhor: porque bateu de começo a fim dos Gerais um calor terrível. Aí, quem sofreu e não morreu, ainda se lembra dele. Esses meses do ar como que estavam desencontrados. Doenças e doenças! Nosso pessoal, montão deles, pegou a mazelar. (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 376)

Graciliano Ramos colors his narrative in shades of red and blue, which dominate the landscape. Even in the middle of winter, there is red — “O círculo de luz aumentou, agora as figuras surgiam na sombra, vermelhas.” (RAMOS 1981, p. 64) — the same color as it had been in the summer, where “A catinga amarelecera, avermelhara-se” (RAMOS 1981, p. 64). Fabiano is colored like the sun, his eyes shine with the color of the sky: “Vermelho, queimado, tinha os olhos azuis, a barba e os cabelos ruivos” (RAMOS 1938, p. 18) and “Pela cara vermelha e queimada o suor corria, tornava mais escura a barba ruiva.”

(RAMOS 1938, p. 111) The only thing that clashes with this scorched red land are the bones sprinkled throughout, cold white: “A catinga estendia-se, de um vermelho indeciso salpicado de manchas brancas que eram ossadas.” (RAMOS 1938, p. 9)

Guimarães Rosa uses a whole color palette — blue, white, dark, greenish blue turning into the color of blood and hot iron:

Da banda do serro, se pegava no céu azul, com aquelas peças nuvens sem movimento. Mas, de parte do poente, algum vento suspendia e levava rabos-de-galo, como que com eles fossem fazer um seu branco ninho, muito longe, ermo dos Gerais, nas beiras matas escuras e águas todas do Urucuia, e nesse céu sertanejo azul-verde, que mais daí a pouco principiava a tomar raias feito de ferro quente e sangues. (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 193)

The Sertão is rendered both as an entity and as place, and appears consistently in the two novels, even when they represent different lifestyles and are depicted in different manners, one purposefully dry, the other intentionally rich and diverse. *Vidas Secas* purports to show the life of the “sertanejo” in all its hardships, to contest the idealized vision promoted among its romantic proponents, while *Grande Sertão: Veredas* celebrates the hidden abundance of a land, which, at a literal level was, very poor, but rich in characters, in practices, and in its speech.

Each novel focuses on what better suits their objectives. Graciliano Ramos consistently refers the drought, persistently painting the scenery with reddish colors, the chapped ground, the dried “caatinga”. Guimarães Rosa continually builds it up as a character, actively interested and participative in the world of the narrative, inflating its representation as a mystical deity.

Overall, the Sertão is the Sertão and even if the approaches are different, over the “sertanejo” and the “jagunço” looms the big hard sun:

E, mesmo – porque a chefe não convém deixar os outros repararem que ele está ansiando preocupação incerta – tive de indagar leixo, remediando com gracejo diversificado: - “Mano velho, tu é nado aqui, ou de donde? Acha mesmo assim que o sertão é bom?...” Bestiaga que ele me respondeu, e respondeu bem; e digo ao senhor: - “Sertão não é malino nem caridoso, mano oh mano!: – ... ele tira ou dá, ou agrada ou amarga, ao senhor, conforme o senhor mesmo.”

Chapter Three. The Wild Places

(...) regresssei da Califórnia a Nova Iorque por um caminho novo para mim: através do Novo México, do Arizona, do Texas; de toda uma região que ao brasileiro do Norte recorda, nos seus trechos mais acres, os nossos sertões ouriçados de mandacarus e de xiquexiques. Descampados em que a vegetação parece uns enormes cacos de garrafa, de um verde duro, às vezes sinistro, espetados na areia seca. (FREYRE 2003, p. 30)

Gilberto Freyre's formative years were spent in the United States of America, first in Texas and afterwards in New York, at Columbia University, where he studied Anthropology under Franz Boas. The likeness of the American West with his own region, the Northeast of Brazil, was not missed by his keen, attentive observation. He recognized his Sertão in the isolated and arid, plains of New Mexico, and he saw the West in the red Veredas of the Sertão.

These similarities go beyond the mere physical resemblance. We have seen, in the two previous chapters dealing with the American West and the Brazilian Sertão, how the settlement and development of those places were important to the construct of what might constitute the respective national characters. They were regarded as different from the civilized institutions of both nations — in the case of the United States as an opposition between East and West and in Brazil's case, between North and South — at the same time as they were fashioned as the true representatives of what supposedly meant to be the real American or Brazilian identity.

We have sought to delineate the diverse characteristics that inform those constructions, the basis on which they were founded, the foundations for their respective narratives, the history of their becoming, the practices that over the years became staples of their psychological and moral framework, which were to become, themselves, a fundamental part of what those nations believed they were.

This process, limited as it is, of uncovering the practices and rituals of these nations and identifying, particularly in the literary examples we have selected, the similar ways by which different generations conveyed the imagery, narratives or characters from their region allows us now to — always taking into account the limited scope of this analysis — compare the use of place and character in the literary fiction about the American West and the Brazilian Sertão.

We will, henceforth, seek to uncover similarities (or the dissimilarities) in the practices of each country's literary fiction production, using the characteristics that we singled out in the previous two chapters, and, when possible and relevant, ponder on the historical reasons that might have led to divergent literary and cultural practices in regions of natural and historical likeness, but which nonetheless blossomed into national myths.

Working solely on the matter of which characteristics are similar and which are not would miss a decisive and most interesting question. Since "Mythic statements are human statements, and are subject to the various pressures of knowledge, intention, politics, and contingency that shape human discourse" (SLOTKIN 1994, p. 24), literary fiction must necessarily reflect the societies it grows out of. We will most certainly be taking this into account in our analysis throughout this chapter.

The structure will be exactly like the one used in the previous chapters: We will start by going through the physical and psychological/moral qualities of the most important characters of the Sertão and the Old West and follow that up with a comparison between the physical qualities of both regions and the different ways by which the chosen fictional works portrayed it. In the end some considerations will be made on the results and why they might have turned out in this fashion.

3.1. Humanity

Are you a cowboy sure enough?

Yep.

You work on a ranch?

Yeah. Small ranch. Estancia, you might say.

You like it?

Yeah. I like it.

He wiped off the boot and opened his can and began to slap polish onto the leather with the stained fingers of his left hand.

It's hard work, aint it?

Yeah. Sometimes.

What if you could be somethin else?

I wouldnt be nothin else.

What if you could be anything in the world?

John Grady smiled. He shook his head. (McCARTHY 2011, pp. 95-96)

The fate of both nations was bred and emancipated from what was seen as the old stagnated European societies. They folded and hardened through the enterprising hands of many of those who had not found a place in those old nations. It was the working men who overcame the ocean, who braved the wilderness, fought neck to neck with incredible, unknown fiends and struggled, month upon month, year upon year, to plow those new lands. They did it against the gnaw of endless hordes of insects, the microscopic torments of new diseases and poisons and all the while desirous of achieving what they had always been barred from achieving — land and fortune.

The men and women we encountered in the context of this study were mostly of the industrious, persistent and hard-working type who became not only acquainted but intimately attached to the wild lands. Both the U.S. and Brazil required these type of people to populate and secure their growth over the majority of the territory of their respective Americas, particularly men of action, strong men, who would take the national imperative of the settlement in their own enterprising hands.

We find here the first coinciding feature between our objects of study. These figures had, first and foremost, a historical existence, only later to be fictionalized and popularized, as the *de facto* conquerors of the interior, the regions furthest away from the more rapid chains of supply and the support of the military establishment in the Atlantic coast. In both cases, they were the workforce behind the “civilizing” process and their exploits were of deep importance to the sprouting new metropolis of the coastlines, even if only as links to richer and more luxurious, lands farther on.

That is not to imply that those nations were particularly endeared to the idea of populating and extracting everything they could from the West and the Sertão. Richer areas were to be found in both the United States and Brazil with more temperate climates and easier access, as was the case with the both countries’ coastlines. However, the settlement of the West and the Sertão came to represent the indispensable tenacity and reliable character attached to a certain idea of the model citizen of these expanding countries, the most prized asset in the colonization/settlement process.

Another element that amplified the popularized persona of these characters was the need to — using their actions — instill in the general population, which was not facing the harsh adventures into the unknown lands, a specific set of values deemed to represent a specific national identity.

American authors endow their stories with sturdy moral lessons, actively attempting to delineate, for example, the boundaries between good and evil. Such can be seen in the works analyzed, particularly in *Shane*, which is after all the paradigm, where we see the compassion expressed by Shane when facing the wrongs of the world, forcing him to act as a source of justice and fairness often against his own self-interest.

Brazilian authors seem to be more contained on their endeavor to moralize the public, while, in the end, doing so. Their characters are somewhat more dubious, duplicitous, inhabiting grey areas between what is absolute good and absolute evil. Nevertheless, there is also an attempt to communicate the values of freedom, the values of what is seen as the non-civilized, traditional, world. Albeit for different reasons, both Fabiano and Riobaldo reject the Brazilian institutions and their representatives. Whether “jagunços”, well-off estate-owners, or modest, if not miserable, people, they all refuse to move to smaller (in relation to the size of the Sertão) lairs of modern comfort. It is precisely this, their much sought-after independence from any formal institutions and their resilience when facing their harsh surroundings, that steers the “sertanejos” actions.

Historical accuracy is not necessarily relevant in these stories. They offer an alternative reality, like memories, an out-of-focus background in which the more or less mythical figures enact their fabled struggles. In fact, it is important to stress that this cannot possibly be simply considered a matter of falsification, or a conscientious push to control social narratives but, rather, as a choice to portray the very best, most convenient, story that both nations cultural and political institutions regarded as best serving their national identity. The repetition of the same themes over a span of centuries and an array of different cultural and social mediums, right up until our days, helped in the construct of the identities of the American and Brazilian people.

Desde pequenos, estamos constantemente escutando as narrativas multicoloridas dos velhos, os contos e lendas, e também nos criamos em um mundo que às vezes pode se assemelhar a uma lenda cruel. Deste modo a gente se habitua, e narra estórias que correm por nossas veias e penetra em nosso corpo, em nossa alma, porque o sertão é a alma de seus homens. (GUIMARÃES ROSA (1965, January) personal interview)

It would be profoundly unfair to simply discard the entire body of works gathered and collected over generations as reflecting only the interests of the political institutions, forcibly imposing their narratives on the masses, unbeknownst to them. The population

would not have adhered to those concepts and logics, internalizing the morals and objectives of their characters, had they not been, from the very first moment, their most active originators. Generation upon generation collected and improved on past and present experiences laying, brick by brick, the foundations for what was to become the world of the Sertão and the American West.

Our efforts in the next subchapter will be to compare and contrast some specific characteristics that we have pinned out as particularly important in the body of attributes that constitute the idea of the leading figures of both cultural stories. Physical or psychological characteristics that, throughout the years, developed as structural and, without which, their recognition of cowboys and “sertanejos” would be undermined.

We will start by examining the physical aspects of these figures followed by their actions and desires. Their relationship with the society around them, their attitudes towards violence; the bonds established with the surrounding wildlife and livestock; and, finally, their acceptance, or refusal, of laughter and humor. What if a cowboy found himself in the “caatinga”? Would a “jagunço” fit in the wild wild West?

3.2. Outfit

In the morning riding out he came upon a party of mounted men, the first such he'd seen in the country. They were five in number and they rode good horses and all of them were armed. They reined up in the trail before him and hailed him in a manner half amused while their eyes took inventory of everything about him. Clothes, boots, hat. Horse and rifle. The mutilated saddle. (McCARTHY 2010, p. 68)

The leather attire of the “sertanejo” is widely known in Brazil. First, because of its association as the working outfit of the “boiadeiro” and then as the ‘official’ clothing style of both the “cangaço” and the “jagunço”. Most famous photos and visual representations of these figures show them in such outfits, a lot more colorful and customized than what one would probably see owned by poor workingmen of the Sertão. For instance, the photos displaying the severed heads of Lampião and his group make a point of displaying

also parts of their outfit, such as their flattened hats, riddled with religious and natural symbols, as well as their weapons¹⁹.

In spite of the significant impact the hat went on to have in Brazilian society, as a representation of the “cangaço” and particularly of the individual figure of the “jagunço”, it does not feature, at all, in the fictional examples we have chosen as representative of the Sertão. Fabiano wears one, a simple one, while in *Grande Sertão: Veredas* the references to leather hats are sparse and mostly indicative: “Ali estava, com um chapéu-de-couro, de sujigola baixada, e se ria para mim.” (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 103); or helping to set the theatrics of the scene “(...) Zé Bebelo tirou o chapéu e se persignou, parando um instante sério, num ar de exemplo, que a gente até se comoveu.” (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 90)

The same seems to apply to Cormac McCarthy’s novels where elaborate descriptions of the outfit are avoided. Still, we see the characters continually using or touching the various components of the cowboy’s outfit, such as hats, boots or stirrups, in the most mundane and banal of actions. Their presence, thus, pervades the entire trilogy.

McCarthy’s relationship to the cowboy’s outfit is, at a glance, non-important, but he does hold belief in its power and symbolism. The quote from *The Crossing* that we used at the beginning of this subchapter corroborates our assertion. The Mexicans look at Billy Parham and, identifying all the various components of a cowboy, know immediately who they are dealing with. Its meaning goes far beyond what can be objectively observed, this is a person whose job has something to do with raising/keeping cattle. The outfit has meaning: it dons its wearer with power.

The same does not happen in the novels concerning the Sertão. The hat does confer, in some moments, a slight aura of power and grandeur, “Zé Bebelo, montado num formudo ruço-pombo e com um chapéu distintíssimo na cabeça, repassava daqui p’r’ali, eguando bem, vistoriava.” (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 132) Nevertheless, there is no evidence in *Grande Sertão: Veredas* to say that a man becomes a “sertanejo”, a “cangaceiro” or a “jagunço” because they are wearing any type of clothing, whichever it might be. Clothes are clothes, serving specific needs. The “sertanejo’s” personality is not elevated by his wear, on the contrary, it is used mostly as an expression of the class divides of their society, it expresses the struggles of that people in relation to the environment

¹⁹ Annex 1.

and with each other and, as such, both authors refrain from donning any of their characters with any elaborate clothing.

The cowboy did not belong to a separate group, it was never the “Other”, and, in a sense, it became recognizable by most Americans as a sort of symbol. This is not the case with the “sertanejo” and especially with “cangaceiros” and “jagunços”, figures which inspired both fear and amazement in the populations of the coastline. Even if they came to represent a part of the building of the country, of some of the values in which it was developed, it never reached the marketing levels of the cowboy. Particularly the coastline and the South could never see the “cangaceiro” as a hero, thus illustrating the importance of the class divide of the country and particularly the literary community who supported and celebrated those exploited figures.

Shane represents the opposite, in contrast with the Brazilian characters. He upholds the intrinsic value of the outfit, a representation of power that only shows itself when Shane most needs it, when he needs to come out of his dormant state to assume his destiny. Shane participates in the class struggles of the valley, taking the side of the weak and needy, but he is nonetheless seen as a figure of another stock, another value: “This was the Shane of the adventures I had dreamed for him, cool and competent, facing that room full of men in the simple solitude of his own invincible completeness.” (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 206)

Another factor that might add to the discrepancies in each culture, the Sertão and the West, about the perception of the attire is the disparity between the characters and the social situation they face. Fabiano and Riobaldo are both contending with what is seen as the civilized society, one which has developed other aesthetic and social values. In the case of Fabiano, clashing with that reality, is a particularly damning experience:

Os caixeiros, os comerciantes e o proprietário tiravam-lhe o couro, e os que não tinham negócio com ele riam vendo-o passar nas ruas, tropeçando. Por isso Fabiano se desviava daqueles viventes. Sabia que a roupa nova cortada e cosida por Sinha Terta, o colarinho, a gravata, as botinas e o chapéu de baeta o tornavam ridículo, mas não queria pensar nisto. (RAMOS 1981, p. 76)

This does not happen with the American cowboys, who, for the most part, have to deal with people on much harsher situations than them. That is the case of Shane and the homesteaders, and Grady Cole and Parham’s journeys into desolate Mexico, where they

seldom meet anyone who has a more civilized way of life. They are the ones who are either allowing civilization to develop (Shane) or are seen as members of a more technologically developed society.

Thus, the only similar aspect is the relationship between clothing and work — the keeping of cattle or livestock, one of the most significant economic endeavors both in the West and the Sertão. As well as the reliance on horses, the maintainers of communication routes and indispensable for their line of work.

All these characters don the hat, wear the boots, a rifle or gun on their shoulder or holster, but the different perceptions the authors of Brazil and America hold on the deeper meaning behind their attire are not the same. This is further reflected by the lack of interest on the part of Guimarães Rosa and, chiefly, of Graciliano Ramos to dedicate much time to describe clothing beyond the necessary to convey what is rather more significant to them: class. This once again contrasts with the abundant references made by Jack Schaefer and Cormac McCarthy, in which the hat seems indispensable: “Mr Johnson was sitting on the back stoop in his duckingcoat smoking a cigarette. He looked up at John Grady and nodded. John Grady sat on the stoop beside him. What are you doin out here without your hat? he said.” (McCARTHY 2011, p. 122) There is little, by way of intentions or literary practice that connects between these cultures, in the limited universe of our study. The conclusion to which we have arrived here, in this analysis, does not necessarily translate into other representations of the Western and the Sertão in cultural media. The case of audiovisual representations in particular would most probably transform the whole result of this analysis, since the multiple narratives developed for that medium draw much more heavily on the physical aspects of the characters.

3.3. Psyche

*Eu vou ficar nesta cidade
Não vou voltar pro sertão
Pois vejo vir vindo no vento
Cheiro de nova estação.
(...)
É você
Que ama o passado*

E que não vê
Que o novo sempre vem. (BELCHIOR 1976)

The above quotation is part of the lyrics of *Como Nossos Pais*, a song popularized by Elis Regina's version. It is, however, a song authored by Belchior, who was one of the most significant young musicians from the Northeast of Brazil to enter the scene of the Brazilian Popular Music movement in the 1970s. The central focus in this particular song, is the criticism of the military government and the generation that allowed it to take power, the clash between generations, and this is helpful for the analysis in this subchapter.

The narrator assumes the position of someone who, like many others, has left the Sertão in search of a decent life elsewhere, in the city (as Fabiano dreams of doing at the end of the last drought cycle), and is resolutely refusing to return to it, to everything that life in the Sertão meant to him: stagnation, violence, and backwardness. Past generations might have lived their entire lives attached to that place, eternally returning to it, in mind and body, but another season has shown up to him, a whole new, luminous, life. He has broken that cycle, punctured that oppressive womb. Riobaldo ponders often on the possibility of escape, but is nonetheless unable to act on his ponderings.

The song also touches on another subject that is of entire relevance to us. It not only decries those who are stuck in the past. It is certain that change is inevitable, that the new always comes in to replace the old. This aspect particularly fits the cowboy's mindset, old cowboys and young alike, reluctant to ever accept practices and realities which do not fit the Old West narrative. The new modern age has come, it has brought with it outstanding medical practices, unprecedented means of communication and transport, an almost instantaneous access to all kinds of information, yet the cowboy not only refrains from indulging in the new commodities, he longs for that lost past, when none of that was available.

I dont miss pullin a tooth with a pair of shoein tongs and nothin but cold wellwater to numb it. But I miss the old range life. I went up the trail four times. Best times of my life. The best. Bein out. Seeing new country. There's nothin like it in the world. There never will be. Settin around the fire of the evenin with the herd bedded down good and no wind. Get you some coffee. Listen to the old waddies tell their stories. Good stories, too. Roll you a smoke. Sleep. There's no sleep like it. None. (McCARTHY 2011, pp. 188-9)

This are the words of Mr. Johnson, the father-in-law of the proprietary of the ranch in *Cities of the Plain*. But also Riobaldo, John Grady Cole, Fabiano, Billy Parham, Sinha Vitória, Blevins or Diadorim, all of them live their entire existence in the confinement of the mythic prison walls that limit their very realities. The mythical structure developed both in the Unites States and Brazil was grounded in an unquestionable need to have a metanarrative they could call their own. One that justified and informed each nation on its desired origins and desired outcomes, and this inevitably doomed these characters to a complete dead end.

This takes center-stage in the *Border Trilogy*. Both protagonists, and other characters, are born long after the Old West age, or the events of the Civil War and the great cattle drives. They live in the second half of the 20th century. In spite of this, their lives are wasted away in the hopeless search for the myth they were born into, a world that only really exists in the collective minds of their society. The paradox consumes them:

Back in the old days, said Blevins, this'd be just the place where Comanches'd lay for you and bushwhack you.

I hope they had some cards or a checkerboard with em while they was waitin, said Rawlins. It dont look to me like there's been nobody down this road in a year.

Back in the old days you had a lot more travelers, said Blevins.

Rawlins eyed balefully that cauterized terrain. What in the putrefied dogshit would you know about the old days? he said. (McCARTHY 1999, p. 48)

Anyone who assumes the role of a cowboy, who is determined to enact his ambitions and ways, has to pay the price. The cowboy never really existed, at least in its fabled way, his place in society is not the same anymore and the ones who aspire to reenact that role clash with the ever-changing “real” world. One might say that change is the cowboys’ most fearsome enemy, as we have seen in a previous chapter, even though the mythical cowboy/gunman figure is the one who promotes the change.

The Brazilian authors’ perspective on the fate of their characters is not one of imminent disaster, tragedy is not a definite consequence of their mythical confinement, but rather a constant presence in the lives of the “sertanejos”, in contrast to the looming tragedy that haunts the cowboy’s path. Fabiano and Riobaldo are similarly trapped in the

motions of their narratives, stuck in the various cycles of the Sertão from which they cannot break loose. We have seen how Riobaldo longs for another life in civilization and how that same desire assails Fabiano at the prospects of another drought rotation.

Pouco a pouco uma vida nova, ainda confusa, se foi esboçando. Acomodar-se-iam num sítio pequeno, o que parecia difícil a Fabiano, criado solto no mato. Cultivariam um pedaço de terra. Mudar-se-iam depois para uma cidade, e os meninos freqüentariam escolas, seriam diferentes deles. Sinha Vitória esquentava-se. Fabiano ria, tinha desejo de esfregar as mãos agarradas a boca do saco e à coronha da espingarda de pederneira. (RAMOS 1981, pp. 125-6)

There is only one way out for both sets of characters. Their existence is pre-determined: the cowboy is in a perpetual struggle with a constructed past; the “sertanejo” in an endless brawl to break the loops in his narrative, whether related with the space, violence or drought. Shane, a cowboy in the age of cowboys clings on to a ranch job in the expectation of not being left behind but is nonetheless forced back to his cowboy ways. John Grady Cole dies in a fight while trying to save his dame. Fabiano can hardly breath in between the impetus of the seasons, which destroy his efforts again and again. Riobaldo and Billy Parham live of the rest of their lives as shells of their former selves. Their story has ended, fate is done with them, they are left deprived of whom they loved the most and passively await the eternal slumber: “(...) and all continued on to their appointed places which as some believe were chosen long ago even to the beginning of the world.” (McCARTHY 2011, p. 263)

3.4. Violence

“A man can stand for a lot of pushing if he has to. 'Specially when he has his reasons.” His glance shifted briefly to me. “But there are some things a man can't take. Not if he's to go on living with himself. (SCHAEFER 2017, pp. 175-176)

Religiosity does not explicitly present itself as a sufficiently relevant characteristic of the Old West narratives to warrant a deeper analysis of its presence. It is relatively absent in *Shane* (where most of the sparse references to God appear as

expletives (god-damnit!), apart from the obvious comparisons between Shane and a redeeming Christ, while Cormac McCarthy does allow for a more significant discussion to be had around the presence of both religiosity and mysticism in the *Border Trilogy*, even if not presented in a straightforward fashion.

The natural mysticism around Billy Parham's first incursion into Mexico, returning the she-wolf to its alleged home, is somewhat similar to Riobaldo's own experience. Both perceive a supernatural existence in the storms and in the movement of the plains, a feeling always hangs on the back of their minds that that God they are imagining might be something much more ancient, ruthless, animal-like. The God of Christian civilization has little control over those parts and struggles to prevent these two believers from worshipping a natural deity: "The old gods of that country tracing his progress over the darkened ground." (McCARTHY 2010, p. 292)

The Christian overtones of *Cities of the Plains*, where John Grady Cole finally takes on the role of redeemer, a redeemer to the exploited, the victims of the world, by sacrificing himself for their sins, give us the best cue towards introducing our examination over the diverse roles taken up by violence in each one of these narratives.

Before I name you completely to myself I will give you even yet a last chance to save yourself. I will let you walk, suitor. If walk you will.

(...) Save yourself, he said. If you can. Save yourself, whoremaster. (...)

He is deaf to reason. To his friends. The blind maestro. All. He wishes nothing so fondly as to throw himself into the grave of a dead whore. And he calls me names. (McCARTHY 2011, p. 251)

Violence pervades both worlds. The Sertão and the West are both established on the basis of power, while the idealized society is yet to develop a strong justice and security system where the power of individuals can be replaced by the expected impartial sovereignty of the state's institutions. The strong rule with impunity, subjugating those who cannot escape abject servitude and a life of perpetual mistreatment, always reminding whom they owe the fear-stricken lives they lead. Weapons are the tools of their trade:

It was clean and polished and oiled. The empty cylinder, when I released the catch and flicked it, spun swiftly and noiselessly. I was surprised to see that the front sight was

gone, the barrel smooth right down to the end, and that the hammer had been filed to a sharp point.

Why should a man do that to a gun? Why should a man with a gun like that refuse to wear it and show it off? (...) (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 83)

The fact that the use of weapons is generalized among all the examples of our case study does not exactly correlate there is any kind of inherent desire on the part of the characters to partake in the ceaseless tug-of-war of the Sertão or, in the West, as agents of their own self-interest. As a rule, none of them employs force to ease the completion of their tasks, objectives or ambitions, refusing to fight or shoot until the very last moment, when their hands are tied by the circumstances. Riobaldo's Urutu Branco persona somewhat escapes this notion, after assuming the important position of leader amongst his fellow "jagunços".

The cowboys, in particular, are moved by this code of conduct. John Grady Cole is instinctively drawn by the urge to protect Magdalene, fully accepting the consequences of his actions. Shane is first badly beaten in a bar brawl while being completely outnumbered and, finally, shot in the gut, all to protect the way of life of some homesteaders. Billy Parham would rather face two "bandoleiros" in a deserted road in Mexico rather than open the bag that contains the remains of his brother, this response resulting in the stabbing of his horse and having the majority of his possessions stolen, as well as the remains of his brother violated. When Blevins is taken to be shot, Rawlins knows that he must do something to prevent Grady Cole's natural impulse to protect the young cowboy and put their lives in more serious danger.

Rawlins looked at John Grady. His mouth was tight. John Grady watched the small ragged figure vanish limping among the trees with his keepers. There seemed insufficient substance to him to be the object of men's wrath. There seemed nothing about him sufficient to fuel any enterprise at all.

Dont you say nothin, said Rawlins.

All right.

Dont you say a damn word.

John Grady turned and looked at him. He looked at the guards and he looked at the place where they were, the strange land, the strange sky.

All right, he said. I wont. (McCARTHY 1999, p. 149).

Cole's failure to act is somewhat atoned by his determination in taking back his and Blevins' horses, attempting to return them back to his owner, thus fulfilling Blevin's perceived duty. This decision results in a shoot-out in which he is seriously harmed. The captain whom he takes as hostage knows what kind of a man he is, when he states: "You make bad troubles for you self." (McCARTHY 1999, p. 216).

This is the good-bad guy. The man willing to put himself in harm's way to attempt to stand up for the little guy, for the victim of robbery, for the humiliated farmer or rancher, the innocent youngster, the humiliated female. The men who exert this kind of punitive violence against the stronger authoritative figures who torment Western society, are not, however, on the same level as those they defend. It is not that they are richer, of irreconcilable economic classes. They are distinguished by their decision to bear arms and particularly by how they choose to use them:

You dont care for us to have to look out for you though, do you?

I can look out for myself.

Sure you can. I guess you got a gun and all.

He didnt answer for a minute. Then he said: I got a gun. (McCARTHY 1999, p. 39)

Somewhat similar circumstances are to be found in the fictional examples of the Sertão though with some significant differences. The "sertanejo" is justified in his violent thoughts, intents and actions by directing them at the figures that indiscriminately exert psychological or physical violence onto him or others. His drive is not, unlike the cowboy, borne out of a selfless kindness, from a true desire to protect. It is directly aimed at the perpetrators of such violence, he is set to get revenge for those actions:

Fabiano pregou nele os olhos ensangüentados, meteu o facão na bainha. Podia matá-lo com as unhas. Lembrou-se da surra que levava e da noite passada na cadeia. Sim senhor. Aquilo ganhava dinheiro para maltratar as criaturas inofensivas. Estava certo? O rosto de Fabiano contraía-se, medonho, mais feio que um focinho. Hem? Estava certo? Bulir com as pessoas que não fazem mal a ninguém. Por que? Sufocava-se, as rugas da testa aprofundavam-se, os pequenos olhos azuis abriam-se demais, numa interrogação dolorosa. (RAMOS 1981, p. 101)

Guimarães Rosa further explores the psychological drive of the "villain", the figure Fabiano and Riobaldo spend their lives wishing they could punish and which is

personalized in Riobaldo's persona Urutu Branco, who is willing to murder a man for the sake of murdering. This drive of his is fueled by the power conferred to his person by having been chosen as leader by hundreds of "jagunços". He comes to represent the indiscriminate power of the social institutions and their indiscriminate power over individuals.

Aquele homem merecia punições de morte, eu vislumbrei, adivinhado. Com o poder de quê: luz de Lúcifer? E era, somente sei. A porque, sem prazo, se esquentou em mim o doido afã de matar aquele homem, tresmatado. O desejo em si, que nem era por conta do tal dinheiro: que bastava eu exigir e ele civilmente me entregava. Mas matar, matar assassinado, por má lei. Pois não era? Aí, esfreguei bem minhas mãos, ia apalpar as armas. Aí tive até um pronto de rir: nhô Constâncio Alves não sabia que a vida era do tamanhinho só menos de que um minuto... (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 461)

Violence is widespread throughout the narratives. The literary fiction of both countries depicts a reality where it is regarded as not unlike any other inevitability, it is as it is and there is no changing that. The main characters of our cases studies, as well as most other figures whom we are introduced to are frequently seen exerting it over others, some going as far, in some instances, as to commit murder, or, otherwise, facing the dire consequences of being on its receiving end. Diadorim, Blevins, Joca Ramiro, Grady Cole, the humanoid dog Baleia and Parham's brother Boyd, are amongst those murdered, while the others are frequently beaten, shot at, knifed and threatened.

It is in the reaction to the institutionalized aggression of the Sertão and the American West that we find the most significant difference in an otherwise similar depiction of the act. The cowboy chooses to employ it in the defense of the helpless; the "sertanejo" is determined to retaliate against all that freely and carelessly use it to help themselves.

3.5. Animalism

Fabiano ia desprecatado, observando esses sinais e outros que se cruzavam, de viventes menores. Corcunda, parecia farejar o solo — e a catinga deserta animava-se,

os bichos que ali tinham passado voltavam, apareciam-lhe diante dos olhos miúdos.

(RAMOS 1981, p.99)

Modern society has seen fit to relegate the overwhelming majority of the sundry animal kingdom to some small niche spaces of its own design. Either for their exploitation as producers of goods, or, in other cases, to keep them in seclusion in such a way as to avoid any undesirable interaction with human civilization. Life in the frontier, in the wild spaces, is full with domestic and wild animals.

This is obvious in the narratives of the Sertão and the American West. The presence of animals is almost constantly felt in all of our case studies. Some animals represent the economic backbone of some communities, as well as a steady supply of food products, while others provide much needed protection and constitute the only viable means of transportation in a world of rudimentary roads and scarce, if any, train-tracks.

When it comes to the American West, the majority of the animal fauna has been tamed, any wildlife that was still in existence in the time of *Shane* has since been driven out of the country in the *Trilogy* (the wild she-wolf, although not completely tamed, was only made controllable by Billy), which does not avoid the intimate relation established with them. Shane, a cowboy, stands out for riding his horse intensely, without hesitation: “There seemed nothing remarkable about him, just another stray horseman riding up the road toward the cluster of frame buildings that was our town.” (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 20) He is a horseman. The social dispute he finds himself immersed in is not only related to the land, it is also about securing the best conditions of life to smaller ranchers.

John Grady Cole and Billy Parham make their living in and around ranches. John is widely regarded as an outstanding cowboy, breaking even the wildest horses: “Well, Billy said, I got a suspicion that whatever it is he aims to do he'll most likely get it done.” (McCARTHY 2011, p. 14) Parham is not as good as Cole with horses, but two of his three crossings into Mexico were made with the intention of returning a stray she-wolf and retrieving his dead parents' horses. His affiliation to them is one of fierce empathy: “The boy looked at the wolf. He looked at the crowd. His eyes were swimming (...)”. (McCARTHY 2010, p. 88)

The Sertão represents a place still deeply embroiled in the wilderness. There are frequent references to felines and a variety of colorful birds alongside a number of the usual domesticized animals, such as dogs and horses. Riobaldo is not particularly attached

to any one animal, but that does not stop him from being deeply troubled by the unnecessary violence exerted on them:

Arre e era. Aí lá cheio o curralão, com a boa animalada nossa, os pobres dos cavalos ali presos, tão sadios todos, que não tinham culpa de nada; e eles, cães aqueles, sem temor de Deus nem justiça de coração, se viravam para judiar e estragar, o rasgável da alma da gente – no vivo dos cavalos, a torto e direito, fazendo fogo! (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 334)

Fabiano is equally emotional when he is forced to put down, due to sickness, the family's anthropomorphic dog Baleia, whom they are entirely unable to forget throughout the narrative. The Sertão has already made it clear that it is time for them to flee yet the thought of abandoning the last resting place of their dog pains them: "A lembrança da cachorra Baleia picava-o, intolerável. Não podia livrar-se dela." (RAMOS 1981, p. 123)

The differences, when it comes to the attribution of humane qualities to animals, are of negligible notice. We witness, throughout the narratives of all of the examples used in this dissertation, the miscegenation of their (man and beast) figures; the development of a hybrid that surfaces only when the hearts of man and their companions beat at such a fast and in sync pace, hearts desirous of independence and of intimate connection to the natural, that they inevitably fuse with one another, forming a single, unique, entity. The Sertão and the American West regard the animal in the same intimate light.

This assumption is further evidenced by the numerous similarities that are to be found in the use of animalisms in the works that make up our case study. They reveal just how connected the cultures of the Sertão and the American West are when it comes to the bond between men and nature, employing similar tactics to both expand and inform their characters' personalities and moods.

The authenticity of the range of emotions of the animals (the most rudimentary of them might be, for example, fear, anger or joy) coupled with their obvious physical qualities, determine the relationship we establish with each species, such as respect for the power of the lion and disdain for the foulness of the pig, and are thus adequate to use as comparison with the people of the wilderness. For them such comparison does not stand out as strange: "They did not smell like horses. They smelled like what they were, wild animals." (McCARTHY 1999, pp. 87-8)

Thus, when it comes to exalt the qualities of Riobaldo, Shane or John Grady Cole, the comparisons are purposefully drawn up by equating them to either “onças” (jaguars) or horses. In Fabiano’s case, a poor wretched soul, he is generally compared to what is viewed as the lowest of the low: he is a pig, a scavenger, feeding on the leftovers of far grander man and creatures — “O rosto de Fabiano contraía-se, medonho, mais feio que um focinho.” (RAMOS 1981, p. 101) The comparison with animals both magnifies the powers of the men as well as inevitably separates them from civilization, leaving them in a limbo, somewhere in between humanity and the instinctive nature of the animal.

This is further attained in the relation that all these men keep with their animals. McCarthy, for example, who does not frequently use such artifices as described in the previous chapters (direct comparisons), would rather achieve that unspoken relation between man and beast throughout the development of the narrative. Such can be seen in the uncanny predisposition of hounds, wolves, horses, that are impelled to develop a sense of trust and understanding with his characters.

The injured hound had come from the fire where the men were sorting and chaining the dogs and it walked out and stood beside John Grady and studied with him the plain below. John Grady sat and let his boots dangle over the edge of the rock and the dog lay down and rested its bloody head alongside his leg and after a while he put his arm around it. (McCARTHY 2011, pp. 92-3)

There is a synergy between both literary cultures on this matter, since all four novels, as disparate as they are, and representing diverse practices and generations, depict the deep connection of the man and his horse. Their frames become confused, a symbiotic link where each seemingly assimilates the other’s needs and intentions. When Shane is called back by Joe Starrett, it is not only he who promptly answers the call, the supposedly irrational horse has the selfsame reaction, his will is bound to Shane’s. "Don't be in such a hurry, stranger." I had to hold tight to the rail or I would have fallen back-wards into the corral. At the first sound of father's voice, the man and the horse, like a single being, had wheeled to face us (...)." (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 26).

3.6. Humor

Diadorim e eu, nós dois. A gente dava passeios. Com assim, a gente se diferenciava dos outros – porque jagunço não é muito de conversa continuada nem de amizades estreitas: a bem eles se misturam e desmisturam, de acaso, mas cada um é feito um por si. De nós dois juntos, ninguém nada não falava. Tinham a boa prudência. Dissesse um, caçoasse, digo – podia morrer. (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 30)

Having in mind what was stated earlier, it might seem that the Sertão and the American West had no place for good-humored laughter and fun, where any joke, no matter how well-intentioned or bland, had always to be weighed up by the recipient. Should he tolerate being the butt of the joke? What would be the intentions of the joker to mock the color-scheme of my jacket? A duel, inevitably leading to physical violence for the lack of a better answer.

Laughter and joy and large grinning smiles, bare of any ulterior intentions, exist in both worlds. Happiness, even in the harshest environments and situations, pops up again and again in the Sertão and the American West. In a world of violence, it is possible to indulge, given time, in a plain and simple enjoyment of life, in the company of others with whom there is a loving relationship, amorous or one of friendship. There is joy in the flirty exchange between Fabiano and Sinha Vitória, right at the start of their escape from the Sertão: “Fabiano agradeceu a opinião dela e gabou-lhe as pernas grossas, as nádegas volumosas, os peitos cheios. As bochechas de Sinha Vitória avermelharam-se e Fabiano repetiu com entusiasmo o elogio. (...) Sinha Vitória riu e baixou os olhos.” (RAMOS 1981, p. 121)

This is similar to the warm, comfortable and easy going feeling we get as the family sits down for dinner in *Shane*:

Mother stared from one to the other of them. Her pinched look faded and her cheeks were flushed and her eyes were soft and warm as they should be, and she was laughing so that the tears came. And all of us were pitching into that pie, and the one thing wrong in the whole world was that there was not enough of it. (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 68)

The most taciturn characters of the Sertão and the American West, such as Grady Cole, Billy Parham in *The Crossing* (who is subject to great changes in the years that go from

that period to when we meet him again in *Cities of the Plain*), or even Diadorim, all make a conscious effort to never let another man perceive in them the letting down of their guard, which a smile might entail. Nevertheless, they laugh freely with people in whom they sense no threat, people whom they have intimate relationships with, people whom they trust. The sobering and tragic adventures of Billy in Mexico find moments of respite when he finds himself back in his homeland, talking with an old and respected acquaintance. His smiles are sincere, comfortable as he lets down his guard for the first time in months:

I seen it thunder in a snowstorm one time, Billy said. Thunder and lightnin. You couldnt see the lightnin. Just everthing would light up all around you, white as cotton.

I had a Mexican one time to tell me that, the old man said. I didnt know whether to believe him or not.

It was in Mexico was where I seen it.

Maybe they dont have it in this country.

Billy smiled. He crossed his boots on the boards of the porch in front of him and watched the country. (McCARTHY 2010, pp. 262-3)

Fleeting tidbits, short interludes speckled in otherwise relentlessly violent circumstances. Every major event in which characters show off their humorous expertise, they are doing it as a show of power, a contest to establish who holds control over the other. Fabiano is powerless against the yellow soldier, but gleefully imagines a hypothetical encounter between that figure and a true “cangaceiro” in its natural environment. Rawlins relentlessly mocks Blevins to assert his sidekick status toward Grady Cole. Fletcher’s men ridicule the homesteaders, reducing them to the low and petty occupation that is pig-farming, boisterously scorning those helpless figures. Riobaldo amplifies his laughter to signal that, even though he is dining in someone else’s house, he is in control:

Essa conversa até que me agradou. Mas eu dei de ombros. Para encorpar minha vantagem, às vezes eu fazia de conta que não estava ouvindo. Ou, então, rompia fala de outras diversas coisas. (...) E todos, com a maior devoção por mim, e simpatias, iam passando os ossos para eu presentear aos cachorros. Assim eu mesmo ria, assim riam todos, consentidos. (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 444)

However, there are significant differences in each of the culture's approach to the topic at hand. The good-bad dichotomy that informs the Old West myth and its narratives is quick to brand as bad any instance of violence that does not adhere to the acceptable moral code of that society. Those who enact aggression for their own benefit are judged as inherently evil but are nonetheless entrusted with the powerful weapon that is humor, brandishing it at their own discretion.

Shane, who will always follow the code, has a past that we imagine to be very similar to any average bad guy: living from place to place, unable to settle for a life of honest labor, a gun lying dormant in its holster. This unique condition, of being a good guy whose actions are, in practice, similar to the most villainous, allows him to freely exercise not only with his revolver but humor as well.

John Grady Cole's good-guy status is irrefutable but, in spite of this, rarely do we see him quipping and jesting. Young Billy Parham seldom, if ever, jokes around either. They lack something, which Shane and the older Parham (in *Cities of the Plain*) possess, something of which the latter are continuously aware of: the tragedy of their circumstances.

It is the consciousness of the duplicitousness quality of their condition as cowboys, striving for good using the tools of destruction, that allows the humor to sprout inside them. In fact, this paradox stands for one of the most important instruments of laughter, a paradox, what appears to be one way reveals itself to be the exact opposite. The moral force for good is not so good as it first appears. John Grady Cole and Billy Parham desperately try to rescue a Mexican society that repeatedly warns them not to, wreaking havoc wherever they go, while Shane is unable to settle down without precipitating the implicit conflict. Billy learns his lesson and embraces the fate set out for him, but Grady Cole can do nothing but die, following his destiny:

You think you'll ever go back there?

Where?

Mexico.

I dont know. I'd like to. You?

I dont think so. I think I'm done.

I came out of there on the run. Ridin at night. Afraid to make a fire.

Been shot.

Been shot. Those people would take you in. Hide you out. Lie for you. No one ever asked me what it was I'd done.

Billy sat with his hands crossed palm down on the pommel of his saddle. He leaned and spat. I went down there three separate trips. I never once come back with what I started after.

John Grady nodded. What would you do if you couldnt be a cowboy?

I dont know. I reckon I'd think of somethin. You?

I dont know what it would be I'd think of. (McCARTHY 2011, pp. 218-19)

In the Sertão there is not a continuous need to set the right from the wrong. The stories of this place are rife with moral ambiguity, with characters for whom we might have developed an attraction but who nonetheless commit crimes or, at least, approve them when practiced by others. Fabiano is a repeat-offender when it comes to gambling and boozing away his family's money, while Riobaldo allows for his gang to satisfy their male desires on the women of a small settlement.

Humor is not circumscribed to those totally devoid of scruples, on the contrary, those few characters, for whom we have no qualm ascertaining which side of the scale they weight on, are also the ones who feel most hurt by its employment. We have seen just how wounded and choleric Bebelo's mockery makes Hermógenes feel when compared to the magnanimity of Joca Ramiro, who revels in the chance to jest back.

The ability to partake in humor seems to be much more grounded on the intelligence and the grandeur of the characters. This inhibits Fabiano from ever dreaming of making his attempt at a joke, since he knows only violence and can only deride any fun from its application, any intellectual effort is redundant: "Atrapalhava-se tinha imaginação fraca e não sabia mentir." (RAMOS 1981, p. 28) For Bebelo, a man of great intellectual qualities, humor comes naturally. This is a weapon that only those with certain faculties can wield, and a man of violence whose sole interest is its physical application, can never understand how to control that intricate mechanism.

There is a divide between the Sertão and the American West as to the perception on the use of humor. The former deems it a characteristic of evil while the latter tends to regard it as an alternative to violence, brandished by men who are above petty aggressiveness and instinctive rash responses.

3.7. Land

There were storms to the south and masses of clouds that moved slowly along the horizon with their long dark tendrils trailing in the rain. That night they camped on a ledge of rock above the plains and watched the lightning all along the horizon provoke from the seamless dark the distant mountain ranges again and again. (McCARTHY 1999, pp. 78-9)

The Sertão is easier to define when contrasted with the American West. It is one big entity which, despite the inevitable variations of climate and vegetation, is seen as a delimited space any Brazilian would recognize. The Sertão is characterized for low annual rainfall averages, a place with tropical temperatures, especially hot in the western-most areas of the Northeast region, whose fauna and flora adapted specifically to the conditions that were present in that area. Its propensity towards the setting of long periods of draught is also well known, documented and studied in Brazil, its logic completely absorbed by popular culture.

If we were to imagine the typical landscape of the Sertão, of its most common features, we would not be far away from the picture that might have been constructed in our minds through the two examples with which we have been working all through this dissertation. The droughts that afflict Fabiano's family; the heatwave that decommissions a whole band of "jagunços"; how Fabiano has to wear his leather clothing so as not to be wounded by the thorny vegetation of the "caatinga"; how one could walk day upon day without touching so much as a drop of water. We are able to witness its incredible diversity and the sheer power of its colors and stretches.

Texas has droughts. Is there a literature of the drought in Texas? Is there a poetry of the hurricane in Florida? Is there an art of the earthquake in San Francisco? Is there music of the famine in the Sahara? Is there a literature of the mudslide in Honduras, a poetry of the typhoon, or a movie genre of the avalanche? Is there any other place [other than the Sertão] on earth where humans, nature, and art are essentially one, defined by a natural disaster that is shaped by and into myth? (ARONS 2004, p. 58)

The American West does not offer itself up to such delimitation. There is a significant dissonance between what the American West was, particularly when we view

its literary and cultural representations, and its objective reality. These representations condensed the vast diversity of the American West — mountain ranges, vast plains, semi-arid regions and areas of intense rainfall — into a single entity, instantly recognizable by its traits.

That literary representation has all the ingredients to be, at its worst, as intensely barren as the Sertão. A land of hardships and fruitless labor, where humans struggle to guarantee even the most basic living conditions, such as a steady water supply or a sundry diet, and yet are never fulfilled. These sterile conditions are frequently seen as a backdrop of the main action almost never becoming a determinant player in the narratives, its effects never truthfully impacting the life of the communities. Something which could not be further from the reality. The great cattle die-up (1886-1887) shows just how intense and lethal the American West can be. Just like in the Romantic literature of the Northeast of Brazil, those hardships are no longer, now merely remembrances of things past:

People imagined that if you got through a drought you could expect a few good years to try and get caught up but it was just like the seven on a pair of dice. The drought didn't know when the last one was and nobody knew when the next one was coming. (McCARTHY 2011, p. 116)

In *Shane* there is no particular attention given to place. Nothing about it is relevant or doubles as signifier. The sun is shining, warmth is good, therefore the sun is good. It is raining, being forced to take cover is bad, therefore it is gloomy and sad. There are some minor hints at the deeper, ancient, power that inhabits the valley, something which escapes the attentions of the average man but is not lost on the instinctive essence of a man like Shane. More relevant (to Schaefer) is the story about the eviction of the natural to usher in civilization. Humankind, through its own hard labor, is going to transform the natural world: “All the pent silence of the two of them that long afternoon through was being shattered in the one wonderful shout. "Horses! Great jumping Jehosaphat! No! We started this with manpower and, by Godfrey, we'll finish it with manpower!"” (SCHAEFER 2017, p. 62).

Comparatively, McCarthy adds another dimension to space. It is still but a presence, as is in *Shane*, but its mystical undertones are greatly accentuated. Its powers remind that of a God who, like the Olympians, ravages the earth and the people's small figures, for its own private purposes. Only, in this case, there is no way to communicate

with it, a God of nature who does not speak the human language and is certainly not worried about human intentions. The storm that hits Grady Cole, Rawlins and Blevins reminds images of aggression and power, of the crack of the flashing lights under the towering smoke of the foundry:

By early evening all the sky to the north had darkened and the spare terrain they trod had turned a neuter gray as far as eye could see. They grouped in the road at the top of a rise and looked back. The storm front towered above them and the wind was cool on their sweating faces. They slumped bleary-eyed in their saddles and looked at one another. Shrouded in the black thunderheads the distant lightning glowed mutely like welding seen through foundry smoke. As if repairs were under way at some flawed place in the iron dark of the world. (McCARTHY 1999, p. 56)

Patterns were fairly difficult to discern in the American West, as well as in the Sertão, for none of the examples we have worked with depicted space in the same way. The Sertão is mostly used as a way to explore the effects it has in its people, how its characteristics have molded the figure of the “sertanejo” and its variants. In the American West is mostly regarded as scenery, particularly in *Shane*. Even in McCarthy, where the environment acquires another role, the main object is the people and how they deal with a mythical past. Each novel uses space for its own particular finalities, fashioning it for the sake of the story.

However, it is interesting to notice how McCarthy shares the two disparate applications of the Sertão that we found in both Guimarães Rosa and Graciliano Ramos. We have already mentioned the mystical facet of the American West, the strength of its ways, which strongly evokes the Sertão of Guimarães Rosa, of a God of nature existing parallel with the God of man. The sharpness of its colors, the intensity of its manifestation, which particularly punctuates the cycle of *Vidas Secas*, is made clear:

E a gente ia, recomeçado, se andava, no desânimo, nas campinas altas. Tão território que não foi feito para isso, por lá a esperança não acompanha. Sabia, sei. O pobre sozinho, sem um cavalo, fica no seu, permanece, feito numa croa ou ilha, em sua beira de vereda. Homem a pé, esses Gerais comem. (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 367)

Guimarães Rosa takes it one step further in comparison with McCarthy. The Sertão is a cognizant being, acting with intent in relation to those who people its extents, capable of

great beauty as well as of being absolutely merciless. Riobaldo is not afraid to call it by its name. It is more than a passing sensation that he gets when faced with the awe-inducing potential of the space, as is the case with Grady Cole. There is an active, ever-present, apprehension in *Grande Sertão: Veredas*, about the mischiefs of the Sertão, whether it might act up on the spot, unprovoked, unsolicited. As mystical as this figure is, it is also the one closest to humanity: “E a regra é assim: ou o senhor bendito governa o sertão, ou o sertão maldito vos governa...” (GUIMARÃES ROSA 1956, p. 465)

What displays the biggest consonance between these literary approaches as far as space is concerned, is to be found in the use of color in the *Border Trilogy* and *Vidas Secas*. McCarthy pictures his American West in very dark shades, shadows, interwoven with the red glare of the sun and its reflection on the earth:

When they reached the trail along the western edge of the floodplain the sun was up behind the mesa and the light that overshot the plain crossed to the rocks above them so that they rode out the remnant night in a deep blue sink with the new day falling slowly down about them. (McCARTHY 2011, p. 172)

Fabiano, on the other hand, is stuck in a world of overwhelming bright blue and the ever present glare of the sun with its red and bright sharp colors: “E olhava com desgosto a brancura das manhãs longas e a vermelhidão sinistra das tardes.” (RAMOS 1981, p. 112).

Overall, in spite of the differences and the amount of references to space, we also have noticed a number of similarities that can be made out between our case studies. While in our analysis of character we managed to single out the logics developed by each culture and later point out the similarities/differences between both the American West and the Brazilian Sertão, space does not, in this limited analysis, produce such results. In *Shane*, on the one hand, there is not much interest in developing space, sticking to very simple observations that act as augmenters to the scene underway, while in the *Border Trilogy* we found the mysticism that permeates *Grande Sertão: Veredas* and the chromatic intensity of *Vidas Secas*.

The mythical aspect of the American West atones for a somewhat less evocative portrayal of place, something which, as we have seen, does not occur with the somewhat better delimited Sertão. This might be one of the most important reasons as to why the latter might have a more intense and multifaceted presence in the narratives. Visual narratives, like cinema, are forced (or have forced) to take a more limited depiction of the

American West, and since those images (Monumental Valley and whereabouts) have long been imprinted in the minds of the audience, that might explain the literary reluctance on the part of some American authors to exploit the possibilities of space.

Conclusion

Now this son whose father's existence in this world is historical and speculative even before the son has entered it is in a bad way. All his life he carries before him the idol of a perfection to which he can never attain. The father dead has euchered the son out of his patrimony. For it is the death of the father to which the son is entitled and to which he is heir, more so than his goods. He will not hear of the small mean ways that tempered the man in life. He will not see him struggling in follies of his own devising. No. The world which he inherits bears him false witness. He is broken before a frozen god and he will never find his way. (McCARTHY 2015, p. 153)

This dissertation had the objective of exploring the literary fiction of both the American West and the Brazilian Sertão, to identify some of their more obvious and glaring characteristics, to understand, within their respective historical contexts, what might be the reasons as to why each literary tradition developed certain traits and, finally, to contrast such characteristics as we have recognized in both the West and the Sertão and unearth the possible similarities (and all the diverse approaches of each author or culture) that abound in our case study.

Each of the conclusions we arrived at throughout this dissertation is fundamentally grounded on the material of the novels chosen to represent each culture, even though other cultural expressions and representations of the mythologies at hand were not forgotten in the development of this analysis. Audiovisual representations are still, to this day, fundamental to the continued proliferation of the ways the American West and the Brazilian Sertão are viewed. We have had to refrain from including anything more than superficial perspectives on these representation and only such examples as could strengthen our arguments from a perspective that any of our case studies might have pointed to.

It is equally important to mention that, for the sake of containing the scope of our analysis, other possibly fundamental novels of both the American West and the Brazilian Sertão had to be overlooked to guarantee the manageability of this dissertation. As such, this dissertation should be taken as a first step towards a much larger and comprehensive analysis of the role of literary fiction in creating and maintaining the mythic structures of the American West and the Brazilian Sertão.

The third, and last, chapter of this dissertation has already sought to set forth the conclusions of our analysis and, thus, we will refrain from rehashing all that has already been said beforehand. There are, however, some general key points that have repeatedly surfaced throughout the process of writing this dissertation.

It was particularly interesting to witness, from the perspective of someone who already had a relatively decent knowledge of the cultural representations we are working with, how many similar traits are shared between them. All the novels rely heavily upon the same themes (violence, destiny or even the relation of the characters with the wilderness, for example) for the development of the narrative and the maturing of their characters.

Shane wanders aimlessly throughout the American West, seeking to escape his former life, riddled with violence, only to find himself, once again, having to exert it. Riobaldo, even though he is born into a very good life in the Sertão, plunges, just like the most destitute, into the violent world of the “jagunços”, having the remainder of his life dominated by the need for revenge. John Grady Cole and Billy Parham make (apparently) innocuous choices in their teenage years, and have to live the rest of their lives with the gruesome consequences of their actions. Fabiano may dream of escaping the rhythms of the Sertão, but he is nonetheless stuck between the violence of the Sertão and the violence of the institutions.

Even more rewarding was the realization that, beyond all the coincidental topics that were dealt with in the case studies, for the most part, there were significant logics behind their inclusion in those narratives. Apart from the shared perspective of the American West and the Brazilian Sertão in regards to the connection of their characters to the wilderness, made especially obvious in the way by which they are often compared or described in animal terms, the motives that lay behind the inclusion of these themes are, for the most part, divergent.

The “justified” exertion of violence by the cowboy has little to do with the rationale that leads the “sertanejo” to enact it, dynamized by the complex relations of power of the institutions at work in the Sertão (as well as the inhospitality of the space itself). Their fate, in spite of being predetermined and always tragic, manifests itself in contrasting forms. While the cowboy’s narrative leads him towards that one defining moment when he will assume, at great cost for himself, the savior role, defending what is deemed right and just, the “sertanejo” is perpetually stuck in a loop of aggression and

violence, also tragic, but often enough, without the moral victories of the cowboy, only violence for the sake of itself.

Only when dealing with the usage of space in our case studies were we faced with a serious difficulty to single out a consensual perspective by either the American West or the Brazilian Sertão. In this case, a number of outlooks were shared, individually, between each author. Space, specifically, demonstrates how significantly the inclusion of more examples of literary fiction, from both cultures, might change the perspectives here contained. Visual representations of the American West (and the Brazilian Sertão to a lesser degree) would also, in this particular matter, complement such further analysis.

We hope to have generated, in others, a desire to further develop this topic. There is ample room to pursue its development, with new perspectives, employing the sizeable body of works that, to this day, continues to thrive in popular culture and has continually shaped the myth of the Old West and the Brazilian Sertão since its inception.

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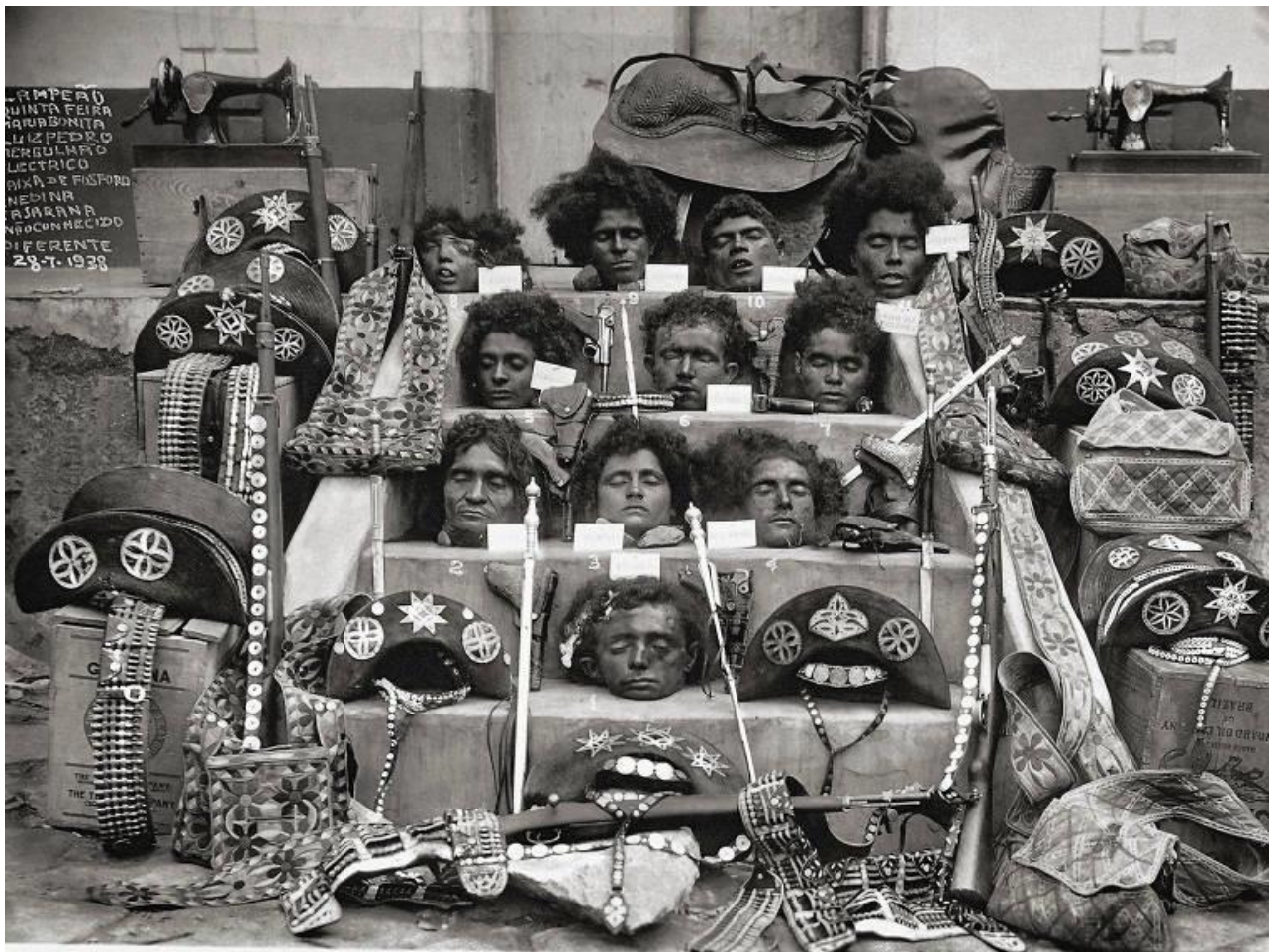
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The severed heads of Lampião and his gang of “cangaceiros”, alongside their hats and weapons, at display after being intercepted and murdered by Brazilian police forces.