

DYING TO SPEAK:
DEATH AND THE CREATION OF A NEW READER IN THE LATIN AMERICAN

NOVEL

By

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To Cynthia, for her love and support

and

To Elizabeth, Ian, William, and Spencer,

whose innocence, love, faith, and prayers inspire me to carry on.

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Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation is to look at the following six works, Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas (1880), and Dom Casmurro (1899/1900), by Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis, La amortajada (1938), and The Shrouded Woman (1948), by María Luisa Bombal, Pedro Páramo (1955), by Juan Rulfo, and Grande Sertão: Veredas (1956), by João Guimarães Rosa, and see how their authors utilize the trope of death to engage the reader. The trope of death is a major contributor to the “indeterminacies,” or subtleties and complexities of these literary texts. I intend to show how the appearance of death in each of these novels destabilizes the works by positioning the narrative just beyond what the normal reader of realist fiction is willing to allow in his or her suspension of disbelief. This positioning demands more of the reader as he or she seeks to determine the meaning of the narrative, and moves the works away from the more traditional “readerly” texts to “writerly” ones. In this manner, I seek to highlight the way in which death not only appears as a common trope in Latin American narrative but contributes to what has become known as the “nueva narrativa latinoamericana.”

In each of these novels, the narrator has had a significant experience with death that has altered his or her philosophy of life and is now utilizing the narrative to present this new philosophy. Death combines with narrative in these works to present a new perspective to the reader of everything from basic human nature to society as a whole. Such an exercise presupposes the reader’s current perspective of human nature and society based on established socio-cultural norms and conventions, regardless of the reader’s specific society. In these works, the narrator attempts to alter the reader’s

perspective and align it with the one manipulated in the pages of the text. The success of the work depends on the complicit reader upholding the “new” philosophy. Wayne Booth speaks of the “tacit contract” between the author and reader of realist fiction and that the latter surrenders him or herself to an omniscient narrator, who, representing the author, agrees to make the story as real as possible (52). My approach to this project is rooted in what Roland Barthes termed the “writerly” text, one constructed in a

perpetual present, upon which no *consequent* language (which would inevitably make it past) can be superimposed; the writerly text is *ourselves writing*, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages. (5)

I see each of these novels as writerly texts, some more so than others, but all of them unmistakably force the reader to assume responsibility for the interpretation of the events that unfold on the page. In each case, we are presented with a narrative that is recalled, and therefore past, but the relationship between the narrator and reader is in the present.

As all literature depends on the participation of the reader to some extent, it is necessary to establish the reasoning behind my choice of these works. Beginning with Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas, death appears as a formal element of the text to create a space from which the narrator tells his tale. In both of Machado’s works examined in this study, the narrated deaths of many of the characters interrupt the realist flow of the narrative and allow the narrators to step away from their stories and interject philosophies and instruct their readers. The result of this is a highly metafictional work into which the reader must “enter” to interact with the narrative and aid in its creation. María Luisa Bombal’s works also involve a deceased narrator, but expand the conceit of death and focus the narrative from the metafictional to the physical remains of the female body.

Rulfo's Pedro Páramo further expands the literary space of the narrative accessible by death to an entire town, the result of which allows characters both living and dead within the narrative to coexist, establishing a metaphor for the reader and narrator/characters of the literary work. In Grande Sertão: Veredas, death expands to fill an entire region, in this case, the Brazilian *sertão*. The reader's unfamiliarity with one of the harshest regions on earth resembles mankind's unfamiliarity with life after death, but more importantly reveals man's own unfamiliarity with life. In each of these works, death increases the indeterminacies of the narrative by destabilizing the reader. This occurs because of the mystery that surrounds death. Excepting the convictions of members of many religious communities, what lies beyond death is unknown to man and therefore these works, by allowing their narrators to have a close relationship with death by either being deceased or by having witnessed death, present a perspective of death to the reader that is outside the realm of realist fiction. As the reader engages the works, this new perspective of life, through the lens of death, allows the reader to experience the work more actively, participating in the creation of meaning as the narrators recall their lives in their respective societies. Death functions as a tool by which the narrative gains access to the unknown, and as the reader engages the texts, the narratives encourage and provoke a reconsideration of conventional wisdom.

In chapter one, "Finding a Voice: Death in Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas and Dom Casmurro and the Birth of the Reader," I look to Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis and two of his later novels to set the pattern for the rest of my study. Machado breaks with the common narrative tradition of the time and gives the narrative voice to a "defunto autor," a dead man who has decided to write. Brás Cubas, the narrator-

protagonist begins by claiming a privileged position regarding the human condition because he has lived and died and therefore is capable of offering true and accurate analysis of human behavior. He inverts narrative chronology by opening his narrative with his death. He also uses the death of other characters within his narrative to rupture the sequence of events and call the reader's attention to the structure of the novel. As the narrative unfolds, Machado calls upon the reader to imagine dialogue between characters, fill in missing events that Brás Cubas only refers to obliquely, and ultimately to judge acceptable or not the philosophy of life presented by the egotistic narrator.

The second novel I analyze in this chapter is Dom Casmurro, arguably Machado's greatest literary work. I argue that the pattern set for the reader in the Memórias Póstumas is put to the ultimate test in Dom Casmurro. Machado challenges his reader by reconstructing a similar situation to that of Memórias Póstumas: a narrator-protagonist whose reliability is in question and whose reception by the reader is the text's real issue. Machado's genius appears as he creates the morally reprehensible Dom Casmurro, whose jealousy swells to misogyny and ultimately misanthropy and so poisons him that he seemingly delights in the death of his best friend, wife, and son. Casmurro's reasoning for writing his tale is to convince the reader that Capitolina was treacherous and conniving by nature, and therefore merited the punishment Bento Santiago imposed upon her. Despite Casmurro's narrative prowess, the careful reader will recognize the narrator's manipulation of the characters, and not fall victim to Dom Casmurro's trap.

In chapter two, "Foregrounding the Feminine: Rejecting the Martyrdom of the Woman in La amortajada and The Shrouded Woman," I turn to two novels written by María Luisa Bombal. The latter is based on the English translation of the former, and it

presents a stronger feminist position that involves the reader to a greater degree in its indictment against patriarchy and its associated evils. Bombal's works utilize the death of the central character to allow the narrator-protagonist a perspective that is generally reserved for omniscient narrators. Like Brás Cubas, Ana María is liberated by her death to share her most intimate thoughts and feelings, but unlike Brás Cubas, Ana María is not aware of her reader's presence, nor does she address him/her directly. The invitation for the reader to become involved is presented in the split narrative authority between the first-person dead narrator, "la amortajada" and the omniscient "*narradora*," a feminine authority whose commentary serves to reveal truth to the reader by clarifying misconceptions presented by the amortajada. As in Machado's novels, the reader once again finds the invitation to question the established order of society and the validity of its institutions. The death of the protagonist is juxtaposed against the surviving female characters who represent a new, empowered Woman, one who does not willingly accept a lesser role in a patriarchal society. I demonstrate in this chapter that the reader shares the perspective of the narrator-protagonist, Ana María, as she awaits the "death of the dead," looking back on the failed relationships in her life and learning key secrets to resolving the conflicts that produced such unhappiness in her life. As the reader discovers the new philosophy found in the memories of the amortajada, the enlightened "*narradora*" confirms these discoveries and pushes the reader to continue questioning the life that Ana María recalls, and with it, traditional gender roles.

The third chapter, "Lingering Voices: Death and (the Death of) Society in Pedro Páramo," explores Juan Rulfo's Pedro Páramo and the way death is a conceit allowing the reader insight into the social structures that controlled each of the characters during

their lives. I draw on Roberto González Echevarría's theory of Myth and Archive in Latin American narrative to explore how Rulfo's Comala functions as a metafictional space in which the reader becomes responsible for the novel. The death of the entire society in the novel shows the failure of the social structure that is criticized in Machado's and Bombal's narratives. The death of the characters within the narrative is also metaphoric, representing the death of the traditional reader. As the novel opens, the reader accompanies the narrator-protagonist on his journey into Comala and quickly learns that everything is either an illusion or echo of a former time and existence. By the midpoint of the novel, Juan Preciado, the reader's only link to life and its stability, reveals that he, too, has died, leaving the reader alone to discover or determine the fate of the town of Comala, like a historian of a ghost town. This is significant to the creation of the new reader, because Juan Preciado's death represents the breakdown of narrative structure, and what begins as a journey in search of identity ends up as a conglomeration of tangentially related tales of death surrounding Pedro Páramo. For the text to have any meaning, the reader must actively organize and structure the events that appear in the work. As the reader assumes the responsibility for ordering the scenes of the text, he or she effectively becomes an ethnographer, piecing together the evidence and determining the destruction of Comala.

The final chapter of this project, "Death and the Deceit of Language in Grande Sertão: Veredas," returns to Brazilian narrative and explores João Guimarães Rosa's seminal novel. Like Dom Casmurro, this novel tests the new reader and his or her ability to create meaning in the text. Guimarães Rosa combines an unreliable narrator, a stream-of-consciousness style narrative, an existential debate over man's relationship to God and

the devil, and a new lexicon in this work. Death appears as a natural effect of the harsh environment of the sertão, but the narrator, although a successful veteran of life in the region is incapable of offering survival techniques, and the narrative becomes the literary embodiment of the deadly “sertão.” Like Machado’s Memórias Póstumas, the narrative meanders from episode to episode, almost entirely devoid of chronology, further confusing the reader. The narrator’s unwillingness to present events chronologically forces the reader to look at them synchronically and choose what information to focus on within the work. The title of the novel evokes the image of paths that traverse one of the most hostile environments on earth, and the narrative itself creates just such a literary environment for the reader. One of the central questions of the novel is reality versus appearance, and only the engaged reader will be able to determine what is real, a task made all the more difficult by the fact that the novel itself is a work of fiction that only imitates reality. In the end, Grande Sertão raises more questions for the reader than it answers, abandoning him or her in the middle of the existential dilemma that Riobaldo has so painstakingly established.

The following chapters, individually and collectively, will highlight the relationship between these six novels, namely their first-person narratives and each narrator’s association with death. We can see that the combination of narrative voice and the mystery of death opens the narrative to the reader, and, in each case, reveals the manipulative power of storytelling and the uncertainty of any one perspective. Within this world of uncertainty and misinterpretations, the reader must assume interpretive responsibility. The deaths in each of the novels not only function as plot elements and motifs, but ultimately become metaphors of the death of the passive reader and the

creation of a new, engaged reader. It is this reader who is adequately prepared for the “nueva novela,” and whose participation in the narrative contributes to the “nueva narrativa” as a whole.

Chapter I

Finding a Voice: Death in Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas and Dom Casmurro and the Birth of the Reader

I will begin this project by analyzing two of Machado de Assis's self-conscious first-person novels, Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas (1880/81) and Dom Casmurro (1899/1900).¹ I have selected these two works because they provide an early example of the type of texts that require the reader to assume an active role in the development of the narrative. These novels require readers to actively engage the text in ways that were uncommon in many of the works written and published at the same time elsewhere in Latin America, works that followed the more traditional, realist model.² In this chapter, I will show how Machado encourages his reader to cast off the complacency that more "readerly" texts generate. I will do this by examining the way in which Machado utilizes the trope of death in these novels to disrupt the verisimilitude of the works and establish a highly metafictional literary space into which the text draws the reader as the story unfolds. Although Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas predates Dom Casmurro by twenty years and Machado published Quincas Borba (1890) and a number of short stories in between, I contend that by "learning" how to be a reader in Memórias Póstumas, one is better prepared to undertake the challenges presented in Casmurro.³ In the Memórias Póstumas,

¹ Of Machado de Assis's five later novels, three of them are narrated by a first-person narrator: Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas, Dom Casmurro, and Memorial de Aires (1908). The other two, Quincas Borba (1892) and Esau e Jacó (1906) are third person narratives.

² Examples of the realist narrative to which I refer can be found in O Mulato (1881) and O Cortiço (1890) by Aluísio Azevedo, and Facundo (1845) by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento.

³ João Barbosa writes, "se puede afirmar que [Memórias Póstumas] es la más importante, por todo lo que significó de renovación de la técnica narrativa no sólo en el autor sino de la ficción brasileña, no hay duda

the reader is enticed along the narrative by a congenial narrator who experiments with realism, narration, and metafiction en route to enlisting the reader as a supporter of his philosophical outlook on human existence.⁴ Dom Casmurro, however, is Machado's great test of the reader. Many of the same devices that appear in Memórias Póstumas are present in Casmurro, but Machado's later narrator is not as blithe in this work as Brás is, for Casmurro presents a more pernicious philosophy in his tale. Machado's aptly conventionalized reader will perceive these narrative devices and respond appropriately when the time comes for him or her to do so.

Prior to Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas, the Brazilian novel had been largely dominated by the conventions of literary romanticism. Authors like José de Alencar,⁵ Joaquim Manuel de Macedo, and even the young Machado de Assis followed the European tradition of romanticism in their works, deftly creating a foundation for Brazilian literature and even establishing a literary genesis for the Brazilian people.⁶ Notwithstanding their New World perspective and their desire to establish a unique Brazilian literary voice, their works imitated the common style of the European masters.⁷

de que [Casmurro] [...]es aquella que de modo más transparente, recoge, por decirlo así, todo el aprendizaje de los dos libros anteriores" (47).

⁴ For a more complete discussion of realism and narration, I would direct the reader to Wayne Booth's The Rhetoric of Fiction.

⁵ Alencar also wrote regionalist novels (in the realist mode) as well as decidedly un-romantic "feminine portraits," like Senhora (1875).

⁶ Of Macedo, Massaud Moisés wrote: "Macedo [...] introduziu o romance brasileiro, nacionalizando a prosa de ficção nos temas e na técnica; iniciou o abasileiramento de nossa tradição ficcional, emprestando-lhe uma fisionomia que faria carreira ao longo do século XIX, e na qual se refletem o *ethos* e o *pathos* nacionais" (79). Alencar's Iracema follows in this vein and is an excellent example of how the European and Brazilian people/ literary traditions unite, with the Tupi princess, Iracema, falling in love with the Portuguese Martim, bearing his child, Moacir, and then sacrificing herself for the love of the man and her child. Moacir can be seen as the first of a Brazilian race.

⁷ David Haberly provides an excellent history in his essay, "The Brazilian novel from 1850 to 1900," and points out how Brazilian novels of the mid-19th century are strikingly similar to European novels of the same period, including those by Eça de Queirós, and Gustave Flaubert.

Massaud Moisés lists 1881 as the dawn of Brazilian realism, with Machado de Assis's early novels published in the period of romanticism and Memórias Póstumas as his first realist novel. Novels of the period told stories that presented characters in situations familiar to the reader, and characters in the novels behaved according to custom, and plots generally followed the pattern of life, beginning with birth and ending with death. Narrators, for the most part, merely told the story, rarely interrupting the flow of narrative to add commentary or pass judgment. Novels based on this narrative technique rarely, if ever, call the veracity of the narrator's voice into question, and a reader's involvement with the text was generally limited to reading the text and envisioning the scenes as they unfold. Interpretation in such texts still occurs, but the reader generally remains confident that what is being interpreted is valid and true and not misleading. Beginning with Memórias Póstumas, Machado drops the convention of the omniscient (and unquestionably reliable) narrator, definitively separates the author from the narrator, and then, going further, makes the narrator metafictional, unreliable, and ironic. David Haberly states:

Machado betrays our expectations as readers and demands the unexpected of us. He presents us with the “tatters of reality” his narrator has stitched together into an ordered sequence, but the narrator's evident unreliability invalidates that order and forces us to create our own reality from those tatters. A unitary explanation of events, imposed by a narrator or an author, gives way to chaos—a potentially infinite number of possible readers and of possible readings. And, finally, each of those readings may fail to capture an ultimately unknowable reality, since our human vision of our own lives, of the lives of others, of the world in which we live, is vague, fragmentary, and formless. (xxvi)

The infinite number of possible readers and readings is precisely what I consider to be evidence of a “writerly” text as defined in the introduction of this project. Although based in the reality of human life and set in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Memórias Póstumas de Brás

Cubas reflects the fragmentary and formless nature of human existence, and one of the key elements to the text is death and its effect on life and the living.

Death is a key trope in these two texts, and the way in which it appears in Memórias Póstumas and Casmurro provides an important link between them. When death appears in a realist narrative, it either moves the plot forward or arrests it.⁸ Death, for all of its mystery, is common to all and therefore not unfamiliar to the human experience. It leads to an end and therefore reassures temporality of existence, but the fact that what lies beyond death remains unknown beyond religious or philosophical speculation leaves death open to experimentation in literature. Death in narrative can be a motif, a link to reality, a device to make the reader uncomfortable, sympathetic, or elicit any number of responses. In narrative, death is naturalized by the realist convention and narrating death generally marks a transition in or the conclusion of a plot. In Machado's works, death appears in the traditional way and moves the plot forward, but at the same time it creates a literary position that de-centers the narrative by rupturing the realist flow and calling the reader's attention to the fictitiousness of the tale. This is most easily discernible in Memórias Póstumas, where Brás immediately breaks with the traditional use of death as arrester of plot and opens his account thus:

Algum tempo hesitei se devia abrir estas memórias pelo princípio ou pelo fim, isto é, se poria em primeiro lugar o meu nascimento ou a minha morte. Suposto o uso vulgar seja começar pelo nascimento, duas considerações me levaram a adotar diferente método: a primeira é que eu não sou propriamente um autor defunto, mas um defunto autor, para quem a campa foi outro berço; a segunda é que o escrito ficaria assim mais galante e mais novo. (17)

⁸ Realism has become a catch-all term in literature, but I use it here in the sense that fundamentally, in literature, realism is the portrayal of life with fidelity. J.A. Cuddon wrote, "*le réalisme* [as used] in the Mercure français du XIXe siècle (1826) refers to a point of view or doctrine which states that realism is a copy of nature and reveals to us the literature of truth" (730).

The opening paragraph of the novel inverts chronology by beginning the narrative with the death of the narrator rather than end it. Also significant to the work, Machado makes a distinction between an “autor defunto” and “defunto autor” and gives the narrative voice to the latter. Such a declaration removes the author, Machado de Assis, from the work by requiring the reader to acknowledge the deceased narrator and accept Brás Cubas’s authority over the narrative. Also, the hope that the work will be “mais galante y mais novo” literally points the work toward a new narrative, one that is unfamiliar to the traditional reader.

Dom Casmurro, published twenty years after Memórias Póstumas, appears to follow the realist tradition much more closely than the earlier novel. It does this with a narrator who is a “living” character looking back on his life in an attempt to reconstruct it for the reader. Casmurro’s relationship with death is the reverse of Brás Cubas, for it is he of all the characters in his narrative, who remains living.⁹ Casmurro states:

Vivo só, com um criado. A casa em que moro é própria; fi-la construir de propósito. [...] O meu fim evidente era atar as duas pontas da vida, e restaurar na velhice a adolescência. Pois, senhor, não consegui recompor o que foi nem o que fui. Em tudo, se o rosto é igual, a fisionomia é diferente. Se só me faltassem os outros, vá; um homem consola-se mais ou menos das pessoas que perde; mas falta eu mesmo, e esta lacuna é tudo. [...] Vou deitar ao papel as reminiscências que me vieram vindo. Deste modo, viverei o que vivi, e assentarei a mão alguma obra de maior tomo. (14-15)

Like Brás Cubas, Casmurro has nothing more to do than write the memories of his life, but as the old man looks back on his existence, he sees a “lacuna” that he hopes to fill or recover through the writing of his memoirs. It is this “lacuna,” this unwritten gap in his

⁹ I have chosen the name Casmurro to identify the narrator of the work because of the distinct personality differences between Bentinho, Bento, and Dom Casmurro. By adopting the name Casmurro, the narrator identifies himself as a different person than his former (younger) self. He is obviously not the young, starry-eyed Bentinho, nor is he entirely consumed by his jealousy as was Bento.

life that is most significant to this work because the proclaimed purpose of his narrative is designed to fill it. He has revealed that the other people in his life have passed away, but their absence is not what drives him to write, it is the memories associated with them. Casmurro seeks to “atar as duas pontas da vida e restaurar a adolescência na velhice.” This impossible task seems to be his flight from his impending death because connecting the beginning to the end creates a circle, which is a symbol of eternity. Creating the text will ensure that Casmurro lives on, and this literary creation echoes Brás Cubas’s desire to write his memoirs posthumously to achieve the fame he never had in life. However, Casmurro reveals a much more significant reason for writing: to find himself.¹⁰ In his attempt to do this, he will record his memories of both life and death. The focus of his tale will be on his younger life, but as the narrative unfolds, the reader quickly sees how the deaths of Bento’s family and friends affect his life and lead to his becoming “Dom Casmurro,” and how he loses himself in the process. Casmurro opens his narrative with the declaration that what he is writing is an exercise for a greater work; nevertheless, as his narrative progresses, he becomes more and more invested in what he is writing and addresses the reader with greater frequency, demanding that the reader recall certain events narrated previously and even infer events that he cannot or will not recall. Both novels rely heavily on the life and death of characters within the narratives and much of the plot is guided or framed by the passing of important characters. Therefore, for the

¹⁰ Luis Fernando Valente argues that Bento Santiago struggles with society’s expectations of what a man should be, and the resulting narrative is the character’s attempt at establishing himself in the correct position over his wife, Capitolina, in the strict social hierarchy. Although I do not directly comment on this within this chapter, Valente’s approach informs my analysis of Casmurro’s narration and has further implications as I look at patriarchy in chapter 2.

reader of these novels to be successful, he or she must pay careful attention to the way death appears in the narrative.

When reading Memórias Póstumas, it is not sufficient for the reader to just accept that the narrator is writing from beyond the grave. By passing through death, the narrator acquires an understanding of death that allows him to manipulate it or incorporate it in his narrative in a manner different from merely relating it as an event. Brás Cubas's ability to manipulate death for his narrative purpose is evident in chapter 124. In this chapter, Brás discusses the nature of death, not as a human experience, but as it affects the flow of narrative:

Vá de intermédio: Que há entre a vida e a morte? Uma curta ponte. Não obstante, se eu não compusesse este capítulo, padeceria o leitor um forte abalo, assaz danoso ao efeito do livro. Saltar de um retrato a um epitáfio, pode ser real e comum; o leitor, entretanto, não se refugia no livro, senão para escapar à vida. Não digo que este pensamento seja meu; digo que há nele uma dose de verdade, e que, ao menos, a forma é pitoresca. E repito: não é meu. (150)

This chapter, reproduced here in its entirety, interrupts the flow of the narrative to “interpose” an intensely metafictional moment in which the narrator directly addresses the reader and expresses concern that without this interposition, the reader would actually suffer a shock. The preceding chapter (123) introduces and describes a young lady who Brás was intended to marry. The chapter immediately following (125) is the inscription on the young lady's tombstone. The metafictional chapter replaces the realist account of the young lady's illness and passing under the guise of protecting the sensitive reader. With this narrative technique, Machado creates a literary space between life and death from which he allows his narrator to operate. By making it a chapter of the novel, he draws the reader into it by interrupting the realist flow of the narrative and forcing him to

comprehend—and accept—the rupture because key information to the plot of the narrative appears within the metafictional discussion of the interposed chapter.

The metaphor of the bridge between life and death leads to two important points. First, the distance between life and death is not a long one, for if a short bridge is sufficient to connect the two, they are much nearer each other than one may believe. Second, the bridge metaphor moves the relationship between life and death from being only a temporal one to a spatial and temporal concept. The metaphor of the bridge also opens the possibility for traffic to flow both ways, from life to death and vice versa. In this way, the interposition of a two-way bridge between life and death interrupts the temporal flow of life from beginning to end and situates the narrative in the present, regardless of when the reader engages the text. This is significant to these novels, for the interrupted flow of time appears several times throughout Memórias Póstumas as well as in Casmurro. Chapter 124, which spans the narrative distance between Nhan-lóóló's life and death, functions as just such a bridge. Ultimately, the entire novel becomes a bridge spanning life and death, for it is through the narrative that Brás, the “defunto autor” symbolically returns to the world of the living, and the living reader interacts with the deceased Brás. This demonstrates what Roland Barthes describes as the perpetual present, a key element of the “writerly” text.

If we consider the separation between life and death formally, the interposition of chapter 124 in the middle of his narrative interrupts the realist flow (that would follow the linear progression of health to illness and then to death) and opens the space for the narrator to speak. Without interposing this chapter, the narrator fears that the reader will suffer such a shock as to be “danoso ao efeito do livro.” So what is that effect? The

narrator mentions the idea of reality and commonplace and then defines or creates his reader by stating that the reader “se refugia no livro [...] para escapar à vida.” Therefore, the effect of the book is to provide the reader with a place in which he or she can escape the real and commonplace,¹¹ to escape *life* altogether. Brás Cubas is offering his readers an escape or haven from life. In order to benefit from this escape, it is necessary for the reader to follow specific rules, and throughout the narrative he takes several opportunities to guide and train his reader to interpret the narrative as he intends it. In one instance, he writes:

Começo a arrepende-me deste livro. Não que ele me canse; eu não tenho que fazer; e, realmente, expedir alguns magros capítulos para esse mundo sempre é tarefa que distrai um pouco da eternidade. Mas o livro é enfadonho, cheira a sepulcro, traz certa contração cadavérica; vício grave, e aliás ínfimo, porque o maior defeito deste livro és tu, leitor. Tu tens pressa de envelhecer, e o livro anda devagar; tu amas a narração direita e nutrida, o estilo regular e fluente, e este livro e o meu estilo são como os ébrios, guinam à direita e à esquerda, andam e param, resmungam, urram, gargalham, ameaçam o céu, escorregam e caem [. . .] Heis de cair. (103)

This chapter is titled “O senão do livro,” and the narrator claims that the “maior defeito deste livro és tu, leitor.” From the perspective of a “readerly” text, there are a number of inconsistencies or potential flaws in the book. The narrative “staggers left and right,” without concern for time, fluidity, structure, or anything that the traditional reader is accustomed to. Brás acknowledges that the book has the “smell of the grave,” a quality that may be distracting or inconvenient, but the fact that the reader rushes to the end while the narrative meanders is the greatest flaw. Naturally, such a flaw belongs to the

¹¹ “Real and commonplace” are terms used by William Grossman to translate “vida” in his translation of this chapter in Memórias Póstumas.

reader, not the book, but this chapter thrusts the responsibility for the success of the narrative on the reader, further strengthening the “writerly” nature of the text.

The next chapter continues the metafictional discussion and presents an argument in favor of the “new” reader by portraying the traditional reader. We read:

Talvez suprima o capítulo anterior; entre outros motivos, há aí, nas últimas linhas, uma frase muito parecida com despropósito, e eu não quero dar paso à crítica do futuro.

Olhai: daqui a setenta anos, um sujeito magro, amarelo, grisalho, que não ama nenhuma outra coisa além dos livros, inclina-se sobre a página anterior, a ver se lhe descobre o despropósito; lê, relê, treslê, desengonça as palavras, saca uma sílaba, depois outra, mais outra, e as restantes, examina-as por dentro e por fora, por todos os lados, contra a luz, espantaja-as, esfrega-as no joelho, lava-as, e nada; não acha o despropósito. [...] Lá continua o homem inclinado sobre a página, com uma lente no olho direito, todo entregue à nobre e áspera função de descifrar o despropósito. [...] Ao cabo, não descobre nada e contenta-se com a posse. Fecha o livro, mira-o, remira-o, chega-se à janela e mostra-o ao sol. (103-04)

This chapter sets forth the distinction between the traditional reader and Machado’s “new” reader. The “bibliômano” of this chapter represents the traditional reader who accepts everything the narrator says without question or skepticism. If the narrator says there is a flaw in the previous chapter, the “bibliômano” interprets it to mean the flaw is visible on the page. The traditional reader will not look to him or herself as the flaw, because the traditional reader does not consider him or herself to be part of the text. Each metafictional break in the text reminds the reader of his or her responsibility for the interpretation of the work. These chapters prod the reader into awareness, and by virtue of his role in awaking the reader to the “reality” of the narrative, the narrator becomes a “reliable” coach for understanding and interpreting the work. This develops a relationship of trust between the reader and the narrator that entices the reader into accepting everything the narrator has to say.

Dom Casmurro employs a similar technique as Casmurro enlists the aid of his readers in bringing to pass the desired effect of his own narrative, which is to establish his wife, Capitolina, as a calculating and determined social-climber who deceived everyone around her, but most importantly, her husband. Dom Casmurro begins by relating his attempts to re-create his adolescence in his old age by rebuilding his childhood home, but admits that he has failed to accomplish his design. The way in which the house is built—“construtor e pintor entenderam bem as indicações que lhes fiz” (14), and re-created the original structure—reflects what he expects to accomplish with the narrative: the faithful reader should be as understanding as the builder and decorator. Casmurro will provide careful description for the reader, who in turn is expected to envision the scene as Casmurro intends. Nevertheless, we can also suspect that this experiment, like the house, is doomed to failure because it cannot undo what has been done and fill in the missing center of his life. Dom Casmurro promises to recall the events of his life with the hope that he may succeed in “recompôr o que foi” (14). The relationship between the narrator and the reader is paramount in this work, because Casmurro must ally the reader to his version of history. Casmurro’s narrative authority depends entirely on the reader accepting his argument as truthful.

The relationship between the reader and Dom Casmurro is much more significant in Casmurro because Casmurro is a great deal more dependent on the reader for judgment and justification. Several of the tools that Machado incorporated into Memórias Póstumas also appear in Casmurro, but in the case of Brás Cubas, the narrative was to “agradar ao leitor” and if it succeeded, the work was successful; however, if it didn’t succeed, Brás

felt he would have lost nothing.¹² In direct contrast, Casmurro has stated that the purpose of his narrative is to fill in the missing middle of his life. If this experiment is unsuccessful, he has lost a great deal more than time. The weight of this story, born on the reference to Faust,¹³ reveals much more severity than a “piparote” if he is unsuccessful. Dom Casmurro deals with life and death in a much more sinister way. It is not the narrator who is dead and therefore liberated from the living world, Casmurro must convince his reader that his actions toward his wife and son were justified and warranted. If he fails at this, Casmurro must assume accountability for Capitu’s death. Casmurro’s goal is to acquit himself of wrongdoing, and the only way for him to do so is to convince the reader that he was correct in his judgment of Capitolina.

As the narrator recounts the events of his life, he tells of the people that were important to him and, as the reader of a realist novel would expect, narrates their deaths as they occurred chronologically. But far from merely utilizing death as a plot element, the profoundly self-aware narrator seems able to escape responsibility for his actions in life, because all those who could accuse him of any wrongdoing have died. They have a voice in his narrative only because he allows it. Notwithstanding their absence, this stubborn, unreliable narrator is incapable of controlling their voices entirely. As he recalls the events of his young life, his memories betray him and those deceased characters escape his careful control and reveal significant truths about the missing middle of his existence. Casmurro utilizes his narrative power to re-create the characters who were important during his life, but takes refuge in the separation that death provides him from

¹² “Se te agradar, pago-me da tarefa. Se não te agradar, pago-te com um piparote, e adeus” (16).

¹³ “Talvez a narração me desse a ilusão, e as sombras viessem perpassar ligeiras, como ao poeta, não o do trem, mas do *Fausto*: *Aí vindes outra vez, inquietas sombras...?*” (15).

those people. Like Brás Cubas, Casmurro directly addresses and coaches his reader throughout the text, carefully developing a relationship of trust that he will rely on as he presents his indictment against Capitolina. Casmurro speaks from a similar space as that described by Brás Cubas as a bridge in Memórias Chapter 124. His salvation and escape from this space is dependent upon his successful manipulation of the reader, who, by agreeing with Casmurro invites him into the world of the living. Notwithstanding, the aptly conventionalized reader, conditioned to interpret the “lacunae” in the texts, will not fall victim to the manipulative narrator.

In chapter one, “Do título,” we are given an insight into the narrator’s personality as he relates how he earned the nickname Dom Casmurro. The narrator tells the reader not to look for the definition of “casmurro” in the dictionary, but says it means, “homem calado e metido consigo” (13). Notwithstanding, the dictionary defines it as “fearful, obstinate, or bull-headed.”¹⁴ The narrator acquired his nickname from a young man (poet) of his neighborhood who felt slighted by him, but the rest of his neighbors found it so fitting that “it stuck.” After misguiding the reader by defining the new nickname and discrediting it with humor, he makes it the title of his narrative. With this simple account, he paints himself as an honest, if misunderstood, gentleman. Nevertheless, the reader who has looked at the dictionary definition of “casmurro” will already begin to question the narrator’s truthfulness. More importantly, however, is how Casmurro downplays the importance of what the young man on the bus and other neighbors think about him, and attempts to convince the reading public of his good character, thus ensuring a positive opinion from the reader. Public opinion has already established Bento Santiago as a man

¹⁴ This definition is found as an editor’s note to the Ática version of Dom Casmurro.

whose defining characteristics are fear, obstinacy, and bull-headedness. As an aged widower, Casmurro portrays himself as someone alone and at the end of his life. The spirits of the figures of Nero, Augustus, Massinissa and Caesar (whose images hang on his wall) suggest to him that he compose a narrative of his life, an invitation he readily accepts. This invitation, combined with the fact that he alone remains living provides Casmurro with the authority to write his tale. Although he is disquieted by the “*inquieta sombras*” of the deceased, he is close enough to them to take advantage of their death and write his life as he desires.

Within the rigid societal structure, the greatest constraint that factors into Machado’s novels is that of public opinion. This public opinion appears in the form of characters within the novels as well as the reading public. In both Memórias Póstumas and Casmurro, each of the narrators is concerned with public opinion in some way or another. Brás Cubas deals with public opinion in two different ways, and when referring to the public opinion that surrounded him during his life, he constantly stresses the presence of this force. Whether he is influenced by it or not, it is evident that it affected his “life” and actions.¹⁵ As a “defunto autor” or dead man who is now writing, he couldn’t be less concerned with public opinion. He states, “O olhar da opinião, esse olhar agudo e judicial, perde a virtude, logo que pisamos o território da morte; não digo que ele se não estenda para cá, e nos não examine e julgue; mas a nós é que não se nos dá do exame nem do julgamento. Senhores vivos, não há nada tão incomensurável como o desdém dos finados” (55). In spite of this declaration of indifference, Brás Cubas

¹⁵ I highlight *life* here to remind the reader that Brás’s entire existence is fictional, but he has two distinct attitudes toward public opinion based on his state of being.

carefully mentions this public opinion not only here, but in other locations as well.¹⁶ The relationship between the deceased narrator and the reader (who represents the reading public) is different than the relationship between the living (narrated) Brás Cubas and his neighbors. This distinction between publics and which is entitled to an opinion of the narrator, the narrative, or the situation narrated is significant as both Brás and Casmurro construct their narratives. Brás Cubas professes an indifference to public opinion by championing his status as a dead author. The living (readers in this case) are free to look upon the dead and judge, but according to Brás, the dead simply don't care. This state of existence is the "territory" of death that shields him from the consequences of pronouncing such judgments in life. His death grants him an additional layer of recognition of life. Dom Casmurro, as a "living" narrator, cannot shrug off his readers' opinions and must therefore behave differently toward his readers. He begins by telling of how the public opinion of him led to his current nickname and ends by affirming that the reader will agree with his assessment of Capitolina, his estranged wife.

The authority that each narrator seeks is closely related to yet another constraint: the imperative to tell the truth. If the narrator is truthful, then the reader can expect to receive a faithful account of the events as they are written. The traditional reader expects the narrator to tell the truth, even though familiarity with first-person narratives should have already heightened the reader's skepticism of the narrator's reliability. Brás openly declares his intention to be truthful with the reader in several instances. He states, "Não sendo meu costume dissimilar ou esconder nada, contarei nesta página o caso do muro" (138). Brás has promised full disclosure in his narrative and reminds the reader of his

¹⁶ Some of the more obvious references to public opinion in Memórias Póstumas are found in chapters LVII, LXX, LXXXVII, CXII, CXIII.

willingness to keep this promise. It is important to make the distinction between truthfulness and reliability here, because the nature of the first-person narrator precludes his complete reliability. He may be truthful in his account, but prejudices and perspective disallow total reliability. For Brás Cubas, the benefit of his being dead enables him to speak with full freedom and reveal follies, vices, philosophies and other things pertinent to his narrative, lending his voice more omniscience than that of a “living” narrator. If the reader is passive throughout the work, then the narrator’s declarations of honesty and authority eliminate the need for the reader to question the truthfulness of events. This conflates truthfulness and reliability and excuses the reader from examining evidence and making a judgment once the narrative has concluded. This allows the reader ample opportunity to escape one of life’s greatest regulators: responsibility.¹⁷ A look back at Chapter 124 will reveal an interesting paradox, because the reader, according to Brás, “se refugia no livro para escapar a vida,” which most certainly includes responsibility, either for the reader’s own actions, or for the interpretation of actions as they are revealed in the narrative. The traditional reader would be able to “escape” reality while reading the narrative, but Machado’s texts contradict their narrators and encourage the reader to assume this responsibility. This technique lies at the core of Casmurro, because the narrative voice claims authority, professes truthfulness, and enlists the reader in his condemnation of his estranged spouse, Capitolina. Whereas death serves Brás by granting him the ability to speak the truth, Casmurro claims to possess the truth because he is the

¹⁷ Freud’s Civilization and its Discontents discusses man’s desire to isolate himself from society as a means of coping with suffering in life. Machado’s narrators demonstrate this tendency toward misanthropy and isolation as a result of their failure to achieve happiness through love of others. I contend that the declaration that a reader seeks to escape life by sequestering him/herself in a book is a similar coping mechanism.

only character not *silenced* by death. In each case, the text possesses significant clues that belie the narrators' carefully constructed "truths."

In the case of Brás Cubas, we can see that a deceased person can obtain and exercise narrative authority, or at least find a voice, but in the same novel, there is a great discrepancy between the deceased narrator having and using his voice and the other deceased characters who remain silent.¹⁸ Brás often speaks of the dead in first person plural form, yet his post-existence is entirely solitary, excepting only the presence of the reader. The case of Dom Casmurro is different, for he has acquaintances and even friends (as he would call them), but, like Brás Cubas, his only interaction in narrative is with the reader. This leads to the question of the reader's responsibility for giving a voice to those characters who may be present in the narrative but silenced by the narrator himself.¹⁹ This is where Machado's "new" reader becomes important.

After looking at the way in which authors, narrators, characters and readers are affected by the constraints on narrative, I will now focus on how the death of the narrator allows narrative to escape or (at least) circumvent them. Death appears in the narrative at key moments to establish a space in which the narrative may avoid many of these restraints by disallowing the power that the constraints would have in life. As we will see, much of narrative cannot escape the constraints listed above, or even avoid them, but the death of the narrator provides the narrative and the reader with a means to circumvent them in some way or another. The first benefit that creating a deceased narrator provides narrative is separation. This separation occurs on several different levels and ultimately

¹⁸ In Chapter 3 I will look at how Pedro Páramo shifts this solitary "existence" beyond the grave and allows society to continue in a modified form.

¹⁹ One example that I will expound upon is Helen Caldwell's The Brazilian Othello of Machado de Assis, which acts as a defense attorney for Capitolina.

moves the first-person narrator into a much more stable position of authority, one closer to that held by the third-person narrator of traditional realist novels. The deceased narrator no longer interacts with the characters of his or her story and can therefore speak of thoughts and actions with a certainty and authority that is otherwise questionable, as a first-person narrator is privy to only his own thoughts and must rely on dialogue and a heavy dose of interpretation to speak of other characters. In Brás Cubas, the narrator is unaffected by what other characters may feel or think, and because his life is over, he is nonchalant about the way in which he reveals his previous relationship with them. The death of the other characters leaves Casmurro at a disadvantage because the narrator, who is also responsible in some way for each of their deaths, imposes silence upon them. This silence casts a shadow of doubt on the entire account provided by Casmurro, which he cannot explain away. This position of disadvantage limits the way in which a narrator, particularly Casmurro, can develop his narrative. Too much dependence on the deceased character for plot development allows the reader to identify with and form an independent image of that character. Casmurro attempts to combat this by focusing on perception. Beyond the separation from the action and other characters of the story, the narrator moves into a more metafictional position from where he addresses the reader directly, thus creating an independent narrating persona in contrast to the narrated self. This is why Dom Casmurro is narrated by Casmurro rather than Bento Santiago.

By allowing a deceased narrator to speak, the narrative establishes itself outside the realm of literary realism and reality, which is, paradoxically, precisely the desire that Brás Cubas attributes to his reader for actually turning to a novel. *Escapar* is the word that Brás uses in his narrative, and this escape leads the reader and the narrative into a

place of freedom and protection from the world of reality, at least as long as the reader remains involved in the text. However, Machado's readers will not find escape in Memórias Póstumas and Casmurro. Machado requires his readers to actively participate in the development of characters and imagining their dialogue. One important example is found in "O velho diálogo de Adão e Eva," the most deceptive chapter of Memórias Póstumas. The chapter represents a dialogue between Brás and Virgília that consists entirely of ellipses, organized in different lengths, punctuated with question marks, periods and exclamation points. The length of ellipses and different punctuation marks throughout the chapter direct the reader in the imagining or "creating" of dialogue, but the responsibility falls entirely on the reader to fill in the dialogue, and Brás's narrative will lead a careful reader to fill in the missing lines rather than pass them over as if they were a joke.²⁰

The idea of a reader turning to a novel to escape reality may not be new, but when considered in the context of Memórias Póstumas, we can begin to see the fluidity and instability between the dichotomies of life and death, reality and fantasy, and reason and folly. Machado deftly highlights these similarities by frequently interrupting the flow of the narrative and reminding the reader that what he or she is reading is fantastic (or at least, unreal.) In chapter 72, "O bibliômano," we read, "este nome de Brás Cubas não vem nos seus dicionários biográficos" (103). In this chapter, Brás associates his work with Laemmert's Almanac, an actual publication of the Brazilian Corte Real published from 1844 to 1889. He playfully mentions that the bibliophile who stumbles across his Memórias will seek the name Brás Cubas among the literary greats of history and find

²⁰ Sterne's Tristram Shandy does something similar, but functions much more like a joke than what I argue Machado's experiment does.

nothing. The reader knows this already, as Brás Cubas is a fictional character; nevertheless, his voice and textual authority resound as if he did, in fact, exist. Notwithstanding the interruptions, the narrator strives to maintain a sense of verisimilitude to life and society throughout the work, enticing the reader into a believable narrative upheld by references to real people and familiar places. Therefore, in spite of the fantastic situation of the narrator, the text is made believable by an equal dose of realism as fantasy.

Death in Memórias Póstumas functions as a common linking element between the narrator and the several characters he incorporates into his memoirs. The deaths of these characters appear realistically, following expected forms of plot development. The fantastic element of the work begins with the state of the narrator, who, as I have mentioned previously, writes to the reader from the privileged position of being deceased. The reader is allowed to interact with Brás in the narrative space afforded through the presence of death in the narrative. However, there is a significant transition in the way in which death first appears in the narrative and ultimately affects it. As we have seen in Chapter 124, Brás fears that the reader will suffer a strong shock if exposed to the death of Nhan-Lóló. But rather than express concern for the reader, Brás worries about the effect of the book. To comprehend this concern, it is necessary to examine how exposure to death has affected Brás himself.

Death is the most common and recurring motif throughout Brás Cubas's memoirs, and the several deaths that appear in the text mark changes in the narrator's philosophy on and understanding of life. At the beginning of the narrative, the reader is to accept that the narrator's position of writing from beyond death affords him a certain amount of

veracity that will silence many of the reader's doubts or concerns. Therefore, it is important that Brás "begin by narrating [his] death," as that is his claim to not only narrative authority, but also the key to his knowledge and supposed wisdom. Brás explains his literary authority and freedom thus:

Talvez espante ao leitor a franqueza com que lhe exponho e realço a minha mediocridade; advirta que a franqueza é a primeira virtude de um defunto. Na vida, o olhar da opinião, o contraste dos interesses, a luta das cobiças obrigam a gente a calar os trapos velhos, a disfarçar os rasgões e os remendos, a não estender ao mundo as revelações que faz à consciência; e o melhor da obrigação é quando, à força de embaçar os outros, embaça-se um homem a si mesmo, porque em tal caso poupa-se o vexame, que é uma sensação penosa, e a hipocrisia, que é um vício hediondo. Mas, na morte, que diferença! que desabafo! que liberdade! Como a gente pode sacudir fora a capa, deitar ao fosso as lentejoulas, despregar-se, despintar-se, desafeitar-se, confessar lisamente o que foi e o que deixou de ser! Porque, em suma, já não há vizinhos, nem amigos, nem inimigos, nem conhecidos, nem estranhos; não há platéia. (55)

Herein lies the justification for Brás Cubas the narrator. This is his manifesto. Brás can write what he wants because he is beyond public opinion, beyond repercussion. In life, he was beholden to the same moral and social constraints that all humans are, but in death he is liberated. This revelation comes in the chapter immediately after the one in which he narrates his mother's death. Brás interrupts the temporal and realist flow of his memoirs immediately after narrating the death of his mother, and steps away from the narrative to remind the reader of the fortunate position that he holds. As he celebrates the freedom that death affords him to reveal the truth about himself, he directly associates man's fear of truth with the pressure of public opinion. As evidence of his awareness of the reader's presence, he expresses concern for the reader's comfort by mentioning the possibility of startling the reader with his frankness. The relationship between Brás and the reader is still tenuous at this point, but as the narrative progresses it will develop into a unique and

important companionship, with Brás encouraging the reader to recall certain events and fill voids in the narrative. We must still recognize that at this point Brás is more concerned with the freedom from the public opinion that exists in life, not narrative, because he is still carefully guiding the reader through his life. With such an “alegre” view of death, it is important to see how Brás acquired this perspective. Following his experiences with death as he narrates them will lead us to just such an understanding.

The most significant death narrated in the work is Brás’s own death, which serves as a “second cradle” for him, in which he awakens to a greater existence or understanding. As evidence of this higher existence, Brás opens his memoirs by answering one of life’s great questions: what is it like to die? He writes:

Agora, quero morrer tranqüilamente, metodicamente, [...] Juro-lhes que essa orquestra da morte foi muito menos triste do que podia parecer. De certo ponto em diante chegou a ser deliciosa. A vida estrebuchava-me no peito, com uns ímpetos de vaga marinha, esvaía-se-me a consciência, eu descia à imobilidade física e moral, e o corpo fazia-se-me planta, e pedra, e lodo, e coisa nenhuma. (8)

A key factor here is his reference to his descent into “imobilidade moral,” an important idea that aids us as we seek to define his character, but what interests this study most at this point is that for Brás, death was “delicioso” and that it was *life* that “estrebuchava-[se] no peito.”

After describing his death, Brás returns to the final hours of his life for his subject matter. His narrative wanders through time, but maintains the primacy of the final hours of his life. With a focus on the last hours of Brás’s life, we can see that his attitude concerning life is warped, for while he discusses his mortality with Virgília, he “sentia um prazer satânico em mofar dele, em persuadir-[se] que não deixava nada” (24). What leads Brás to adopt such a miserable outlook on life? The verbalization of this derisive

attitude appears in chapter VII. In the vision accompanying his delirium, Brás finds himself at the beginning of time, riding on the back of a hippopotamus. There, Brás is given an interview with Nature, a woman-like figure both beautiful and terrible. This woman describes herself as both life and death. Thus, both are contained in the same entity and can be considered easily as opposite sides of the same coin. During his interview with “mother” Nature, the narrated Brás pleads for more time, a longer life, and is ridiculed for the request. Without hope of mercy or benevolence from Nature, Brás seemingly accepts his fate. The knowledge Brás gains from his interview with Nature is that selfishness is the only law. From his vantage point beyond the grave, the narrating Brás can recount his experience matter-of-factly, without sentiment or feeling, but his memoirs reveal a gradual awakening to this law of selfishness. The narrative leads the reader on a journey in which Brás illustrates his understanding of life and human nature. The key to his narrative is the process through which Brás acquired this understanding, the transition from narrated character to narrator. It is not sufficient to reveal selfishness as the supreme law of human nature and attribute this knowledge to a fantastic revelation that occurred during a moment of delirium in the final hours of his life, Brás must prove this law with great care, supporting it with evidence that the reader can believe.

After relating his own death, Brás begins a chronological account of several of the events in his life. As the reader would expect, the narrative describes the events of Brás Cubas’s life that were significant in molding his character. Of the myriad of experiences which he recounts, the common element connecting them is death. In this way, Brás’s memoirs follow a chronological order and death becomes a transitional event in his life. His first experience with death occurs in chapter XIX, titled “A bordo,” in which he

relates his voyage between Rio and Lisbon. The journey on the ship is metaphorical for the journey between life and death, and foreshadows the concept of the “bridge” presented in chapter 124. Brás’s father places him on this ship in an effort to cure him of a “love” for Marcela, a worldly Spanish socialite. Brás, seemingly heartbroken and dying for Marcela, and the captain’s wife, dying of tuberculosis, both occupy this space. In addition to them, there is another man on board who went mad after the death of his daughter. In the case of the Captain’s wife, Brás carefully narrates the condition of the woman and her repeated insistence on her health. The dying woman develops a close bond with young Brás, whose personal struggle in life at the time, he tells us, was pushing him toward suicide. His despair over being separated from his Spanish lover is more than what he would care to bear, and the captain and his wife have him on suicide watch. The constant companionship of the Captain or his wife prevents the despondent Brás from committing suicide, but Brás does relish sleep as a “modo interino de morrer” (48). As the journey progresses, Brás undergoes a change in attitude and character as he watches the captain struggle with the death of his wife and as he develops his own friendship with the dying woman. Her death ultimately serves as a symbolic death of the young Brás Cubas, and through this death the protagonist is transformed in a number of ways. Primarily, Brás is cured of his pining for Marcela, but, more significantly, he is able to understand human nature differently after this journey.

The experienced narrator shows that the young Brás is unable to face death at this time, nor does he understand the change he undergoes with the woman’s death, for Brás admits, “Eu, que meditava ir ter com a morte, não ousei fitá-la quando ela veio ter comigo” (48). When the woman was in the throes of her death, Brás “fugi[u] o

espetáculo, tinha-lhe repugnância” (50). After the woman’s death, the Captain approaches Brás with an elegy that he had written for Leocádia, his dearly departed. It is significant that the woman is not named until after her death; her identity is created by her passing, just as the narrating Brás Cubas did not become an “autor” until after his death.²¹ Brás found the lines of poetry to be inspiring and agrees with the captain that it is his best work. In essence, it has taken the tragedy of his wife’s death to bring about the literary change that the captain needs to realize his ambition and become a poet. This episode harkens the reader back to the opening chapter in which Brás tells us that his death served as a second cradle in which he, too, could be born as an author. This account is the longest and most in-depth account of any of the deaths that occur in Brás’s memoirs. Although he admits that he was not present for the final breath of Leocádia, and that the sight of her death was even repugnant to him, he feels deeply the effects of her death and when he disembarks, he is a changed man. From this point on, the deaths that Brás chooses to recount will shift further away from realist narrative and draw nearer in form to the aperture of chapter 124.

As the journey to Lisbon was to separate Brás from Marcela, it is important to see the way in which it is successful. Years after his return to Rio, when Brás encounters Marcela in a run-down jewelry shop, he casually compares the now old and ugly Marcela with the once young and beautiful one. The only thing that remained constant from the young woman to the diseased hag was the greed. Highlighting the separation between narrated and narrating self, Brás inserts another highly metafictional discussion in the

²¹ In Chapter 2 I discuss the way women are defined in society by the roles they occupy. María Luisa Bombal’s protagonist suffers a similar identity loss in the patriarchal order to which she belongs.

middle of the narrative and considers Marcela as if she were a novel, with first and second editions. Emphasizing his own rebirth as a writer, Brás corrects himself concerning language he had previously used to describe Marcela. “Cuido haver dito, no capítulo XIV, que Marcela morria de amores pelo Xavier. Não morria, vivia. Viver não é a mesma coisa que morrer; assim o afirmam todos os joalheiros desse mundo” (44). The debate on life and death appears at this point with the patent Brás Cubas disdain and spite. The separation between the young Brás and the deceased narrator is evident here, for at this point we see how selfishness is beginning to be agreeable to the narrator and the young Brás has learned a valuable life lesson.

Brás narrates his first experience of witnessing death when his mother passes. After his return from Lisbon, but still as a young man, Brás still has a very different perspective of death than the one from which he recounts his own. In recounting his mother’s death, he writes:

Longa foi a agonia, longa e cruel, de uma crueldade minuciosa, fria, repisada, que me encheu de dor e estupefação. Era a primeira vez que eu via morrer alguém. Conhecia a morte de oitiva; quando muito tinha-a visto já petrificada no rosto de algum cadáver, que acompanhei ao cemitério, ou trazia-lhe a idéia embrulhada nas amplificações de retórica dos professores de coisas antigas, – a morte aleivosa de César, a austera de Sócrates, a orgulhosa de Catão. Mas esse duelo do ser e do não-ser, a morte em ação, dolorida, contraída, convulsa, sem aparelho político ou filosófico, a morte de uma pessoa amada, essa foi a primeira vez que a pude encarar. (54)

This illustrates the doubt that so commonly accompanies any philosophy of death. With this established, Brás asks the common questions associated with grieving, generally initiated with “why?,” but quickly censures himself: “Triste capítulo; passemos a outro mais alegre.” This seems like an escape tactic, but is not escape for Brás, who is deceased and therefore needs no escape. Like the episode of Leocádia’s death, the account of his

mother's death is entirely descriptive. But more than merely the description of her suffering and succumbing, Brás inserts a philosophical discussion into the account. By philosophizing his experience with his mother's death, he deftly introduces the questions of why death occurs and leaves the reader to pursue the concept alone. These interposing chapters interrupt the traditional reader's escape from reality because they encourage the reader to consider the philosophy of the narrator outside of the realist flow of the work.

When Brás narrates the death of his father, he links it to his own failed attempts at becoming a public figure. "Eram tantos os castelos que engehara, tantos e tantíssimos os sonhos, que não podia vê-los assim esboroados, sem padecer um forte abalo no organismo" (74). The narrator's concern over the "forte abalo" that his father's failed dreams will cause is reiterated in chapter 124. In this case, the shock results in his father's death, but what must he fear for the reader in 124? In this instance, Brás presents the theory behind his father's death before actually revealing the event. Brás reveals that his father is displeased with the humble beginnings of the family name and fortune and has fabricated an entire family history to disguise the family's humility by creating a story of a war-hero grandfather and other noble ancestors. By the time Brás is born, the family is wealthy and respected in the community, but it means such a great deal to Brás's father that they be either noble or closely linked with nobility, that he focuses his entire existence on his son's ability to get into the public sphere of government, for he feels that this is the only way in which his existence will have meaning. Brás's father tells him, "é preciso continuar o nosso nome, continua-lo e ilustrá-lo ainda mais" (60). When Brás reveals that he initially fails in his attempt at obtaining a government post, he narrates his father's death almost as an afterthought. Interestingly, Brás never expounds on what it is

he did for a living, although he repeatedly states that he was wealthy and enjoyed an easy life. He informs us that he enjoyed moderate success at writing political essays and treatises, but he never successfully entered into public service. At best, Brás is a low-level bureaucrat and although recognized in public for his service and his essays, it is nothing significant, especially since he does not bother to mention his successes in his narrative. Moreover, the essays he wrote during his “life” are not sufficient for him to consider himself a “writer,” as he now considers himself, undertaking the task of penning his memoirs. The realist flow of the account of his father’s death, like his mother’s, is interposed as Brás lists notes recorded while pondering a sad and melancholy event, one that the narrator decides he will not convert into a chapter (XLV). Once again, he exposes the literary devices of structure by writing a chapter that he negates, leaving the reader to ponder the absence of realist description, replaced by the metafictional paragraph he has just read. With both his father and mother now deceased, Brás tells how his own selfishness becomes the primary guiding force in his life. This selfishness destroys his relationship with his sister and her husband and establishes Brás’s character more closely like the man that Nature described in the interview of chapter VII.

From this point on, as Brás begins his life’s journey in relative solitude, he witnesses other deaths and recounts them with a very different understanding.²² These deaths affect Brás like the others, but to understand the effect they have on him, it is important to consider the link between character traits and life and death. The most significant character in this portion of the narrative is Virgília, Brás’s lover, for it is

²² I use the term solitude because Brás has no other person to whom he is accountable. All of his actions, although they affect others in often serious ways, seem to bear no meaning on Brás’s life. Alone, he is left to be the epitome of selfishness as described by Nature.

through her that Brás filters his experiences with death. Once Brás begins to remember his experiences with Virgília, the way in which death affects his narrative shifts even more dramatically. As I illustrated earlier, the separation from Marcela was punctuated by the death of Leocádia. Brás's father intended for him to marry Virgília and the initial failure of their arranged marriage resulted in his death. At a dance some time later, Brás becomes reacquainted with Virgília.²³ They dance together and Brás tells us that at that moment, his downfall began (L, 84). Brás and Virgília begin an affair at this time that guides the decisions that both of them make throughout the rest of their lives. Linked to Virgília through this illicit affair, Brás progresses more rapidly toward the selfish being that Nature shows him during the delirium. It is important to remember that the delirium and vision occurred while Virgília was visiting the dying Brás Cubas, for this relationship is the vehicle through which Brás arrives at his final, pessimistic outlook on life.

At this point, it will also be beneficial to recall Brás's mention of descending into moral immobility as he lay dying. It is important to contextualize this idea with Brás's previous understanding of morality. Beginning in Chapter LI, Brás begins to establish a motif for moral equalizing, and calls it the "lei da equivalência das janelas" (86). Brás finds a gold half-doubloon and feels guilt or remorse for possessing something that does not belong to him. He ultimately decides to surrender it to the police and ask them to return it to its rightful owner. Upon doing this, Brás's conscience is liberated and he imagines himself as a great man, upright and honest in all aspects of his being. The next chapter, "O embrulho misterioso," then relates how Brás finds a box containing five contos, the value of which is more than 1000 times the value of the half-doubloon. Rather

²³ This second meeting happens long after Virgília has married Lobo Neves and borne him a child.

than return this substantial amount of money to the police in the same manner as the half-doubloon, Brás keeps it. He eventually uses the money to support Dona Plácida as she becomes the front for his affair with Virgília. By using Dona Plácida, a helpless servant, to cover his affair with Virgília, Brás expresses some concern for her moral well-being, but decides that it was her calling in life to serve others, and as long as he is able to keep her comfortably, he is not offending her in doing so. In LVII, he and Virgília decide that it is fate, or even God's will that they fall in love. This way they can excuse themselves for the morally reprehensible act of adultery and carry on as if they enjoyed the blessing of heaven. Virgília's pioussness is nonexistent, but her mention of God on any occasion suffices for Brás's loose morals. Brás and Virgília both acknowledge the social laws and morals that forbid adultery, but once they have attached their affair to the will of God, there is nothing for them to do but to carry on. Eventually, Brás adds interesting "novelistic touches" to his story as he justifies his affair with Virgília to Dona Plácida. He reveals to his reader that it is a pathetic story that he "made up" in order to win her favor, but it is the money that he gives her that wins her favor and frees him from all guilt in her eyes. As occurs in Dom Casmurro, Brás Cubas is revealing his intention to mislead other acquaintances by lying to them. In contrast, he claims that he is open and honest with his readers, for his identity is set and he is now in a state of moral immobility. There is no changing what he was or now is, and as long as he is separated from the living by death, he can be honest with his reader and not feel worried that he will face repercussion or consequences.

During the affair with Virgília, Brás witnesses the death of Viegas, a miserly old fellow who Virgília courts in an attempt to win an inheritance for her son. Brás has

already told the reader that he doesn't care for Virgília's son, so Viegas's death and refusal to bequeath anything on the boy should not be considered as a blow to Brás in any way. Why he is at all concerned with this event is only visible as we look at the context in which Viegas enters the memoir: through his death. Brás is present at Viegas's death and although the old man was ailing and not long for the earth at the time, Brás recounts the old man's last moments in which he haggles over the price of his house. If Brás dies for his idea (which will bring him fame and fortune), Viegas dies for money (LXXXIX). What is the statement being made here? Greed, avarice and selfishness are all the rage in humanity. What is even more telling is the way in which Brás describes Virgília's relationship with Viegas: "Virgília nutria grandes esperanças em que esse velho parente, avaro como um sepulcro, lhe amparasse o futuro do filho, com algum legado" (118). She felt no obligation toward Viegas out of charity or sympathy. Brás further describes her as "menos escrupulosa que o marido: manifestava claramente as esperanças que trazia no legado, cumulava o parente de todas as cortesias, atenções e afagos que poderiam render, pelo menos, um codicilo" (119). The only impetus for her association with the miser was the hope of receiving an inheritance. When Viegas dies and leaves them nothing, Virgília "tragou raivosa esse malogro." There is a distinct shift in the narrative tone at this point, because all of his memories from this point forward relate specifically to Virgília and the illicit affair between them. Brás seems to lose his composure at this point in his memoir and allows his emotions to flow unchecked on the page. At times, he even becomes casual with the reader, playing games in which he teases the reader with bits of information. Brás is now confident that his relationship with the reader is well established and relinquishes a great deal of his narrative authority to the reader, for the reader is so

endeared to Brás by this point that he can get away with almost anything. John Gledson writes, “Brás Cubas [...] foi intencionalmente concebido para agradar o leitor, aliciá-lo no sentido de aceitar o ponto de vista do narrador” (8). It is at this point that the reader must be doubly wary of being manipulated by a likeable but unreliable narrator.

One example of how important it is for the reader to be on guard is when Brás speaks of the possibility of Virgília bearing him a child. He allows his imagination to wander and place his son in a rank of nobility that would leave Brás, like his father, more than overjoyed. He overlooks the fact that this child, if born, would either be rejected by society as illegitimate, unless recognized by Virgília’s husband, Lobo Neves, or if Brás is acknowledged as the father, the child would be ostracized for being the product of an illicit affair. In his memoirs, Brás takes great care to examine the life of an illegitimate child, and although he never considers the possibility that his and Virgília’s child would suffer as Dona Plácida had, the textual evidence about Dona Plácida’s life speaks volumes to the contrary. Ultimately, the pregnancy ends spontaneously and Virgília is relieved. Brás does not understand, but eventually comes to realize that the birth of a child exposes the mother to annoyance and death. Virgília suffered with the pregnancy and birth of her first child, almost to the point of dying, but beyond this she was annoyed at the privations that having a child would present her with (XCIV). Following the pattern established surrounding death in the narrative and the interposition of a new philosophy, the reader can see that the *almost* life of Brás’s child is another way in which death serves to interrupt the flow of the narrative and allow the reader to become more involved in the text. At this point, it behooves the reader to recognize the inconsistencies in Brás’s logic and vain dreams and the actual narrative present.

Dona Plácida is the character that is linked to Brás Cubas's philosophy on the purpose of life (LXXV). He tells of her humble (if not dubious) beginnings, the illegitimate child of a workingwoman and a sacristan. Her life was to be spent in suffering, working, pain and other tribulations. Brás does not see any parallel between Dona Plácida and his own child, but the careful reader can see it there, as he describes his own high hopes for this love child in Chapter LXXXVI. Interestingly, Brás ponders his relationship with his future son and compares it to the relationship and dialogue between Adam and Cain. We may believe that Cain is listed as the first son of Adam and Eve (a parallel that he has already drawn between himself and Virgília,) but it is certainly not without intention that his offspring is linked to Cain, the first murderer and perhaps one of the most evil people in the Bible. We can now return to the "Velho diálogo de Adão e Eva" and see how the reader is to read (fill in) the narrative presented by ellipses. Aside from being the first humans on earth, Adam and Eve bear the honor/burden of original sin. While in Eden, Satan tempted Eve with the forbidden fruit, which she ate. It was then Eve who gave the fruit to Adam, resulting in both of them falling from grace and being cast out of Eden. Brás does not vilify Virgília, and his narrative is certainly not misogynistic. Nevertheless, Brás's "downfall" into moral immobility, his fall from grace came through his association with Virgília. She is not responsible for creating Brás's character, but through their relationship Brás becomes so completely self-absorbed and egotistical that he comes to represent the very pernicious character that disgusts him in his interview with Nature. Virgília is Brás's female counterpart, equally greedy and self-absorbed. Together, they complete both sides of humanity, male and female, illustrating

the philosophy of life learned in chapter VII that all of mankind is egotistical, greedy and selfish.

If we now consider the reader and his or her expectations, we can see in Chapter CXV how Brás once again makes clear his intention to write “truth.” At this point, Virgília and her family are relocating to another state where Lobo Neves is the governor. Brás is less than saddened by her departure. He writes:

Não a vi partir; mas à hora marcada senti alguma coisa que não era dor nem prazer, uma coisa mista, alívio e saudade, tudo misturado, em iguais doses. Não se irrite o leitor com esta confissão. Eu bem sei que, para titilar-lhe os nervos da fantasia, devia padecer um grande desespero, derramar algumas lágrimas, e não almoçar. Seria romanesco; mas não seria biográfico. A realidade pura é que eu almocei, como nos demais dias. (160)

What he tells his reader here is that he or she should not be seeking fantasy but truth in this narrative, and the truth is firmly rooted in his egotism and selfishness. This Brás Cubas is a very different character from the young Brás who sought death so eagerly when forcibly separated from Marcela. Brás suffers somewhat at the loss of his lover, but nothing like his separation from Marcela so many years earlier. Brás counts on the structure of his narrative and the reader’s familiarity with literature to provide the necessary distance from his suffering. We have seen that Brás equates the loss of lovers with death, but as his selfishness grows, his dependence on others wanes and he becomes the misanthrope that we know from the introduction to the text.

During the short time after Virgília leaves, his uncle the canon and two cousins all die. He briefly mentions their passing, and even recalls accompanying them to the cemetery, but he feels no more pain or suffering than if he were dropping letters off at the post office. This is a tremendous change from the first experience with dying that Brás

had. When he was taken from Marcela and sent to Lisbon, he felt as if he wanted to die. On board the ship, the captain's wife died of tuberculosis. This event instilled in Brás a desire to live, or at least a fear of death. When Virgília is taken from him, he considers himself to be widowed, but does not suffer at losing her, nor the loss of other family members. While with Virgília, Brás came to be tolerant of death, witnessing Viegas's passing and recounting it as a disappointing event, more like losing money than a loved one. Now that Virgília is "lost" to Brás, he is left without feeling for anyone, and even family members pass away without so much sadness or remembrance by the narrator as a stop at the post office.

The replacement for Virgília in Brás's life comes back in the form of a remade Quincas Borba, bearing a philosophy unlike any other: Humanitism. Quincas Borba is an old school friend of Brás Cubas, a "pícaro" par excellence, philosopher, and madman.²⁴ Without delving into great detail, Quincas Borba tells Brás of his downfall. Concomitantly with Quincas Borba and his Humanitism, Brás considers the possibility of marrying a young lady and beginning his family. Quincas Borba's theory values life and the creation of life above all other things. "Como a vida é o maior benefício do universo, e não há mendigo que não prefira a miséria à morte [...], segue-se que a transmissão da vida, longe de ser uma ocasião de galanteio, é a hora suprema da missa espiritual. Porquanto, verdadeiramente há só uma desgraça: é não nascer" (160). This philosophy becomes almost as important to Brás as it is to Quincas Borba, and Brás includes several reflections upon this philosophy throughout the remainder of his narrative. Nevertheless,

²⁴ Quincas Borba is the title character of Machado's second great novel, published in 1890.

he breaks significantly with the above belief as he comes to value death and the state of not having reproduced as a winning sum over the misery of life.²⁵

Memory is important in the retelling of one's life (see Dom Casmurro) and although is not as highly emphasized in this novel, we see that memory is important for Brás Cubas as well. When Brás's affair with Virgília is finally revealed to Lobo Neves, Brás finds himself face to face with a man that would have every justification to kill him. We read, "Creio que lhe vi fazer um gesto, como se quisesse atirar-se sobre mim; mas não me lembra bem. O que me lembra claramente é que durante os dias seguintes recebeu-me frio e taciturno" (127). Brás eventually tells that Virgília dismissed the letter as libel once Lobo Neves showed it to her.²⁶ Eventually the family relationship resumed and Brás and Virgília found new flame in their illicit affair with the danger now so close at hand. Interestingly, Brás faced a moment of mortal danger (if we are to believe Virgília's account of her husband's love for her) and it passed without incident. Perhaps Brás adds the vignette about Lobo Neves desiring to pounce on him in an effort to add drama. Alternately, it could be nothing more than further illustration of Lobo Neves's disinterest in his wife. If this is the case, then a faulty memory, if believed, upholds the lie that Brás told Dona Plácida. What is most significant in all of this is the fact that each individual in the novel overlooks such horrible things as infidelity in order to gain as much as they can. Dona Plácida accepts the five contos and ends up blessing Brás as a saint. Lobo Neves believes Virgília's account of the calumny and continues his pursuit of

²⁵ This philosophy is highlighted by William Grossman in the title of his English translation, Epitaph of a Small Winner.

²⁶ Later, when Brás faces Lobo Neves yet again, Brás comments that the one thing holding Lobo Neves back from killing him over the affair is public opinion. Lobo Neves has a reputation to protect, and although the entire city may know of the illicit affair between Brás and Virgília, as long as Lobo Neves does not openly acknowledge it, he is "safe."

fame in public service. Brás and Virgília ignore the social stigma associated with such an affair and serve their desires completely, almost to the point of having children together.

To punctuate the significance of this thought, Brás interrupts his narrative in chapter 100 to analyze his work and his reader. Here is yet another lesson to the reader on how to read and interpret his work. “Se esse mundo não fosse uma região de espíritos desatentos, era escusado lembrar ao leitor que eu só afirmo certas leis quando as possuo de veras; em relação a outras restrinjo-me à admissão da probabilidade” (130). There may be some confusion as to what world Brás is referring. It is important to note that he refers to “esse mundo,” but from his privileged location on the bridge between life and death, safely situated in his narrative, he detaches himself from both life and death. He is speaking from beyond the grave, in a solitary location. Nevertheless, his desire to “remind the reader” seems to point this declaration of inattentiveness back to the living. He, the deceased, possesses all the laws of human nature, but he is only willing to reveal some of them by allusion. The reader of a realist novel may expect the work to be done in the narrative by the omniscient narrator and then expect to see the philosophy on the page. Brás is unwilling to do this. He will eventually push the reader to his conclusion, but he does it by reminding the reader of his or her position regarding the novel. The last line of this chapter reads, “Não convindo ao método deste livro descrever imediatamente esse outro fenômeno, limito-me a dizer por ora que o Lobo Neves, quatro meses depois de nosso encontro no teatro, reconciliou-se com o ministério; fato que o leitor não deve perder de vista, se quiser penetrar a sutileza do meu pensamento” (131). Brás once again emphasizes the role of the reader in the narrative, presenting a fact out of chronological

order and admonishing the reader to remember it in order to understand his thought, which is presented in the form of his narrative.

With the reader now “engaging” the text by reordering events told out of chronological order, the narrative focuses more on the importance of public opinion. As I mentioned earlier, the deceased Brás does not fear the opinion of the narrated characters because he is separated from them. He expounds upon the force of public opinion in dictating the actions of several of the characters, but the reader should also recognize the narrator’s attempts at swaying the opinion of the reader. Chapter CXII bears the title, “A opinião,” and presents Brás’s philosophy of public opinion and the way it governs society. In this case, it is Lobo Neves who serves as the subject for observation. In another chance encounter between Brás and Lobo Neves, Brás notices that the man “estava retraído, mas de um retraimento que forcejava por dissimilar. [...] Tinha medo da opinião. [...] cuidou que ele estaria pronto separar-se da mulher, como o leitor se terá separado de muitas relações pessoais; mas a opinião, essa opinião que lhe arrastaria a vida por todas as ruas, [...] obstou à dispersão da família” (140). Lobo Neves is suffering as a result of Virgília’s affair with Brás Cubas, yet can do nothing about it for fear of falling in public opinion, which would destroy his career. The only solace that Brás offers his reader is the promise that time heals all wounds and eventually public opinion will focus its attention elsewhere. The next chapter, another interruption in the narrative, equates public opinion with the glue that holds domestic institutions together. Brás Cubas understands domestic institutions and even attempted to enter into marriage a number of times, but each time was thwarted. Since Brás has nothing to lose, not even a good name, he felt no shame in following his selfish desires throughout life.

By interrupting the narrative once again for metafictional commentary, Brás authorizes the reader to develop an opinion of his or her own. This is not a new concept in the narrative, for the introduction tells the reader that the narrator is unconcerned with whether or not he or she likes the story. However, at the end of the narrative, Brás's declaration that, "este último capítulo é todo de negativas" (176), presents his final philosophy and leaves the reader to accept or reject it. Brás concludes, "ao chegar a este outro lado do mistério, achei-me com um pequeno saldo, que é a derradeira negativa deste capítulo de negativas: --Não tive filhos, não transmiti a nenhuma criatura o legado da nossa miséria" (176). Brás's final negative is the "positive" fact that he did not have children. The final memories of the work are the "morte de Dona Plácida," and the death of the narrator himself, which, if we follow the established pattern of the work and step away from the narrative, show that the closing phrases of the novel do not end the work as a traditional narrative would, but leave the responsibility with the reader to tally the score and determine the winner. This ending prepares us for the final lines of Dom Casmurro, in which the narrator presents his final declaration and leaves the reader alone to determine the success of the work.

For more than a century, Dom Casmurro has enticed readers into debating whether or not Capitolina, Bento Santiago's wife, was faithful to her husband. But more important than the question of Capitu's fidelity, or lack thereof, is how the novel positions the reader both to pose and decide that question for him or herself.²⁷ As trained

²⁷ Paul Dixon, Antonio Luciano Tosta, Keith Ellis, and others argue that the text's ambiguity is its greatest strength. This is true, but more than merely highlight the ambiguous nature of Casmurro's narrative, I contend that the work functions like Memórias Póstumas and becomes a "writerly" text as it places the reader in a position of control and allows the reader's own subjectivity interpret the ambiguous signifiers within the work. (Ironstone, et al.)

readers of Brás Cubas's memoirs, we must look back at the clues within the novel itself to understand just what the reader's responsibility toward the text is, and then decide how to arrange it accordingly. Although Dom Casmurro is not as carefree as Brás Cubas, his narrative style is strikingly similar, so the lessons learned in Memórias Póstumas will prove immensely beneficial to us as we seek to understand what Casmurro is trying to say. This narrative does not dwell as much on the death of characters as they occur in the life of the narrator, but as each character is recalled, Casmurro follows a careful pattern to maintain his ability to tell his tale.

Like Brás, Casmurro is a very selfish being and possesses a terribly pessimistic worldview. He is alone and like Brás, relies on the narrative relationship between himself and the reader to present his story and assuage his conscience. I will look at the ways in which Casmurro entices the reader into his confidence and manipulates him or her into condemning Capitu and thus absolves himself of any responsibility for her death as well as the other reprehensible actions of his life. The narrative provides many clues in what appears to be one eyewitness's truthful account; however, if we carefully consider these clues, we can see that the narrator is quite possibly living a lie and how his desire to fill in the middle of his existence ultimately fails because the truth of his life is found in the lacunae that he cannot (or will not) include in his life story. I will look at the relationships between memory and writing, and certain images, specifically related to portraiture and drawing, to see how Casmurro's characters manage to escape his narrative control and speak from beyond the grave, thus creating the ambiguity which makes Dom Casmurro a successful narrative. The lacuna, the missing middle of Bento Santiago's life is the same bridge from which Brás Cubas narrates.

From the novel's very beginning, all of our access into the text depends on how the narrator recalls and re-creates the events of his life. Casmurro is aware of this and invokes his memory as an important tool for establishing his credibility. To aid his memory, Casmurro relies heavily throughout the narrative on pictures, portraits, drawings, and writings. He painstakingly presents these visual stimuli and is careful to give a faithful rendering of these signifiers through his narrative. Once he has successfully created the image, he is able to ascribe meaning by adding additional descriptions that are not evident if one is looking directly at a portrait or photograph. If we examine the description of his home at Engenho Novo, and the way in which he tells us it was built, we see the key relationship between his words and portraits, phrases and imagery. It is the text that the reader must rely on for an understanding of the narrative, but the narrator repeatedly invokes images and portraits to aid his argument: that the old Capitolina was fully contained within the young Capitu, as the fruit within its rind. The opening chapters of the narrative express his desire to fill in the missing middle of his life, but his final comments are those highlighting Capitolina's treachery and deceit. Casmurro's narrative ultimately serves as an attempt to portray Capitolina, whose portrait is missing from his life.²⁸

The narrator's skill at describing images is evident early on and the first portraits he describes are those of his mother and father. He writes:

Tenho ali na parede o retrato dela, ao lado do do marido, tais quais na outra casa. A pintura escureceu muito, mas ainda dá idéia de ambos. Não me lembra nada dele, a não ser vagamente que era alto e usava cabeleira

²⁸ I resist the urge to write "indict" Capitolina, because the narrative, although an indictment of her, is also a verbal portrayal of her beauty and her character. She IS the missing middle, the missing part of Casmurro's life. Whereas Virgília was the completion of Brás Cubas, Capitolina is the same for Bento Santiago. Without her, Casmurro only sees the missing middle of his life.

grande; o retrato mostra uns olhos redondos, que me acompanham para todos os lados, efeito da pintura que me assombrava em pequeno. O pescoço sai de uma gravata preta de muitas voltas, a cara é toda rapada, salvo um trecozinho pegado às orelhas. O de minha mãe mostra que era linda. Contava então vinte anos, e tinha uma flor entre os dedos. No painel parece oferecer a flor ao marido. O que se lê na cara de ambos é que, se a felicidade conjugal pode ser comparada à sorte grande, eles a tiraram no bilhete comprado de sociedade. (21)

By using terms like “parece” and “o que se lê,” Casmurro begins his shift away from mere description and into interpretation. The intricate description of the portraits of his parents and the accompanying interpretation he gives of each of their expressions is flawless. He continues:

São retratos que valem por originais. O de minha mãe, estendendo a flor ao marido, parece dizer: “Sou toda sua, meu guapo cavalheiro!” O de meu pai, olhando para a gente, faz este comentário: “Vejam como esta moça me quer...” Se padeceram moléstias, não sei, como não sei se tiveram desgostos [...] mas aqui estão os retratos de ambos, sem que o encardido do tempo lhes tirasse a primeira expressão. São como fotografias instantâneas da felicidade. (22)

Casmurro deftly creates characters and dialogue as he describes these portraits, but at the same time, he admits he has little or no recollection of his father. His father died before Bento was born, so naturally there is no recollection of the death of this man. However, this death alters the trajectory of Bento’s life because his mother promises to dedicate her child to the service of God. As we look at the death of each character as a rupture in the realist flow of the narrative, as we saw in Memórias, we begin to recognize how deftly Casmurro creates characters by attributing his imagined actions and words to them. This is an act that we should be wary of as he continues his narrative, for this is one of his primary tools in creating his account.

On several occasions, Casmurro updates the image he has created of his mother, but always highlights the youthfulness and beauty of the 20-year-old in the portrait. Near

the end of the narrative, Dom Casmurro describes Dona Glória as an aged woman. In chapter 115, he writes, “Fomos jantar com a minha velha. Já lhe podia chamar assim, posto que os seus cabelos brancos não o fossem todos nem totalmente, e o rosto estivesse comparativamente fresco; era uma espécie de mocidade quinquagenária ou de ancianidade viçosa, à escolha” (153). After all this care to describe his mother to the reader, upon her death he essentially erases her identity by burying her under the epitaph of “uma santa.” Casmurro explains, “A minha idéia é dar com tal palavra uma definição terrena de todas as virtudes que a finada possuiu na vida” (178). In spite of this intention, the inscription on her tomb reduces her existence to nothing, and her entire life is silenced by his actions. Beyond her portrait, what remains of Dona Glória is only that which Casmurro is willing to recall for the reader. By marking her grave only with the words “uma santa,” her identity is only available through his narrative, for anyone encountering this tombstone in the cemetery would be left without any concrete identifiers of Dona Glória. This careful allocation of his mother’s identity is significant when we consider what he ultimately attempts to do with Capitolina. In contrast to this, we can recall that Brás Cubas allowed Leocádia to remain unnamed until after her death on the ship between Rio and Lisbon. Although her name is revealed after her death, her character, like that of Dona Gloria, is erased by the arbitrary application of a name.²⁹

In a manner similar to the description of his mother’s portrait, Casmurro painstakingly describes Capitolina’s physical appearance. Speaking of the young Capitu, he writes:

²⁹ The way in which the narrators diminish the presence of the women in their life will reappear in Bombal’s work, Guimarães Rosa’s novel and Rulfo’s text as well.

Não podia tirar os olhos daquela criatura de quatorze anos, alta, forte e cheia, apertada em um vestido de chita, meio desbotado. Os cabelos grossos, feitos em duas tranças, com as pontas atadas uma à outra, à moda do tempo, desciam-lhe pelas costas. Morena, olhos claros e grandes, nariz reto e comprido, tinha a boca fina e o queixo largo. As mãos, a despeito de alguns ofícios rudes, eram curadas com amor; não cheiravam a sabões finos nem águas de toucador, mas com água do poço e sabão comum trazia-as sem mácula. Calçava sapatos de duraque, rasos e velhos, a que ela mesma dera alguns pontos. (29)

Again, his description shifts away from those elements of her person that would not be visible in a photograph and he incorporates scents and certain behaviors in his portrayal of the girl. Without a physical portrait of Capitolina to reference, Casmurro carefully describes her appearance and defines her character at the same time. Later, he dedicates an entire chapter to his own description, but rather than speak of himself, he gives the voice to other members of his family. Dona Glória states, “Veja se não é a figura do meu difunto. Olha, Bentinho, olha bem para mim. Sempre achei que te parecias com ele, agora é muito mais” (134). This description forces the reader to recall the only description available of his father; that provided with his portrait. However, the snapshot that Casmurro attempts to provide of himself is not one of felicity, and we already know that he has not escaped the “foul hand of time.”

Perhaps the most significant portrait in the narrative is that of his friend, Escobar. In this case, the portrait serves as a memory of his dear friend as well as the “crime” committed by Capitolina, for at the end of the narrative he interprets this portrait and submits it as evidence of Capitu’s treachery. Casmurro carefully narrates the moment of anagnorisis.

Capitu e eu, involuntariamente, olhamos para a fotografia de Escobar, e depois um para o outro. Desta vez a confusão dela fez-se confissão pura. Este era aquele; havia por força alguma fotografia de Escobar pequeno que seria o nosso pequeno Ezequiel. De boca, porém, não confessou nada; reprimiu as últimas palavras, puxou do filho e saíram para a missa. (175)

Here we see why Casmurro places such narrative emphasis on portraits and images. In this case, the likeness between Ezekiel and the portrait of Escobar is sufficient for Casmurro to find Capitu guilty of adultery.

In direct contrast to this supposed confession, Casmurro narrates an important event that should lead the careful reader to question his accuracy in applying meaning to pictures. In the childhood home of Capitolina's best friend, Sancha, Bento sees a picture of a woman that looks surprisingly like Capitolina. Sancha's father, Gurgel, comments to Bento on this girl's likeness to Capitu. Casmurro writes, "Então ele disse que era o retrato da mulher dele, e que as pessoas que a conheceram diziam a mesma coisa. Também achava que as feições eram semelhantes, a testa principalmente e os olhos. Quanto ao gênio, era um; pareciam irmãs [...] Na vida há dessas semelhanças assim esquisitas" (117). The "strange resemblances" is the best explanation Gurgel can afford for the likeness, and Bento seems to agree. However, the narrating Casmurro chooses to disregard this lesson as he passes judgment against Capitu and Escobar. After deciding to put his wife and child away from him, he admits, "No intervalo, evocara as palavras do finado Gurgel, quando me mostrou em casa dele o retrato da mulher, parecido com Capitu" (176). He further punctuates the importance of these words by encouraging the reader "hás de lembrar-te delas; se não, relê o capítulo" (251). Nevertheless, if the reader is to recall the lesson or even return and reread the chapter, he or she should question why Casmurro is unwilling to believe it. The difference between the narrator and the narrated self echoes Brás Cubas in Memórias Póstumas. The reader will recognize the change in perspective from the young Bento to the old Casmurro, and the narrator's instruction for the reader to go back and reread the chapter functions like Brás's metafictional

interruptions in his narrative to give the reader pause to consider the way in which the text is being manipulated.

After carefully anchoring the descriptions of the significant characters in his narrative with portraits, he begins to blur the lines between images and inscriptions. In fact, one of the repeated themes of young Bento's relationship with Capitu lies in the words and inscriptions they share. The first in the narrative is written by the hand of Capitolina. Bento surprises her in the garden after she had just written "BENTO CAPITOLINA" on the wall. Reading this inscription seems to alter young Bento's life. Casmurro continues his narrative of the moment that these two children share under this inscription of love, but in the moment her father appears, "Capitu riscava sobre o riscado, para apagar bem o escrito. Pádua saiu ao quintal, a ver o que era, mas já a filha tinha começado outra coisa, um perfil, que disse ser o retrato dele, e tanto podia ser dele como da mãe; fê-lo rir, era o essencial" (31). We can find two important truths in the account of this event. First, that inscriptions (words) can be erased, manipulated, and hidden; and second, that drawings can be interpreted in many different ways; simply put, a picture is not always reliable. These two points are very important for the reader to consider as Casmurro's narrative unfolds because they are the two things upon which Casmurro establishes the veracity of his account.

Capitolina continues in her affinity for drawing and Casmurro narrates another experience they share around this skill.

Um dia fui achá-la desenhando a lápis um retrato; dava os últimos rasgos, e pediu-me que esperasse para ver se estava parecido. Era o de meu pai, copiado da tela que minha mãe tinha na sala e que ainda agora está comigo. Perfeição não era; ao contrário, os olhos saíram esbugalhados, e os cabelos eram pequenos círculos uns sobre outros. Mas, não tendo ela rudimento algum da arte, e havendo feito aquilo de memória em poucos

minutos, achei que era obra de muito merecimento; descontai-me a idade e a simpatia. (53)

In this moment, Casmurro mentions his admiration of her abilities, both artistically and mentally, for she has re-created the picture of his father from memory. However, this admiration does not continue because Capitu's ability to draw and write competes with his own ability, and he begins to equate this ability with dominance in the relationship. Throughout their courtship, Capitu and Bento struggle for creative authority. Casmurro writes:

Capitu, quando não falava, riscava no chão, com um pedaço de taquara, narizes e perfis. Desde que se metera a desenhar, era uma das suas diversões; tudo lhe servia de papel e lápis. Como me lembrassem, os nossos nomes abertos por ela no muro, quis fazer o mesmo no chão, e pedi-lhe a taquara. Não me ouviu ou não me atendeu. (72)

Bento's inability to obtain the bamboo stick and write their names together on the ground highlights Casmurro's inability to accurately portray Capitolina in his narrative. To further punctuate this, Capitu's voice speaks to the reader from beyond the grave as Casmurro continues telling this event. He makes a promise that Capitu knows he will not keep and then she "teve um risinho descorado e incrédulo, e com a taquara escreveu uma palavra no chão; inclinei-me e li: mentiroso" (73). Even in Casmurro's narrative, years after her death, Capitolina maintains authority enough to define and portray Casmurro. Nothing remains of her existence for she and her child are both dead. Capitolina, like dona Glória, exists only in Casmurro's narrative, yet her accusation of Bento rings loudly on the page and echoes throughout his narrative. With this in mind, we will now focus on memory and writing in the work. If Casmurro is incapable of silencing Capitolina in his narrative, he must rely on something else to ensure the reader arrives at his desired

conclusion. Again, Casmurro's conflicted persona struggles with itself and the narrative to maintain his control.

As he introduces his memoirs, Casmurro begins by talking of "recordação doce e feiticeira," and then gives as definitive a statement of the credibility of his memory as possible: "Eia, comecemos a evocação por uma célebre tarde novembro, que nunca me esqueceu. Tive outras muitas, melhores, e piores, mas aquela nunca se me apagou do espírito. É o que vais entender, lendo" (15). Thus he has promised a faithful account of his life, but he has also shown that he expects the reader to take him at his word and not look outside of his text, or in between the lines, for meaning. This contradicts repeated invitations for the reader to return and reread chapters. Naturally, with Casmurro's focus on memory, he expects his reader to recall the detail he has set forth in his tale, but each interruption echoes Memórias Póstumas, and the new reader will remember the lessons learned in those breaks from the realist flow of the work.

Casmurro's memory is his strongest source of evidence in his work, but his narrative belies his initial declaration of possessing an infallible memory. In Chapter 54, "Panegírico de Santa Mônica," Casmurro recounts a moment when he stumbled into an old classmate from seminary who had written a "Panegyric of Saint Monica." The "honest" narrator admits to the reader that he did not remember anything of the panegyric, stating, "Vinte e seis anos de intervalo fazem morrer amizades mais estreitas e assíduas, mas era cortesia, era quase caridade recorder alguma lauda" (83). Now that he has justified his deceit to the reader, when asked by his friend if he remembers the panegyric, he responds:

Perfeitamente. Panegírico de Santa Mônica! Como isto me faz remontar os anos da minha mocidade! Nunca me esqueceu o seminário, creia. Os anos

passam, os acontecimentos vêm uns sobre outros, e as sensações também, e vieram amizades novas, que também se foram depois, como é lei da vida... Pois, meu caro colega, nada fez apagar aquele tempo da nossa convivência, os padres, as lições, os recreios.... (83)

Santiago uses the same language with his old classmate as he does with us at the beginning of his narrative. If he uses these declarations of memory with an old acquaintance out of “cortesia,” should the reader not suspect the use of these words in the beginning of the narrative? Much later, at the moment in which he tells of his attempt at suicide, his son Ezekiel enters the room and Casmurro states, “Leitor, houve aqui um gesto que eu não descrevo por havê-lo inteiramente esquecido, mas crê que foi belo e trágico” (173). Can we believe anything that he has written here? He obviously remembers this gesture, because his words betray him on the page. As the boy approached him with this “beautiful and tragic” gesture, Santiago’s reaction causes him to “recuar até dar de costas na estante” (173).

To bolster the strength of his argument based on his “infallible” memory, Casmurro begins to enlist the reader as an accomplice in his actions by manipulating the way in which we interpret his narration. In the chapter, “Convivas de boa memória” (LIX), Casmurro states, “Não, não, a minha memória não é boa. [...] Nada se emenda bem nos livros confusos, mas tudo se pode meter nos livros omissos. [...] É que tudo se acha fora de um livro falho, leitor amigo. Assim preencho as lacunas alheias; assim podes também preencher as minhas” (90). With this declaration, Casmurro begins to relinquish control of the narrative and leave it in the hands of the reader by inviting the reader to fill in the gaps in his narrative. What we must be wary of is that until this point, he has provided precious little opportunity for us to do so. Up till now, he has gone to great lengths to ensure that the reader adopts his point of view. If he has successfully woven

his narrative he can be confident that the reader will condone his actions once he chooses to reveal them. We must remember that he is carefully leading the reader through the events of his life, describing in detail many of the seemingly pointless events so as to establish a relationship of trust and build confidence with the reader. He has openly told us of some of his flaws and has discounted their severity with acceptable explanations as to why he would behave in such a manner.

When Casmurro relates his failed attempt at writing a sonnet (chapter 55), he invites the reader to become more active in the creation of the text. But his invitation for the reader to get involved in finishing the sonnet is not the most significant part of this chapter. The last line in this chapter states, “Tudo é dar-lhe uma idéia e encher o centro que falta” (86). Once again, we are thrown back to the opening chapters of this narrative and we see the true significance of this invitation. By means of the act of interpretation, the poet/reader is to fill in the missing middle of Santiago’s life. This invitation echoes the “Diálogo” chapters in the Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas. By instructing the reader to complete a sonnet, Casmurro limits the reader/poet in a manner similar to Brás Cubas, who provides line length and punctuation in his own chapters. In Brás’s tale, the reader can understand the significance of the discussion between Brás and Virgília based largely on the surrounding chapters. In Casmurro’s tale, the reader’s responsibility is more important, because by completing the sonnet and choosing between one of the two endings provided, the reader actually defines Bento Santiago’s character.

As he progresses through the events of his life, Casmurro pauses frequently to address the reader and comment on how his narrative is progressing. Rather than merely comment to the reader, in Chapter 45, “Abane a cabeça, leitor,” he interrupts the narrative

and invites us to act. Casmurro mentions the possibility of a frustrated reader throwing away the book. Yet at the same time, he is confident this will not happen. “Fio que torne a pegar do livro e que o abra na mesma página, sem crer por isso na veracidade do autor” (74). What should strike us hardest at this point is Casmurro’s invitation to *doubt his veracity*. Casmurro swears that Capitu acted and spoke exactly as he has written, and this invitation to doubt his veracity may initially seem to draw the reader’s attention to Capitu’s cruelty; however, it also serves to remind the reader that the narrator is only capable of providing one point of view, as Capitu is not present to speak for herself. This invitation begins a transition in the narrative in which the reader is expected to assume greater responsibility with the text, yet at the same time we can see Casmurro’s reluctance to allow the reader his or her independence in interpreting the events as he has related them.

The sonnet/life metaphor is obvious and the invitation to fill in the missing middle seems genuine, but in chapter 62, “Uma ponta de Iago,” we can see how the narrator continues to manipulate the reader in order to maintain control over filling in the gaps of his text. In this chapter, Santiago receives a report of Capitu’s gaiety while he is away at the seminary. The family dependent, José Dias, matter-of-factly tells Bento that Capitu is just waiting for some young buck of the neighborhood to marry her. Casmurro writes, “E... quê? Sabes o que é que trocariam mais; se o não achas porti mesmo, escusado é ler o resto do capítulo e do livro, não acharás mais nada, ainda que eu o diga com todas as letras da etimologia” (94). The reader now finds himself the object of Casmurro’s derision. He continues, “Mas se o achaste, compreenderás que eu, depois de atirar-me pelo portão for a, descer o resto da ladeira, corer, chegar a casa do Pádua, agarrar Capitu

e intimidá-lo que me confessasse quantos, quantos, quantos já lhe dera o peralta da vizinhança” (94). At this point, Casmurro has made a dangerous leap and is counting on this relationship of trust and sympathy with the reader to carry him through his admission of jealousy and violence directed at Capitu. However, he is also resorting to manipulation to control the reader. At this point in the narrative, no reader wishes to be considered incapable of “figuring out anything,” and we must certainly feel that if Casmurro has been open and honest to this point, sharing his innermost thoughts, weaknesses, temptations and secrets with us, we can trust that he wants us to come to the “right” conclusion and will guide us to it by whatever means necessary.

Notwithstanding his desire to direct the reader to his point of view, Casmurro is incapable of maintaining the tight control over the reader throughout the text. As he “vive o que viveu,” he begins to succumb once again to his jealousy and we find him rushing to his conclusion: the indictment and condemnation of Capitu. In chapter 97, Casmurro promises to cut his narrative short and essentially open up several lacunae in the process. He steps back from his memoir and states:

Aqui devia ser o meio do livro, mas a inexperiência fez-me ir atrás da pena, e chego quase ao fim do papel, com o melhor da narração por dizer. Agora não há mais que levá-la a grandes pernadas, capítulo sobre capítulo, pouca emenda, pouca reflexão, tudo em resumo. Já esta página vale por meses, outras valerão por anos, e assim chegaremos ao fim. (133)

As he has promised, the pace of the narrative quickens dramatically and Casmurro does not pause to reflect as much. What we must now consider is the way in which he economizes his narrative, for he must be much more careful with what he allows into the narrative because he is building his case for indictment.

After introducing Capitolina's son, Ezekiel, into the narrative, Casmurro must be certain that the reader remains his ally, for it is on this child that the entire case rests. Once again, he resorts to deriding the reader. He has already told us that he intends to leave reflection out, but when speaking of the child, he states, "A tudo acudíamos, segundo cumpria e urgia, coisa que não era necessário dizer, mas há leitores tão obtusos, que nada entendem, se se lhes não relata tudo e o resto. Vamos ao resto" (146). This is an important shift from the personal interaction and "querida" "gentle reader" treatment that he has shown previously. Now we are to accept his criticism of an unknown other reader (certainly not us) who cannot understand what Santiago is experiencing. For the benefit of the obtuse reader, Casmurro chooses to tell us what's left over. It is clear that although he does not address us as such, he considers every reader to be obtuse, thus necessitating the explication of everything as he perceives it.

Throughout the narrative, Casmurro has been careful not to alienate the reader by insulting him or her, but he is not yet finished manipulating the reader into arriving at his desired viewpoint. After recounting his desire to possess Escobar's wife, Sancha in chapter 119, he interrupts his story to mend his ways. He writes, "A leitora, que é minha amiga e abriu este livro com o fim de descansar da cavatina de ontem para a valsa de hoje, quer fechá-lo às pressas, a over que beiramos um abismo. Não faça isso, querida; eu mudo de rumo" (159). Casmurro shows he is aware of the propriety of his reader and knows that infidelity is abominable, a direct contrast to the deceased Brás Cubas, who flaunts his illicit affair with Virgília in the pages of his narrative. Perhaps we could go one step further and say that Casmurro imposes this propriety upon his reader by writing this chapter. Just the same as he has done with the "leitores obtusos" mentioned in

chapter 109, he has created another fictional reader to manipulate the actual readers of the book. He flirts with Sancha and tells of it in his narrative. By writing to the “leitora” in the next chapter, he tells the reader that they are to be suspicious of adultery, and in doing so, he presents himself as more virtuous than his friend Escobar, who has already been unfaithful to his wife.³⁰ Casmurro has now created a number of different “readers” in his text and assigned them a specific function to further his narrative. Like Memórias Póstumas, the object of the work is to create a “new” reader who is willing to engage the text and assume some responsibility for completing the missing sections of the work. Brás Cubas allows his readers to imagine dialogue between “Adão e Eva” and “Adão e Caim,” to determine how he did not become “Ministro d’Estado,” and to insert commentary between chapters. Casmurro invites the reader to write the missing middle of his sonnet and fill in the lacunae of his life.

Helen Caldwell was a particular kind of “lady reader,” one who took Casmurro’s invitation to “encher as lacunas” of his narrative. In doing so, she presents a case for Capitu’s innocence.³¹ Caldwell analyzes the text as a court trial in which the narrator, an elderly Bento Santiago, acts as the prosecuting attorney at a trial for his wife’s infidelity. However, Caldwell misses two important points: who is standing trial and who is actually narrating. She writes, “In the final chapter (CXLVIII), the reader realizes with a start that he has been pressed into jury duty. Santiago’s ‘narrative’ has been a long defense in his own behalf” (71). After briefly toying with the idea that Casmurro is guilty of the murder of Capitu and Bento Santiago, Caldwell abandons this thread and focuses on evidence to

³⁰ See chapter 104.

³¹ In her study, Caldwell makes “the case for Capitu” and carefully lays out evidences based on literary incongruences found in the novel to show how Capitu was innocent.

“prove” Capitu’s innocence. Caldwell has accurately identified the court metaphor in the novel, but mislabels the role of the reader. The reader’s role is to act as an inquisitorial judge, rather than juror, and look to the evidence outside the text. Caldwell accepts the idea that Capitolina is on trial, and argues Capitu’s case based on the gaps within the narrative and textual references that point “outside the book.” The structure of the narrative allows for only two possible persons who could stand trial, Bento and Capitolina. But what about Dom Casmurro? Although Dom Casmurro was once Bento Santiago, their characters are distinct and we cannot collapse them into the same person. We cannot try Casmurro for murder (as Caldwell suggests) because his only crime is that of being an unreliable narrator. Bento Santiago has assumed a new identity and created the narrative account of his life so as to escape trial and all responsibility for his actions. In the end, Casmurro frees himself of his narrative, essentially expiating his guilt and the reader is left with the responsibility of judgment. The mastery of the text ensures the debate will continue, but what remains is that we, as readers, we must be extremely careful in whatever role we choose to occupy; for the truth of the novel is found in the gaps, and the gaps, as we are told, are the reader’s responsibility.

When we look at these constraints that exist within narrative, we must question how they affect the different levels of the text and the parties involved at each level. The first person affected by these constraints is the author, Machado de Assis. By looking at the texts as an extension of the author, we can see that the author is present in some form or another, not as a bumbling wizard behind the curtain, desperately trying to maintain a façade or image of power, but as the bearer of the message, which holds that the source of truth lies in language itself. Both novels are fiction and the life of the characters is

bound to the author as their creator. What these characters represent may be the embodiment of ideologies or something that the author wishes to present without exposing himself (like the bumbling wizard) to the sharp and judicial eye of public opinion. Although Machado does not appear in the text of either of the novels, there is a tangible struggle between author and narrator in each work.³² In spite of this, there are a number of critics who have claimed that *Brás Cubas* is the extension of Machado's personal philosophy of life.³³ *Dom Casmurro*, the stubborn recluse, seems to fight constantly against an overwhelming authority, trying to conceal or obfuscate a force that consistently eludes his grasp. This force may be truth, guilt, or the author, or language itself. Whatever it is, it exists beyond our control over the written words in the narrative, somewhere within the grasp of the reader, but wholly in the hands of a judicious author.

Death abounds in both novels, the *Memórias Póstumas* being the more visible novel concerning death, but in each case, the narrator finds sufficient security by constructing a relationship with the reader based on their relationship to death. *Brás Cubas* writes to a living reader, but draws his reader into his text through the use of his narrative structure, specifically chapter divisions. The visibility of the narrative structure of the *Memórias* allows the narrator and the reader to delve into or avoid topics that may be uncomfortable or awkward at certain points. *Dom Casmurro* relies on his own narrative structure to gently lure the reader into a sense of camaraderie with him and therefore accept his opinions. The relationship between *Dom Casmurro* and the reader balances precariously on the fact that the poor, misunderstood gentleman is a widower,

³² This struggle is not as great in *Memórias Póstumas* as it is in *Dom Casmurro*.

³³ John Gledson and Roberto Schwarz are among the more prominent critics who have upheld this point.

and the reader's sympathy for Bento Santiago's struggles in life is sufficient to excuse a multitude of sins.

After reading the Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas and Dom Casmurro, the reader feels like he or she has made friends with both of the narrators, but upon closing the book, we are left with the pessimistic outlook on human existence that these new friends have so deftly imparted to us. John Gledson writes, "o leitor se envolve na trama sem compreender de todo o que está ocorrendo, ou aonde está sendo conduzido, de modo que, quando começa a perceber, já perdeu a capacidade para julgar como observador imparcial" (26). Machado's narratives trap the traditional reader into accepting and agreeing with the narrator, but at the same time provide us with the necessary education to allow us to rethink the philosophies presented on the pages of the novels and escape the pernicious perspective of the narratives' antiheroes. This can only be done as the reader engages the metafictional ruptures in the text that appear as direct discourse aimed at the "querido leitor." Each interposition allows the reader an opportunity to de-center the traditional, readerly text and reorient the work. These are the "lacunae" that Casmurro cannot fill, but Machado's aptly conventionalized reader can and will.

Chapter II

Foregrounding the Feminine: Rejecting the Martyrdom of the Woman in La amortajada and The Shrouded Woman

Excluding Ezequiel, Capitolina's is the final death narrated in Dom Casmurro. Her willingness to accept her husband's judgment, whether rational or irrational, and be sent to Europe to live out her remaining days in silence and obscurity illustrates the strength of the patriarchal order to which she belonged. Ezequiel's testimony that Capitolina, "falava muito em [Bento Santiago], louvando-[lhe] extraordinariamente, como o homem mais puro do mundo, o mais digno de ser querido" (181), shows the extent of her devotion. Her willingness to die away from home and family, while praising the man who forced her into her situation demonstrates the woman's inability to escape the role established for her by the patriarchal society. Regardless of Capitolina's guilt or innocence, the last word we are given of her is that she dies praising the man who condemned her. Capitolina's longsuffering and sacrifice make her a martyr for the traditional role of wife and mother.

In this chapter, I will look to the Chilean writer, María Luisa Bombal (1910-1980), and the way she utilizes death in her novels La amortajada (1938) and The Shrouded Woman (1948), to criticize the patriarchal structure of society and awaken the reader to the possibility of a successful existence outside of the traditional roles established within the male/female dichotomy of the patriarchal order. Like Capitolina, Bombal's protagonist is silenced throughout her life, but in a manner similar to Brás Cubas in Memórias Póstumas, the protagonist's death gives her a voice with which to

criticize the society to which she belonged. In these novels, the reader accompanies the female narrator/protagonist who enjoys a period of semi-omniscience as her consciousness lingers during the hours between her death and burial. It is during this time that she recalls the many roles she filled in her life, but her enhanced perspective allows her to comprehend both sides of the relationships and understand better the conflicts in each of these roles that caused her unhappiness during her life. Both narratives are the result of the narrator/protagonist recalling her life and her struggle to fit the role of daughter, lover, wife, mother, and sister; all identities that are frequently (if not primarily) defined by their relationship to their masculine counterparts. In La amortajada, as she progresses toward the “muerte de los muertos” (107), this woman reconciles her strained relationships, forgives her male counterparts, and seemingly approaches peacefulness and tranquility; however, in The Shrouded Woman, the protagonist recalls relationships with a number of female characters whose identities exist independent of the traditional masculine counterparts. It is through the protagonist’s response to these women that we see the greatest criticism of the patriarchal society presented in the narratives.

For this study, I consider La amortajada and The Shrouded Woman as two separate novels, although a majority of Shrouded is the author’s own English translation of Amortajada and the short story, “La historia de María Griselda.”³⁴ María Luisa Bombal was born in Chile in 1910; at age twelve, her mother took her to Paris where she was educated. She remained there until 1930, when she moved to Argentina. While living in Argentina, Bombal published Amortajada in 1938. She moved to the United States of

³⁴ All future references to these texts will be noted as Amortajada, “María Griselda”, and Shrouded.

America in 1940, and during the early years of the decade, she wrote the short story, “La historia de María Griselda,” and subtitled it “en donde continúa un relato apenas esbozado en la novela ‘La amortajada.’” Bombal then translated, expanded, and rewrote Amortajada and “María Griselda” in English and published them together in 1948 as The Shrouded Woman. As is common with many translations, the English version of the narrative is not as poetically masterful as the Spanish version and this defect may be one reason for the dearth of critical exegesis surrounding Shrouded.³⁵ In the analyses that have been done, critics have criticized Shrouded for “[telling] too much” and “[obscuring] the fantastic and surreal quality of the original narrative” by leaving the protagonist “in the same pragmatic situation but [changing] the contexts and contents of the enacted rememberings” (McBride, 187). Although McBride’s observation of the situation in which the protagonist finds herself is accurate, this criticism against Shrouded misses the mark because McBride does not consider the English version in the correct context. She recognizes the difference between the two texts, but fails to read Shrouded correctly. Because the majority of the text is a translation from the original Spanish text, the protagonist does remain mostly static from Amortajada to Shrouded, but it is through the other female characters added to the English narrative that the work assumes a different identity and develops a more significant feminist message than the original. With the added characters and narrative provided in “MG,” the final novel is a much more powerful feminist narrative than the original for its approach to male/female

³⁵ Bombal’s La última niebla (1935) is generally considered to be her more feminist work and is the subject of several more studies than Amortajada and Shrouded. Although I do not include La última niebla in my study, I will include some criticism about the work in this chapter because several of the techniques Bombal uses in that novel also appear in Amortajada and Shrouded.

relationships, female psychology, and its argument for a more independent position of women in Latin American society.

Evelyn Fishburn, a critic and the editor of a volume of short fiction by Latin American women, considers Bombal to be “an important precursor” to the Latin American feminist movement, but then quickly discredits the possibility of there even being a movement at all. As evidenced by the many studies of her earlier novel, Bombal is a strong feminist voice in Latin American literature of the early twentieth century and for this I include her in my own study of precursors and developers of the “nueva narrativa latinoamericana.” Her narratives are both realist and fantastic, splitting the narrative voice among several narrators.³⁶ The first is a decidedly feminine third-person omniscient narrator who is close to the protagonist of the works, identifies with her, and, most importantly, serves as the voice of truth and authority throughout the work. It is this *narradora* who guides the narrative along realist lines.³⁷ The next narrator of the work is the protagonist herself, the title character, the “amortajada” or “shrouded woman.” This narrator, who is deceased but speaks from what is labeled “la muerte de los vivos” (107), recalls the events and relationships of her life as those characters who were most significant to her during her life come to pay their respects upon her passing. Most significant in the opening lines of the novel is the statement that “ella veía, sentía” (9). This fantastic element begins as the *narradora* depicts the scene focused entirely on the

³⁶ Although I will focus primarily on the two female narrators in these works, there are two masculine narrators, Fernando and Padre Carlos, whose male perspective is juxtaposed with the female perspective of the “amortajada” and the *narradora*. This technique reveals important differences between the expectations and desires of the two sexes.

³⁷ Lucía Guerra-Cunningham identifies the third-person narrator as “la *narradora*,” and recognizes her intimacy with the “amortajada” and her experiences. I will adopt this term to identify the 3rd person, omniscient narrator of both Amortajada and Shrouded as well as “MG.” Magalí Fernández has mistakenly (I believe) collapsed the *narradora* and the protagonist into the same personage in her work El discurso narrativo en la obra de María Luisa Bombal (1981).

deceased woman and describes her surroundings from a conflicted perspective, vacillating between what she (the protagonist) can see from behind her “largas pestañas” and what others see as they look at her. As the deceased woman becomes aware of her consciousness, she sees herself objectively, and notes simple changes in her appearance. This perspective frequently combines that of the *narradora* with the protagonist, leading some critics to conflate the two. This is not the case, however, as the *narradora* possesses more knowledge and has considerably more authority over the progress of the narrative than the protagonist. The *narradora* is linked to the “amortajada’s” consciousness but remains completely independent of her, one of the strongest evidences of this is that she opens and closes the works, continuing to speak after the protagonist chooses silence and oblivion.

Although the *narradora* is a reliable authority in the narrative, the vacillation between the narrator/protagonist and the omniscient narrator destabilizes the work. Margaret Campbell includes this in her explication of the “vaporous world” of Bombal’s narrative, and highlights the way in which the author “leaves traditional techniques in search of [literary] effects” (419). Campbell recognizes the autobiographical form of the “amortajada’s” portion of the narrative, but largely ignores the relationship between the *narradora* and the “amortajada.” The relationship between the *narradora* and the “amortajada” is important because it is through the differences in their perspective that we see the “amortajada” progress toward a deeper understanding of her situation and the meaning of her life, and this progress is essential to the development of the feminist perspective that appears at the end of Shrouded.

As the story develops, we quickly see that the *narradora* provides valuable but objective insight into the human condition while the “amortajada” is driven by feelings, both emotional and physical. The *narradora* is responsible for telling events that occur at the wake, as well as verifying judgments that the protagonist makes during her moments of recollection. The “amortajada” speaks only in response to the presence of other characters in the room, many of which touch her body in some way or another, and it is this touch that leads the protagonist to recall the relationship she had with that person during her life. By making the woman’s body the locus of all of her memories, Bombal makes the female body literally a medium of communication.³⁸ Death has freed the “amortajada’s” consciousness from her body, and her remains lying on the bed during the wake become the stage on which the memories of her life play out. The first evidence of this occurs in the opening pages of the narrative, as the protagonist becomes aware of her consciousness outside of her physical body. The *narradora* describes the woman’s beauty thus:

Y se ve envuelta en aquel batón de raso blanco que solía volverla tan grácil [...] vislumbra sus manos que han adquirido la delicadeza frívola de dos palomas sosegadas. [...] Ella no ignora que la masa sombría de una cabellera desplegada presta a toda mujer extendida y durmiendo un ceño de misterio, un perturbador encanto. Y de golpe se siente sin una sola arruga, pálida y bella como nunca. (10)

The physical description of the dead woman’s beauty introduces her to the reader and immediately reveals the “amortajada’s” liberated consciousness because she derives pleasure from seeing herself in this state. We read, “La invade una inmensa alegría, que puedan admirarla así, los que ya no la recordaban sino devorada por fútiles inquietudes,

³⁸ See Hélène Cixous’s “The Laugh of the Medusa.”

marchita por algunas penas y el aire cortante de la hacienda” (10). As the now inert but beautiful body lay on the bed, it is the focal point of all who enter the room, including the reader. Her death has established the setting for the narrative, and the body of the deceased provides the link between the world of the living and that of the dead. In Machado’s works, the narratives combine death and the metafictional structure of the works to create a space in which to establish the narrative. In Bombal’s novels, the narratives unfold between the living and the dead, but the physical remains of the central character provides the space for these works.

Throughout each episode, the *narradora* links the “amortajada’s” memories with a physical element of her body. While the mourners focus on her remains, we see how the narrator/protagonist delights that her acquaintances now see her as a beautiful being, transformed from the woman stifled by her position in life and the world around her. The joy she experiences from this comes as she realizes that the final memory these people will have of her is seeing her “bella como nunca.” With only her physical body remaining, her friends and family, “los que ya no la recordaban sino devorada [y] marchita,” look on her physical beauty in the serenity of death and presumably use this image to form their final memories of her. During her life, this woman was forced into an identity associated with her surroundings, and her physical beauty was obscured by “inquietudes” and “penas” resulting from her situation in life. Now that she is dead, her beauty is all that remains, and the “amortajada,” who not insignificantly is unnamed at this point in the narrative, exists independently of the social identity imposed on her by her position in life. The death of this woman has ended all of her earthly relationships. The living look upon her body and mourn the loss of their daughter, lover, wife, mother,

and sister, but the “amortajada” finds peace as she relinquishes each of these roles and escapes society altogether.

At first, the protagonist seems unwilling to let go of the relationships she had in life. Each new mourner revives in her a conflict that existed in their relationship. From her position within the “muerte de los vivos,” the narrator/protagonist is able to recall with clarity the events in her life that created the conflict she had with each person. More importantly, the new perspective provides the “amortajada” with a certain amount of omniscience as she recalls the relationship. This perspective strips away the veils of everyday existence and petty desires and allows her to reconcile each conflict. Her death allows her to become more self-aware by separating her physical body from her consciousness. By escaping the limits of her body, the “amortajada” is able to perceive the influences that were stressors in her living relationships and understand the actions of other (predominately masculine) characters in her life story. By the end of Shrouded, the deceased narrator is able to utilize her enhanced perspective within the “muerte de los vivos” to not only reconcile her conflicted relationships for herself, but for others as well.

In the original Amortajada, the narrator/protagonist recognizes ten different characters that bring about varied reactions and recollections. Of these ten, her father, sister, two sons and daughter are not given extensive narration except through their presence in other memories. Of the remaining five characters, her nursemaid, Zoila, appears as a constant throughout the work, accompanying her during every phase of her life. The other four are the men who had the most influence on her during her life: her first lover, Ricardo; her confidant and would-be lover, Fernando; her husband, Antonio; and her spiritual adviser, Padre Carlos. As these conflicted relationships are significant to

the way the “amortajada” evolves as a character, it is important to examine some of the more complex issues presented in the narrative through her recollection of them. These relationships all illustrate a different time in the woman’s life, beginning with the first expression of her sexuality, progressing through her marriage, motherhood, and even an apparent dominant position in her relationship with Fernando. Each role grows out of the others, but none is an acceptable or fulfilling role for her, for each of these relationships follows the patriarchal order of society and denies the woman an independent identity.

The first role is that of the child. Her mother is absent from the narrative, and when her father appears at her wake to mourn her passing, we see the foundation of the patriarchal order to which the “amortajada” belonged during life. Her relationship with her father centers around their memory of her mother, whom they loved for her “velito atado alrededor del sombrero y [...] tan rico olor” (36). Rather than illustrate a conflict or resentment in this relationship, this brief episode establishes the system of patriarchy central to the work. The woman’s father was the original authority in her life. It is significant that as the girl answers her father’s inquiries of why she loved her mother, he dismisses her answers as silly. He would have the young girl believe that he had a more significant reason for loving his wife, that he was able to describe her character and beauty better than the simple smells and colors that the child used, but never shared his recollection with her. The “amortajada” does not know why her father never spoke about her mother, but accepts his dismissal of her memories as evidence of a deeper love for or understanding of her mother’s being. Without any recollection of a deeper relationship between the girl and her mother, especially without memories of her mother’s voice or actions, we can see how the “amortajada” has continued in the same role as her mother,

silent and unidentified. It is evident that the girl's mother has been absent throughout her life, and the anonymity of the older woman continues in the "amortajada." In this patriarchal order, women have neither voice nor independent identity in a male/female relationship.

The "amortajada" gains her voice in the novels when her first lover, Ricardo, appears at her wake to pay his respects. She states, "Te recuerdo, te recuerdo adolescente. Recuerdo tu pupila clara, tu tez de rubio curtida por el sol de la hacienda, tu cuerpo entonces, afilado y nervioso" (14). This declaration echoes the *narradora's* description of the woman's body laid out on the bed in the opening pages of the narrative. Her description of Ricardo's physical beauty is appropriate because he is the man with whom the protagonist first discovered the procreative power of her physical body, therefore the physical contact between them lies at the center of this relationship and is the basis for her memory of him. It is in her relationship with Ricardo that the girl becomes a woman, and the discovery of her sexuality transitions her from girl to lover. Prior to this, her position in society was determined by the relationship she had with her father, but it is in her relationship with Ricardo that she first begins to recognize through experience the limitations placed on women in the patriarchal society. The narrator/protagonist recalls that as a child, Ricardo would terrorize her and her sister, and states that she hated him for this cruel behavior, but was powerless to act against it. Later, as an adolescent, she fell in love with him and gave herself to him. What initially appears as foibles of youth reinforces the lesser position that the girl is allowed in society. The male is the aggressor and the female is expected to remain passive and open to receive his advances.

As his lover, she focuses only on the pleasure of her union with Ricardo, but her identity rapidly shifts because she becomes pregnant. Her naïve perspective of society leads her to expect that as she becomes “mother,” she will also become “wife.” This anticipation is a result of witnessing the relationship that existed between her father and mother. However, her family’s lower social status complicates the relationship and Ricardo refuses to comply with her expectations and assume the roles of “husband” and “father.” Her anger at Ricardo’s decision to abandon her rather than marry her adversely affects every other relationship she will have in her life, but more importantly, her recollection of her failed relationship with Ricardo introduces the first moment in which she learns that she has the ability to reject (or at least postpone) the role of “mother.”

The girl’s unexpected pregnancy presents the greatest discrepancy between the two novels, with the event ending spontaneously in Amortajada, but very differently in Shrouded. In the earlier novel, the protagonist recalls,

Quando la voz de cierta inquietud me despertaba importuna:
--“¡Si lo llega a saber tu Padre!” –procurando tranquilizarme le respondía:
--“Mañana, mañana buscaré esas yerbas que... o tal vez consulte a la mujer que vive en la barranca...”
--“Debes tomar una decisión antes de que tu estado se vuelva irremediable”.
--“Bah, mañana, mañana...”
[...] Mañana, mañana, decía. Y en esto llegó el verano. (27)

Only briefly does she consider the possibility of interfering with the natural course of the pregnancy by looking for the “yerbas que...”, but the narrative does not dwell on this thought as the girl puts it out of her mind. She ultimately miscarries and is saved from assuming the role of “mother” as an unmarried woman. This is not the case in Shrouded, because the pregnancy does not end spontaneously: it is aborted.

Rather than play out internally as it does in Amortajada, this episode is much more developed in Shrouded, for it is Zoila, the Araucanian woman who becomes the “voice of reality” in the English text. As the conflict unfolds between Zoila and the girl, we see that Zoila possesses a strength and knowledge that the women in Amortajada do not have. We read:

“Something is the matter with you! You’re sick!”
“Sick, me! You’re crazy,” I answered insolently, trying to lie to her, more from shame than out of desire to deceive.
“I say sick because I don’t know how to say it another way. But you know what I mean.” (27)

Zoila has identified the problem from which the girl is suffering and confronts her. Zoila knows that she is pregnant and not merely sick, but Bombal uses this line to illustrate the ancient woman’s inability to communicate. This dialogue is important because it shows the importance of how language and truth may be lost if the bearer of truth has no authority to speak. The girl feels that she can lie to Zoila because she has somewhat of a greater command of the language and authority over the word than her nursemaid. Notwithstanding her education and authority, the girl’s naiveté reflects the foolish society in which she lives. In spite of her limited vocabulary to define the girl’s situation, Zoila is able to perceive the problem and confronts her about it. Zoila understands the implications of the unexpected pregnancy and describes it for what it is: an illness. The detriment to the already struggling family is something the selfish girl cannot comprehend, but Zoila fully recognizes and intends to avoid. The simple girl tries unsuccessfully to lie to Zoila and admits, “Faced with her firmness, I suddenly felt an infinite weariness come over me” (28). Zoila now shows her true strength and wisdom and proposes a resolution to the problem. As the girl cedes authority to her nurse, Zoila,

the older woman first tries to make the would-be father marry her by writing (with “queer handwriting” (29)) a letter to Ricardo and his parents. When Zoila’s attempts to force the young man to marry fail (as they naturally would, for Zoila is nothing more than a servant to a family from a much lower class than Ricardo’s), she opts for the second solution: abortion. Here, Zoila carries out the act by administering the “potion of bitter herbs” that are only thought of in Amortajada. The difference between the two texts illustrates the strength of the woman as a controller of her own destiny. Zoila’s pragmatism regarding the unwanted and inconvenient pregnancy stands against everything the girl’s society upheld. Ricardo and his family were free from the responsibility of rearing an illegitimate child because their position in society allowed them to ignore Zoila’s pleas for justice. Zoila fully understands her power over life and death and is not beholden to any moral behavior dictated by the teachings of a patriarchal religion. Whereas in Amortajada the young girl lazily passes off an “inquietud” and serendipitously miscarries the illegitimate child, in Shrouded, the strong, reasonable Zoila administers the “bitter herbs” and actually causes the abortion of the child. The “shrouded woman” narrates:

I think she even threatened your parents. I think so. I never knew quite what she did; I had surrendered myself to her will. I remember when she began to awaken me in the morning with a potion of bitter herbs. ‘What is this awful stuff?’ ‘Drink it and ask no questions.’ And so I would drink, asking no more questions. (29)

It is evident that the Woman has no authority to speak and demand that Ricardo accept responsibility for his actions, because both the girl’s confrontation of Ricardo and Zoila’s “poor letter” are unsuccessful. Nevertheless, Zoila’s knowledge of herbs and strength of character to actually induce an abortion liberates the foolish girl from the repercussions

of bearing an illegitimate child.³⁹ The resolution of this situation, although vastly different in the second novel does not prompt additional thought in the narrator/protagonist. Because of this, it is easy to agree with McBride's criticism of the work and how the character remains static despite facing more challenging life situations.

After recalling her relationship with Ricardo, her enhanced perspective leads her to recognize that, "la verdad es que, sea por inconsciencia o por miedo, cada uno siguió un camino diferente. Y que toda la vida se esquivaron, luego, como de mutuo acuerdo" (33). This realization is only made possible through the separation of death, primarily because she has not interacted with Ricardo since he abandoned her in their youth. The *narradora* explains the protagonist's realization that she was equally responsible for the lifelong separation from Ricardo, and that she shared authority in the relationship. She no longer needs to hate him for abandoning her at such a young age, but now comprehends that her physical experience with Ricardo was only the awakening of her sexual identity. She realizes that Ricardo, although not present during her life, was always a part of it. More importantly, she discovers that she, likewise, has always remained a part of his life. This final realization empowers the "amortajada" because she is able to witness the lasting influence she had on Ricardo's life. The *narradora* then asks, "¿Era preciso morir para saber ciertas cosas?" (33). In *Shrouded*, the *narradora* asks, "must we die in order to know certain things?" (39). The protagonist's inability to understand the nature of her relationship with Ricardo led to a life of frustration, but death distances her sufficiently to allow her to reconcile herself to Ricardo's decision to leave her. In each novel, the

³⁹ This echoes Virgília's failed pregnancy in *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas*. Virgília does not abort the pregnancy, but Brás comments on the inconvenience that he realizes Virgília would have felt had the child lived.

narradora's question ruptures the flow of the woman's memories to give the reader pause to consider the new perspective being granted through the eyes of the "amortajada."

Once the "amortajada" understands that Ricardo's reasons for abandoning her are unimportant, her lifelong hatred born of the hurt she felt is erased immediately. The *narradora*'s question is also ironic because just when the protagonist is able to reconcile herself to the man she loved first and foremost throughout her life; she becomes painfully aware that their relationship will never be repaired because they are separated by death. To further emphasize the separation, a new voice enters the narrative and engages the "amortajada" in dialogue. We read,

–Vamos, vamos.
–¿Adónde? [...]
–Más allá. (34)

This force leads her out into the garden, back toward nature, but her life is not yet resolved and as she pauses to contemplate this strange force that pulls her away, she suddenly sees herself once "again, lying face up in the spacious bed" (41). There are other relationships and roles that the "amortajada" must comprehend and reconcile before she can move on.

Her experience with Ricardo is not the only one in which the protagonist struggles with the role of lover. Her relationship with Fernando also explores the power struggle that exists between man and woman as lovers. However, her relationship with Fernando is an inversion of her relationship with Ricardo, as is evidenced by the way in which he approaches her body. The "amortajada's" would-be lover appears at her bedside to resolve his conflict with her. As if in anticipation of a struggle, the *narradora* declares,

“¡Que se vaya! No quiere oírlo” (44). This declaration raises a new question, for none of the other visitors speak to her. The other guests arrive and silently look at her while her memories take the narrative back. The protagonist can criticize them and comment on their life and behavior, but this is a new situation because it is as if she knows what is going to happen with this visit. It is quite significant to note that the woman does not want to *hear* Fernando. Nevertheless, she is powerless to prevent Fernando from speaking and he begins. “¡Ana María, levántate!” (44). For the first time in the narrative, the “amortajada” is identified by name. Like Machado’s women, Ana María is not named until one of the men decides to address her. All of the mourners who appear in her home to pay her respects are identified by their names, but she is no longer part of society and therefore remains unnamed by them. Each mourner identifies Ana María by her role in their individual relationship, but Fernando uses her name, and he does so in an attempt to command her to return, to arise from death. This is the initial indicator of the power structure in the relationship between Ana María and Fernando. As he continues speaking to her, Fernando describes the process of death that Ana María is undergoing. He states, “Tú, minuto por minuto cayendo un poco más en el pasado. Y las sustancias vivas de que estabas hecha, separándose, escurriéndose por cauces distintos, como ríos que no lograrán jamás volver sobre su curso. ¡Jamás!” (44). It is apparent that this man is far more familiar with Ana María than anyone else who has appeared in the narrative up to this point. If anyone understands her, it is he. However, the conflict that holds Ana María captive with this relationship does not need to be resolved for her, but for him. The relationship between Ana María and Fernando is a reversal of the other patriarchal relationships in which Ana María lived. It is she who commanded in this relationship.

Therefore, just as Ana María needed to understand and forgive Ricardo for abandoning her, Fernando now must reconcile his relationship with Ana María.

The *narradora* explains the conflict that exists between Ana María and Fernando: in this relationship it was Ana María who held all the power. This presents a very interesting reversal of gender roles for it is she who allowed Fernando to visit her, to accompany her and witness her sorrows. He entered her life as a would-be suitor, filling in where her estranged husband Antonio was absent. Fernando became her confidant and she revealed a great deal of her suffering to him, one confidence after another, and he patiently listened to everything she had to say. The moment of truth in this strange relationship occurs after Ana María realizes that she cannot rid herself of Fernando and that she did not hold complete power over the relationship as she once believed. The *narradora* states:

¡Fernando! Durante largos años, qué de noches, ante el terror de una velada solitaria, ella lo llamó a su lado. [...] En vano se proponía hablarle de cosas indiferentes. Junto con la hora y la llama, el veneno crecía, le trepaba por la garganta hasta los labios, y comenzaba a hablar. Hablaba y él escuchaba. [...] Después de la primera confidencia, la segunda y la tercera afluyeron naturalmente y las siguientes también, pero ya casi contra su voluntad. En seguida, le fue imposible poner un dique a su incontinencia. Lo había admitido en su intimidad y no era bastante fuerte para echarlo. (45)

Ana María's intention with Fernando was to eliminate the physical element of a male/female relationship and replace it with language, something she felt she could control. Her relationship with Fernando is the fulfillment of her desire for control. As long as Fernando listened passively, Ana María could be the aggressor and was comfortable surrendering her secrets to him. The physical description of Ana María in this setting, her incontinence with her secrets, the focus on her throat and lips as her

words pour out of her serves as a substitution for the unfulfilling sexual union between Ana María and Ricardo or her husband, Antonio.

Ana María's relationship with Fernando is quite different from the other male-female relationships described in the novels, because it was established on the "confidencias" revealed in private, semi-intimate conversation. Fernando provided the emotional support that Ana María sought so desperately in her life, but this support led to her dependence on him. The *narradora* reveals that Ana María became dependent on Fernando because in this relationship, Ana María was able to speak, something she could not do in any of the other relationships. With Fernando acting as the receiver, Ana María felt she was the dominant force in the relationship and therefore enjoyed the power that comes through possession of the word.⁴⁰ She was content with her authority over Fernando, knowing that she controlled the level of intimacy between them. Later, when Fernando attempts to speak, equating himself with Ana María, she is utterly repulsed by what he reveals, discovers she hates him, but then loses her ability to command in the relationship. We read:

Pero no supo que podía odiarlo hasta esa noche en que él se confió a su vez.

¡La frialdad con que le contó aquel despertar junto al cuerpo ya inerte de su mujer, la frialdad con que habló del famoso tubo de veronal encontrado vacío sobre el velador!

Durante varias horas había dormido junto a una muerta y su contacto no había marcado su carne con el más leve temblor. (46)

Ana María is repulsed by Fernando's indifference to the death of his wife. The reference to the tube of veronal hints that this unnamed woman took her own life, an act that is

⁴⁰ Francine Masiello sees a "defiance to the masculine logos" in Bombal's work as her narrator/protagonists "reject the paternal axis of social significance" by assuming control of the narratives and "reshaping the self-awareness of the protagonist through a new approach to her body" ("Texto" 808).

echoed in Ana María's daughter-in-law Silvia in "Historia." Nevertheless, it is not the event of the death of Fernando's wife that disgusts Ana María, but the fact that he that he felt nothing at finding his wife's body beside him.

As Fernando and Ana María recall their relationship, the combination of death and loss of control in the relationship becomes paramount.⁴¹ It appears that Ana María is disgusted by the "coldness" with which Fernando relates the death of his wife, but Ana María takes the greatest offense at Fernando's declaration of solidarity with her when he says, "¡Oh, Ana María, ninguno de los dos hemos nacido bajo estrella que lo preserve...!" (46). By equating himself with Ana María, Fernando strips her of the authority she felt she held. She suddenly realizes that she never held power over their relationship and Fernando is equal to the other men in Ana María's life. Ironically, she desires to turn him away by silencing herself, an act that was previously despicable to her. It is this recollection that Ana María so desperately wishes to avoid as she sees Fernando approach her bedside. Fernando's presence and his ability to speak uninhibited serve to remind her of her failure to maintain her power over him, once again relegating her to a lesser position in society. The final statement that Fernando delivers is, "Tal vez deseé tu muerte, Ana María" (62). Ana María does not find peace from this encounter, but Fernando does and can move on with his life. In this case, Ana María's death acts like Leocádia's death in Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas, in that it serves to give Fernando an independent identity. If we recall Leocádia's death in Memórias, she is not identified until after her passing, but her death set her husband on his path as a poet. Like the

⁴¹ Each recalls in a different manner. Fernando addresses Ana María, accusing her of unfaithfulness and cruelty to him, while Ana María recalls only their history together, using their relationship as a backdrop for many of her memories with her children. Fernando's accusations of unfaithfulness echo Ana María's accusations against her husband Antonio and strengthen the gender reversal in the former relationship.

captain/poet eulogizing Leocádia and moving on, Fernando's appearance in the novel identifies and eulogizes Ana María to the reader as he gains his independence through her death.

The events recalled during Fernando's visit to Ana María's bedside are altered very little from the first narrative to the second, but after the resolution in Shrouded, Death calls Ana María away, something that does not happen in Amortajada.⁴² As she proceeds with Death, she comes to realize "that on the stairway leading down to earth, one of the last steps is the step of silence" (115). This silence further illustrates the loss of her authority to speak in her relationship with Fernando. She is tempted to succumb to Death and silence, but forces herself back, for there is yet "an earthly image [that] endures intact" (115). Ana María's gradual progress toward nature and silence shows her progress toward becoming a martyr for the traditional role of women. This time, her return to her body is not the result of a struggle, nor does she question her destination. She merely returns to resolve her final conflict with patriarchy: her marriage to Antonio. The image that remains intact, that needs to be destroyed, is the image of the passive wife.

Once Fernando leaves her bedside, Ana María's husband, Antonio, arrives at the wake. The *narradora* tells how everyone present leaves the room to the "dueño y señor de aquella muerte" (63). This title is confusing, for although he was the lord and master of Ana María during her life, this statement seems to credit Antonio with responsibility

⁴² I have chosen to capitalize Death because it appears as a character, possessing a voice, and acting on the protagonist.

for her death.⁴³ We have already learned through Fernando's visit that Ana María's marriage to Antonio was unhappy and Ana María resents Antonio for being unfaithful to her and for withholding affection. As Antonio faces the deceased, her recollections take the narrative back into the past, where it becomes clear that, for Ana María, the roles of wife and lover never coincide.

The discovery that Ana María makes in this episode is that it was her own actions early in her marriage that resulted in its breakdown. Her refusal to surrender herself sexually to Antonio even in marriage reflects her initial unwillingness to accept the role of wife assigned her in the patriarchal society. Her father agreed to the marriage and she had to accept it, regardless of her feelings. When Ana María spurned her new husband and returned to her father's home, he moved on, satisfying his sexual desires with other women. Eventually Ana María accepted her position and returned to Antonio, but by this time he no longer needed her. In her position as wife, Ana María is forced to accept Antonio's unfaithfulness because she refused to accept the role of lover, and the only solace she has comes through her claim as his legitimate wife to a portion, however small, of his heart. Her attempt at complying with the patriarchal structure requires her to suppress her feelings of betrayal, but this does not work, for this is the memory that calls Ana María back from death.

The image that she recalls occurred as she witnessed, by pure accident, what she perceived as Antonio's frustration with his marriage. Thinking himself alone, Antonio enters their bedroom, stumbles on one of Ana María's bedroom slippers and, "Ella vio y

⁴³ Both the Spanish version and the English version specify "death" as the object over which Antonio is "señor y dueño." There is no change made to identify Ana María as the "muerta," and this bears a much more significant connotation into the failed marriage of Antonio and Ana María.

nunca pudo olvidarlo, brutalmente, con rabia, casi, la arrojó lejos de sí de un puntapié” (76). The *narradora* tells that Ana María discovered a truth about her relationship with Antonio at this point: that Antonio didn’t love her, that he merely tolerated her. In this case, the bedroom slipper becomes metonymous for Ana María and she sees the violent act as a direct attack on her own person. However, it is important to note that this discovery was made during her life, when she was unable to discern true thoughts or feelings. As a result, Ana María allows her own frustration in marriage to devolve into hatred, which she bears for Antonio until this moment in the narrative, when she watches as he lays his head on her hip and sobs.

Once again, the *narradora* returns the focus of the narrative to the female body by describing that Ana María feels the weight of his head on her hip; the first contact (especially tender) between the two in an unspecified (but presumably great) amount of time. The touch between the man and woman seemingly breaks down barriers as Ana María rejects her husband, disgusted at his presence, but “a medida que las lágrimas brotan, se deslizan, caen, ella siente su odio retraerse, evaporarse. No, ya no odia” (85). With this revelation, forgiveness comes against her will. Death now pulls her back toward nature and its accompanying silence, but she cries out, “¡Quiero vivir. Devuélvanme, devuélvanme mi odio!” (85). With this exclamation, Ana María shows that it is her hatred for the men who held power over her in life that is the essence of her physical existence. Moreover, her command is for those men to return her hatred to her, as if they took it away. Her existence, her identity was defined by her relationship with those men, and her independence and individuality in those relationships was based on the hatred she felt for each of them in turn. Without this hatred, Ana María loses her

independent identity and succumbs to the roles of lover and wife, entirely subsumed by the patriarchal authority of the men around her.

As Ana María recalls her relationships with Fernando and Antonio, we learn of another of the important roles the “amortajada” held in life, that of mother.⁴⁴ It is in this role that Ana María possesses complete authority and autonomy. Notwithstanding this powerful position in the society of the family, Ana María is not content with this role either, for it relegates to her the task of perpetuating and protecting the patriarchal structure of the society that has caused her so much unhappiness. The focus on the woman’s responsibility as mother as opposed to the father’s responsibility is demonstrated as many of Ana María’s memories of her children are only visible through the recollection of this mock family setting in which Fernando (called “tío Fernando” by the children) substitutes for the children’s real father, Antonio. In one episode, Fernando takes Ana María and the kids on an excursion while Antonio remains at the hacienda. The distortion of the actual family structure is so natural to Ana María that when they are lost and unable to return home that night, it is only an afterthought that brings Antonio and her responsibility toward him to her mind. The substitution of Fernando for Antonio as an acceptable father figure for the children strengthens Ana María’s role as mother, for she is unable to escape her position in the family. There is no acceptable substitute for the mother, whereas Fernando and Antonio both serve, albeit inadequately, as father figures

⁴⁴ Each of the works included in this project demonstrate the importance of the mother in maintaining the family structure. Brás Cubas celebrates his victory over life by not fathering a child, but Virgília does have a child, and Brás focuses a great deal of attention on her suffering during pregnancy and childbirth. Bento Santiago does not recall his father, but focuses several chapters on his mother’s will for him in life. If Casmurro doubts the paternity of Ezequiel, there is no question that Capitolina is the mother, and she dies fulfilling that role. Juan Preciado may be Pedro Páramo’s son, but it is his mother, Dolores, who instills in Juan the desire to seek his father and claim his birthright. Even Riobaldo grows up without a father and does not begin his life until his mother passes away.

for the children. As long as Ana María is present as the matriarch, it is not important whether Antonio or Fernando fill the role of the father. “La historia de María Griselda” also upholds the primacy of Ana María’s role as mother, because it is she, the matriarch of the family, who must travel to the family’s hacienda and resolve her children’s problems.

“La historia de María Griselda” is narrated entirely by the omniscient third-person *narradora*, who focuses her narration of events around Ana María’s return to the family hacienda in the south where her husband Antonio took her as a young bride. Alberto, her oldest son, has married María Griselda and claimed his right to the hacienda as the heir to the family fortune. They are joined by Fred and his wife Silvia. Also living at the hacienda is Rodolfo, the family steward, who has been pursued there by Ana María’s daughter, Anita, who hopes to secure his affection and marry him. By portraying Ana María’s children as adults, the *narradora* allows the reader a deeper insight into the patriarchal order of the society surrounding the family. Ana María’s children repeat the mistakes she made as a youth. Naturally, Ana María is most concerned about Anita’s behavior, because it is reminiscent of her own youthful foolishness. Anita, like her mother, is trying to use pregnancy to secure the man she loves. As the matriarch of the family, Ana María is obliged to enter and set things to right.

When Ana María arrives at the hacienda, she finds that all of the men are trapped in the house by their love for María Griselda’s beauty. Alberto, who seemingly has the good fortune of being married to María Griselda, suffers the most because his jealousy

knows no limits.⁴⁵ As Ana María examines the disarray surrounding her children and surmises that María Griselda is responsible for it all, she decides that she must speak with her and somehow force her to stop what she is doing. She eventually meets María Griselda and also falls in love with her beauty. In the interview that follows, we learn that María Griselda is the epitome of natural beauty and womanhood. She explains that she has no likeness to her parents or anyone else on earth. She has been responsible for the madness of several people who could not comprehend her beauty and pined for her. What is most significant about this event is that Ana María does not blame María Griselda for her beauty, but she understands the tragic nature of such a blessing. María Griselda desired to enter into the patriarchal order of society by marrying Alberto and having children with him, but this is impossible, for fate, it would seem, is so cruel as to deny her offspring. María Griselda's inability to bear children echoes Ana María's and Anita's attempts to secure their lovers by becoming pregnant. Although Alberto has already married María Griselda, her beauty is such that it prohibits a happy marriage because Alberto desires to possess her beauty entirely. Her unmatched beauty is famed throughout the country, but it brings no joy and only María Griselda is capable of understanding the suffering that it causes; until she meets Ana María. The stern matriarch softens immediately and pities the young beauty, establishing a link between herself and María Griselda, the traditional woman and the impossible beauty, understanding the curse of beauty as it applies not only to María Griselda, but also every other woman on earth.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Alberto echoes Bento Santiago/ Dom Casmurro, who allowed himself to be destroyed by jealousy over his wife's presumed unfaithfulness.

⁴⁶ María Griselda's beauty echoes that of the shepherdess Marcela in Don Quixote, but María Griselda is unlike Cervantes's character because María Griselda tries to be part of society but is incapable. She also

The effects of María Griselda's beauty are so profound that Ana María recognizes them in Alberto as he visits her bedside during the wake.

When Alberto enters the room, Ana María identifies him as María Griselda's husband and immediately reproaches herself for doing so. Her equivocation in identifying her son inverts the gender role and places María Griselda at the head of the union. This contradicts the traditional concept of "man and wife" and Ana María's self criticism reflects the strength of this tradition. The *narradora* states that Ana María missed seeing her daughter-in-law at the wake and is confused or disturbed by her son's behavior. As Ana María contemplates Alberto's physical appearance, she notices "sus párpados. Son [...] unos párpados rugosos y secos, como si, cerrados noche a noche sobre una pasión taciturna, se hubieran marchitado, quemados desde adentro." More importantly than his appearance, the *narradora* states, "Es curioso que lo note por primera vez. ¿O simplemente es natural que se afine en los muertos la percepción de cuanto es signo de muerte?" (41). Once again, the *narradora*'s observations and questions highlight the role of death in the narrative and force the reader to contemplate the new perspective. Here we have a physical description of the effects of jealousy. The destruction of Alberto's countenance recalls the image of the aged Bento Santiago/Dom Casmurro, who relies so heavily on photographs and portraits in his own tale, yet never provides a description of himself.

The enhanced perspective reveals a unique link between the mother and the son, a condition best described as a "sign of death." The statement that this is the first time Ana

prefigures Remedios the Beauty of García Márquez's Cien años de soledad, who is carried away to heaven before she can become a wife/mother.

María has noticed Alberto's eyes implies that they have been damaged for some time. At the same time, the *narradora* highlights the importance of death in understanding, because prior to this encounter, Ana María was incapable of seeing her son's true character. When he is given the opportunity, or when he perceives himself alone and unwatched, Alberto quickly locates a photograph of his wife, María Griselda, and burns it, thereby destroying the last existing testament to the beauty of his wife, whom he now keeps sequestered in his home. The *narradora* tells:

Salvo una muerta, nadie sabe ni sabrá jamás cuánto lo han hecho sufrir esas numerosas efigies de su mujer, rayos por donde ella se evade, a pesar de su vigilancia. ¿No entrega acaso un poco de su belleza en cada retrato? ¿No existe acaso en uno de ellos una posibilidad de comunicación? (48)

This paragraph allows us a glimpse into Alberto's thoughts, explaining that María Griselda's beauty is also a means of her communicating with others. This further echoes Casmurro's dependence on photos and portraits to establish his characters' identities and nature. Ana María is able to discern these thoughts because she knows the history between Alberto and María Griselda. The *narradora*'s matter-of-fact description presents Alberto's desire to eliminate all evidence of María Griselda's beauty and existence outside of his home as madness, because it is impossible to communicate through photographs. By referring to María Griselda as "su mujer," the *narradora* emphasizes the "man and wife" tradition to which they belong, but we cannot forget that Ana María is abandoning this perspective by initially referring to Alberto as "el marido de María Griselda" (39).

In Amortajada, the protagonist only laments the ultimate destruction of her daughter-in-law, jealously cloistered away from the world by her husband. With no means of consoling herself or the famed beauty, Ana María can only cry, "¡Oh, Alberto,

mi pobre hijo!” (42). This episode illustrates the continued patriarchy in the society in which the narrative unfolds: Ana María, even though she is Alberto’s mother, is unable to denounce the cruel jealousy that he allows to sequester his wife from the world.

Bombal’s Alberto echoes Machado’s Casmurro in his attempt at eliminating all evidence of his wife’s existence on earth and subjecting her completely to his will. Ana María’s death separates her in this case from her daughter-in-law and her memory of the famed beauty perishes with her, for Ana María possessed the only remaining souvenir of María Griselda. Alberto is the oldest son and heir to the family land and fortune. Because of his position within the family and the authority granted him by his station in life, his jealousy ensures that all of the women in his life will remain subordinate to him, thus perpetuating the flawed social structure that Ana María’s narrative is highlighting. Again, it is through the revelatory lens of Ana María’s death that the reader is able to observe the flaws. The problem remains that Ana María must serve as a sacrifice for such knowledge to be made known. Her observations are limited to the reader at this point, for there is no means by which she can communicate with her survivors.

It is not only Alberto who is likely to perpetuate the patriarchal order, but Ana María’s other children as well. Fred appears initially at the wake as he escorts the grieving Fernando away from Ana María’s bed. This man, whom Ana María considers to be her most sensitive child, is widowed, and the story of the death of his wife, Silvia, also appears in “La historia de María Griselda.” Like all others who knew María Griselda, Fred is in love with her beauty. Silvia encourages him to visit the hacienda where Alberto and María Griselda live so she may compare her beauty to that of her sister-in-law and prove her husband’s love for her. Fred is so taken with María Griselda that he has

abandons Silvia, resulting in her decision to kill herself. Silvia enters the room and boldly kills herself “como un hombre,” shooting herself unflinchingly in the temple because her own madness and jealousy over María Griselda’s beauty is more than she can bear.

Silvia’s suicide is significant because of the way she kills herself, “como un hombre,” looking death in the eye and taking her life. Silvia uses suicide to gain the attention she needs. It is her ultimate cry to be heard, yet it paradoxically is the ultimate silencing act. If we look back to Amortajada, we see that Ana María saw the effects of suicide once before as she learned from Fernando that his wife took her own life with veronal. Upon their deaths, both Silvia and Fernando’s wife vanish from society. Fernando does not mourn the loss of his wife, and uses the story of her death to try and win Ana María’s affections. Similarly, Fred is unaffected by Silvia’s suicide, but remains focused on how María Griselda will suffer upon viewing the macabre scene.

Throughout the works, it becomes evident that Ana María’s daughter, Anita, is poised to perpetuate her mother’s mistakes. Anita is described as “fría, dura hasta con su madre” (88), but cries out to her mother, “¡No te vayas, tú, tú...!” (87). Anita’s lament is unexpected, and Ana María now considers her position beyond death and the result of her physical demise. She states, “ningún gesto mío consiguió jamás provocar lo que mi muerte logra al fin. Ya ves, la muerte es también un acto de vida” (88). Here we see that Ana María finally understands and accepts her death. This episode is doubly significant because it is her daughter, the only female progeny of the “amortajada,” the girl who bears her mother’s physical attributes, her emotional characteristics and her name, who

mourns most for the loss of this otherwise anonymous woman.⁴⁷ Ana María's farewell to her daughter shows a hope for a change in how women function within a matriarchal relationship. She states, "No llores, no llores, ¡si supieras! Continuaré alentando en ti y evolucionando y cambiando como si estuviera viva; me amarás, me desecharás y volverás a quererme. Y tal vez mueras tú, antes que yo me agote y muera en ti. No llores..." (88). The promise that she will live on and evolve through her daughter presents us with the hope that the cycle perpetuated by the patriarchal order of society will eventually break down. Ana María will accept her death with the confidence that it represents a passing away of the traditional woman, and the development of a stronger, more independent woman. This is most easily seen by examining the surviving women from the narratives, each of whom represents a different role in society and is affected by Ana María's passing.

In both novels, Zoila is one of the first characters recognized by the *amortajada* as she observes the people present at her wake. She describes, "Zoila que la vio nacer [...] Allí está canosa, pero todavía enjuta y sin edad discernible, como si la gota de sangre araucana que corriera por sus venas hubiera tenido el don de petrificar su altivo perfil" (11). Zoila's presence is constant because she saw Ana María born, was present in "María Griselda" to care for the younger generation of women, and was with Ana María when she died. The mention of her Araucanian blood and indiscernible age are paramount to understanding her function in the narrative. Zoila represents a different society than that of Ana María and the other women. She shows no sign of fatigue or weakness and it is to

⁴⁷ Traditionally, "Anita" is the diminutive form of Ana, used to distinguish the younger Ana from her mother.

be understood that she remains timeless. Zoila's Native American heritage provides her with an enhanced role in the narrative because although she is relegated to the bottom of the social hierarchy to which Ana María also belongs, she is unaffected by her position there. Rather than strive to fit into this society, Zoila lives by a different philosophy and possesses strength unknown to Ana María. Her presence in Ana María's life provides an alternate solution to the strictures that Ana María faces in society.

Although Zoila's influence on Ana María's life is evident from the first episode in Amortajada, it is not clear just how significant the old woman is until we read about Ana María's relationship with Ricardo in Shrouded. As I illustrated earlier, the outcome of this relationship is the same in both novels, but the details of it are dramatically different, particularly with regards to Zoila's role in the narrative. In Shrouded, the ability to speak and the woman's authority in society are made paramount through Zoila's character. Ana María reveals her own inability to speak in Shrouded when she recalls how Ricardo abandoned her. Ana María has informed Ricardo that she is pregnant with his child, to which he responds that he is not to blame. Ana María states:

Because of those words, I threw myself at you with that blind fury which has caused me to lose every battle in life. I began to beat and abuse you. For violence has always been my argument at critical moments when the injustice of others makes the words choke in my throat. Always, always, even when I understood that it was the last argument, the argument of the defeated. (36)

This illustrates one of the core conflicts of Bombal's novels; that a woman is not strong enough to command a man. Ana María recognizes that she has no ability to speak, that the authority and power in her relationship with Ricardo was solely in Ricardo's hands. Of course, her violence proves equally futile in winning her argument, but it is all she has left, for where the word fails her, she has her body. Despite her resorting to violence

against a man when her words fail her, she already recognizes the futility of such an act, for even her physical strength is incomparable to that of any man in her life.⁴⁸ Ricardo leaves her, completely unaffected by her pleadings and even her violent assault on his person.

Despite her constant presence throughout Ana María's life, Zoila's voice is mostly unheard. Through further character development in "María Griselda" and Shrouded, we see how valuable Zoila is as an example of a woman outside of the social (patriarchal) structure. In contrast to Zoila, we see Ana María's sister, Alicia, who exists entirely within the parameters of the patriarchal society. When Ana María contemplates her sister's presence in the room, the conflict that distinguishes this relationship appears to be faith-based. Ana María's lack of faith in God and religion become the focus of this interaction. Alicia, a devoted and pious woman has been present "desde el principio de la noche" (37), but is only noticed by Ana María now. Alicia's presence mirrors Zoila's presence, but once Ana María discerns her sister in the room, she responds very differently. Without sympathy or feeling for her mourning sister, Ana María ridicules her for her piety and faith, boldly proclaiming her position "bien apegada a la tierra" (37). It is at this point in the narrative that Bombal's two works diverge for the first time. There is a rather lengthy portion of Amortajada not included in Shrouded that examines the nature of God. Ana María has already sarcastically explained in her address to her sister, Alicia that she does not believe in God. At this point, she goes further and invokes memory of Zoila, her nurse. For the rest of the novel, Ana María struggles to identify

⁴⁸ Guimarães Rosa's Grande Sertão: Veredas also presents this problem, but demonstrates an entirely different outcome regarding the woman seeking a place in a man's world.

with one of two opposing philosophies, that of her sister and that of Zoila. Alicia represents women in the established patriarchal system of society, and Zoila represents women independent of patriarchy and dependent upon nature.

Even though she does not comprehend it at this point, Ana María favors Zoila's natural god over Alicia's Catholic God. She states, "ella [...] nunca logró comunicarme su sentido práctico, pero sí todas las supersticiones de su espíritu tan fuerte como sencillo" (38). Rather than accept her sister's faith, Ana María struggles against it and holds up Zoila's superstitions as a foil. By ridiculing Alicia's piety, Ana María criticizes the way in which women adhere to this supposedly divine patriarchal order. Zoila's god represents nature and although it may not have a practical application, it conforms much better to Ana María's desire to remain "apegada a la tierra." Ana María's decision to follow Zoila's natural religion over her sister's becomes more significant once Ana María recognizes within herself the power to create and destroy life. This recognition translates into more independence and strength of communication, as is evidenced in Ana María's response to Ricardo in Shrouded.

As Ana María contemplates the failed relationship between herself and Ricardo in Shrouded, we can see that she speaks out more critically of Ricardo and his family than in Amortajada. Ana María states, "That sudden, cowardly desertion of me, did it result from a peremptory order of your parents or from some rebelliousness in your own impetuous nature? I did not know. I never knew" (19). Unlike her remembrance of Ricardo in Amortajada, Ana María is now able to reprimand Ricardo for his cowardice and rebelliousness, something that she was incapable of doing in life, nor in the first novel. In addition to this attack on Ricardo's character, Ana María also berates his

parents, something a young girl from a lower social class could not do. Ana María reasons with Ricardo about their relationship and his parents' objections to her:

[Your mother is] afraid that you will marry me, considering that we've lost all our money and besides, she thinks I'm not well brought up. Why, Zoila told me so. Even in the kitchen they know it, they know that she gets very angry because she thinks you're in love with me. And you, you're just repeating to me, like an idiot, the nonsense she puts into your head. (20)

These are considerably stronger and more forceful words than the Ana María of

Amortajada is capable of delivering. Even when we remember that the memory of this relationship occurs after her life is ended and she no longer need fear Ricardo or society, the Ana María of the earlier novel cannot make the discovery that the "shrouded woman" reveals here:

Without any dignity—I've never learned to be dignified in love—for several months, obstinately, I persisted in linking my life to yours [Ricardo], not understanding why love should be incompatible with your career.

But now, now that I am dead, it occurs to me that possibly all men once in their lifetime long to make some great renunciation; to sacrifice regretfully something vital; to tear to pieces a butterfly, in order to feel themselves masters of their own destiny. (21)⁴⁹

At this point it is evident that Ana María's death has freed her from her passivity in life. She acknowledges her lack of "dignity in love" and shrugs it off as unimportant. Her new perspective grants her understanding and the ability to speak out, albeit only in the narrative, against the sins of patriarchy. She can speak freely about Ricardo's cowardice because of her separation from him, but more importantly, she has acquired the power to speak out against one of the men who previously held power over her.

⁴⁹ The image of killing a butterfly just to feel powerful echoes Brás Cubas's chapter on the "borboleta preta." (Memórias Póstumas Chapter 31)

While heeding Zoila's counsel and following her guidance, Ana María becomes a strong matriarch for her family. Zoila does not have a place of authority within Ana María's society, but the example of her steadfastness and practicality influence Ana María tremendously. I have already illustrated Zoila's proactive approach to Ana María's pregnancy in Shrouded, but Bombal echoes this pattern in "La historia de María Griselda" with Anita. In each case, it is Zoila who attempts to prevent the undesired outcome of the girls' foolish behavior. In "MG," Zoila has accompanied Anita to the home of Alberto and María Griselda to care for her. Zoila writes to Ana María to inform her of the problems developing at the hacienda and Ana María, more mature and wiser than she was as a youth, she heeds Zoila's voice of warning and travels to the hacienda to try and set things straight. As the matriarch, Ana María must protect her daughter. Anita and her sisters-in-law are stupid (like the young Ana María) and only desire to fit into society by securing the love of their chosen men. Once Ana María arrives at the hacienda, Zoila disappears from the narrative, but we cannot overlook the fact that without Zoila's warning, Ana María could not fulfill her role as matriarch.

With the focus shifted away from Zoila and onto the younger generation of women, we see three different outcomes of women who try to fit the established roles. Silvia, we have seen, is silenced as she takes her life in desperation. Anita, like her mother, ultimately fails in her attempts to secure Rodolfo's love, and María Griselda is unable to escape the tyranny of Alberto's jealousy. Because the purpose of Ana María's consciousness within the "muerte de los vivos" is to resolve the relationships that were conflicted during her life, it is significant that she visits María Griselda en route to the "muerte de los muertos" to offer her peace in her situation. With her flawless beauty and

impossible desire to be a wife and mother, María Griselda has the least hope for happiness in this life. At the same time, María Griselda represents the unattainable “perfect woman” that the patriarchal society seeks. María Griselda is a fantasy, and as a character in Bombal’s works, provides the means for the text to criticize the misogynist fallacy of the perfect woman.

As a final expression of understanding and the last act of her love for her daughter-in-law, Ana María is able to see María Griselda one last time in her journey into oblivion. Ana María narrates the encounter, but it is apparent that although María Griselda senses a presence near her, she does not recognize it as Ana María. We read, “¡Oh, María Griselda! No tengas miedo si sobre la escalinata los perros se han erguido con los pelos erizados; soy yo. [...] No tengas miedo, deseo acariciarte el hombro al pasar. ¿Por qué has saltado de tu asiento? No tiembles así. Me voy, María Griselda, me voy” (86). As if to give her some peace in her death, Ana María is able to see and touch María Griselda one last time; nevertheless, the contact is completely misunderstood by (perhaps threatening to) the latter and no comfort is given to the living during the encounter.⁵⁰ Ana María’s desire to console her daughter-in-law meets with resistance because María Griselda does not yet recognize her own nature. Ana María’s presence near María Griselda at this point echoes that of Death calling Ana María away from her consciousness, but María Griselda is not agonizing or ready for death and therefore cannot comprehend her mother-in-law’s caress. María Griselda is like the living Ana María, blinded by the will of her husband. She is literally shrouded by his jealousy and

⁵⁰ This encounter between the living and the dead prefigures the state of order we find in Pedro Páramo.

despite her attempts to break through that shroud, Ana María cannot share her new perspective with her daughter-in-law.

With the addition of other women who are significant to Ana María's life, namely her nursemaid, her daughter, and daughters-in-law, Bombal is able to expand the scope of her narrative, and link all of the women together in their plight in society. The younger generation of women echoes Ana María in name (Ana María / Anita, María Griselda) and in their actions. By expanding the plot to involve the younger generation of women, Bombal diminishes the importance of Ana María as the central character to the narratives and focuses on the Woman in a broader context, one who struggles to fulfill the established roles of lover, wife, and mother within the patriarchal order of society. At the same time, by including Zoila in the narratives, Bombal provides an example of a powerful woman existing outside of the confines of the patriarchal order.

In addition to María Griselda and Silvia written into "MG," The Shrouded Woman adds a number of additional characters to the narrative, including: Ana María's brother, Luis; his "great love" Elena; Luz-Margarita, Luis's wife; Sofia, Ricardo's ex-wife and Ana María's friend and confidant. Each of these other women have a distinct relationship with Ana María and the way in which she addresses them or perceives them in relation to her own life further reduces the narrative focus on her role as a woman in society and strengthens the focus on the role of women outside of society. In most cases, Ana María is not visited by these women during the night of her wake, but her relationship with each of them surfaces during the visit of one of the many men in Ana María's life. When her brother Luis visits in Shrouded, Ana María reprimands him for loving Elena and abandoning her in favor of a more proper wife. Ana María states,

“Elena, divorced, scandalous, pure and haughty! If my death finally succeeds in making you remember her, I am glad to have died, Luis” (48). Ana María portrays herself as a much stronger person, able to provide comfort and counsel to her brother during life.

When Luis struggled to choose a wife, he faced the choice between Elena and Luz-Margarita. Ana María’s reproaches for her brother resound in a very feminine manner as she describes the two competitors:

What guarantee of mediocrity and of stability could someone like Elena have offered you; someone pure, fanciful and passionate, whom fate had compelled in her heart and in her flesh, to live every second intensely as the drop of dew is compelled to catch eagerly every reflection of the morning. What guarantee! Luz-Margarita, on the other hand, with her sweet name, her concealed energy and her post-card goodness, offered you all that security which gradually has made of you a commonplace man.
(49)

For Ana María to laud a “fallen” woman, someone who put passion before sensibility, demonstrates her newfound feminism. Her final judgment on the two women is even more revealing. Ana María laments Elena’s downfall, saying, “Slander will always pursue her. That is the tribute women like Elena must ever pay for their liberty” (50).

Speaking of Luz-Margarita, she states, “No, nothing will ever make her suffer. There are people so small that life and death will always pass them over without reaching them.

And she will remain, repeating over and over: [...] ‘God should punish girls who are not born like me—pretty, sweet, rich, and destined to marry the man they love’” (51). There is no question how Ana María feels about Elena and Luz-Margarita. Her ability to laud and criticize these two women shows the extent of her transformation through her death, because she was unable to speak like this during her life, even on her deathbed, when Luis held her hand and struggled with her during her final hours.

As Ana María comes to accept her death, “resignada, rechina la mejilla contra el hombro hueco de la muerte” (85) and travels through the wilderness en route to oblivion, she eventually comes to a crossroads where she meets another woman. This woman is Sofia, whom we learn was Ricardo’s wife and has a child by him. This encounter is similar to the encounter with María Griselda because Sofia is also still alive and has not seen Ana María for several years. While on this journey with the personified figure of death, Ana María recalls where she had seen this terrain before. “Sofia! Sofia! Yes, this silent and royal park must be the park where Sofia so often told her she came in her dreams” (144). Sofia represents a very different type of woman than Ana María because Sofia is European and lives a much freer lifestyle than Ana María. She is described as an “elegant, foreign-born girl whom Ricardo preferred to [Ana María] and eventually married; [a] girl who in turn treated him with contempt and left him” (145). After choosing to divorce Ricardo, Sofia happily concedes to let her ex-in-laws raise her child for her “as if everything that came from him meant absolutely nothing to her” (145). Sofia’s decision to give up her child to her in-laws is an alternate escape from parental responsibilities. Whereas Ana María had no social authority to demand marriage or assistance with her child, Sofia did. Sofia does not fit into Ana María’s society at all because she divorced her husband and abandoned her child. Her detachment from her son reflects a much stronger independence than anything Ana María ever knew, even in Zoila.

Ana María and Sofia eventually become best friends, but while maintaining her friendship with Ana María, Sofia also begins an affair with Ana María’s husband, Antonio. When Ana María learns of this betrayal by her best friend (she had learned to

accept Antonio's unfaithfulness,) she ceases all contact with Sofia and tries to erase her from her life. During the encounter between the two women, somewhere between death and dreaming, Sofia is able to confess to Ana María that she used her physical beauty to get Antonio to speak to her about his relationship with Ana María. She would then pass this information on to Ana María. This is the first time that a woman in the narrative is successful in using her body to control a man. Every other attempt by a woman to use her sexuality to control the relationship with her lover fails: Ana María's pregnancy with Ricardo's child; Anita's pursuit of Rodolfo; and Ana María's bearing three children to Antonio all fail.

In spite of Sofia's success in controlling Antonio and getting him to speak about his marriage, the shroud remained over Ana María during her life, for her own jealousy and feelings of betrayal led to her cease all contact with Sofia. Only after her death is she able to meet with her estranged best-friend and reconcile their misunderstanding. As Ana María recalls the more positive years of their friendship, she remembers a picture of an angel that she kept above her bed. All three of Ana María's children immediately recognize a resemblance between the picture of the angel and Sofia. The resemblance between the angel and Sofia draws Ana María's circle of female friends closer together. Ana María tells how Zoila had given her the picture of the Annunciation on the event of her First Communion. Here we can see a direct link between the ageless, timeless, and wise Zoila; the central character of the work, Ana María; and the liberated Sofia. When Ana María recalls how she came to associate Sofia with the image of the angel in the picture, she recounts an argument between herself and Antonio in which the angel represents purity and virtue, the lack of which Ana María disdains in Antonio's many

mistresses. The irony of this association with Sofia and the angel serves to separate the two women because of the betrayal, but it is the image of the angel that allows the redemption of Sofia in Ana María's eyes.

Despite the troubled relationship between Ana María and Sofia, the care with which Bombal restores their friendship and allows Ana María the understanding of Sofia's motives in her relationship with Antonio further frees Ana María from the oppressed role of wife to a husband that did not love her, and moves her closer to the liberated, independent Sofia. The encounter between the "shrouded woman" and Sofia is important because it allows Ana María to live on in a new woman. In the same way Ana María has declared that she will evolve within Anita, she will affect Sofia as well. Sofia states:

Oh, Ana María, blessed be my dream, blessed be my dream, if because of it I see you again and can now tell you everything I was not able to tell you that afternoon so many years ago when we were walking together in the garden at the hacienda!... No, I was not able to confess to you then the passionate curiosity I too had felt about you. (150)

These two women were at one time competitors for the same man. Sofia won out over Ana María, but admits in this conversation that she "did not love Ricardo" and what she "had thought to be love was nothing more than the thrill of the success [she] had achieved over him, mixed with an ardent desire to escape as quickly as possible from the tyrannical indifference of [her] mother" (151). Sofia's character becomes clearer through this conversation and we begin to see her like Elena, the spurned lover of Ana María's brother. Sofia was able to flee from the mother-daughter cycle that Anita seems to be trapped in. As long as Ana María and Anita remain beholden to the rules of the patriarchal social structure, they will continue to suffer. Sofia's freedom exists because

she has cast off the role of wife and mother. The reputation of “fallen woman” that Elena bears never applies to Sofia.

Also during this interview with Sofia, Ana María recalls moments in which the family structure functioned correctly, with Antonio fulfilling his role as father to the children, but more importantly, revealing his true feelings for his emotionally distant wife. It is through Zoila that Ana María learns of her best friend’s betrayal of her trust. Zoila and the other family servant, Juan de Dios know of the illicit affair that occurred between Sofia and Antonio and as Zoila tells Ana María of it, the latter believes her faithful nurse and cuts all ties with her “best friend.” As Ana María accuses Sofia of these crimes of betrayal, she does not deny them but clarifies them for the dead woman.

During this interview, all of the women of the narratives are once again recalled, some for their folly, others for their strength, but as Ana María reconciles herself with her former best friend, her death begins to serve a purpose for all of the women. As for Sofia, she will hear that Ana María has died and

will remain pensive, realizing that her dream was true, that an almost forgotten friend had come to her in death to tell her she was forgiven... And from that day on, with a shiver, she will vaguely begin to believe in God, and in the existence of an invisible, disturbing world stirring there, very close to her own pleasant, frivolous world. (176)

Sofia’s dream echoes Brás Cubas’s association of sleeping as a temporary death. In that realm, Ana María is able to communicate with Sofia and not only forgive her, but pass on some of her own understanding. If Sofia is to “begin to believe in God,” it is not because religion will save her, but because it grants the believer some hope in a better existence.

As a final observance of Ana María’s transformation from Amortajada to Shrouded, Ana María accepts Padre Carlos’s blessing, expresses her thanks for it and

hopes it will sustain her through any additional deaths that may occur after this one. This line is absent in Amortajada as immediately after the extreme unction, “ella se siente precipitada hacia abajo [...] como si hubieran cavado el fondo de la cripta y pretendieran sepultarla en las entrañas mismas de la tierra.” (105). In Amortajada, there is no further faith expressed by the dying or dead woman. Death, as it were, appears and claims her before her faith can save her—before her physical death as well as after it. What’s more significant here is that Ana María comments on death as a pleasant experience in Shrouded.⁵¹ She says, “If I should ever know another death beyond this one, so sweet, so earthy, I’m going through now, I pray that your blessing remain with me to sustain me before God’s infinite Justice, Light and Love” (195). This is an enormous difference from the Ana María of Amortajada, who has rejected her faith and postponed her confession until it was too late, if she ever intended to confess at all. There is no hope of an afterlife or even fear of a judgment in Amortajada. The Ana María of Shrouded has accepted the faith of father Carlos and looks forward to a judgment before God at some unknown future time. This declaration hinges entirely on the word “if.” Ana María does not accept the extreme unction, but has not been cast to hell as a result. She is finally free of the restrictions placed on her by society and chooses to accept Padre Carlos’s blessing as a friend rather than as a follower. She has finally reconciled herself with the frustrations and disappointments of her life and can look forward to peace and rest. With this new freedom, Ana María is content to wait for the death of the dead, which is eternal silence and a complete return to nature. This hope, this progression, we are left to contemplate is

⁵¹ Again, we see echoes of Brás Cubas’s death, for he declared in his memoirs that it was calm and peaceful, and that life thrashed in his chest.

now evident in all of the women Ana María has left behind: the ageless and eternal Zoila, the cloistered María Griselda, her own daughter, Anita, and the free, frivolous Sofia.

Ana María's death opens the works, and her physical remains serve as the space for the narrative. As each surviving character visits her bedside to pay his or her last respects, the relationship that the deceased woman had with each of them unfolds within the works. After examining the additional female characters in The Shrouded Woman, we can see how Ana María's life has become less central, but more meaningful to the narrative. Ana María no longer exists in isolation, separate from friends and other women by the patriarchal order of society. As Ana María interacts with other women and allows herself to learn from and teach other women, she escapes the suppressed role she knew during her life and is able to contemplate and understand that there is more to the feminine existence than what she was allowed in life. The irony of the narrative lies in the fact that once she gains a voice and is able to "forgive," she becomes content to wait for the "death of the dead" and the silence and oblivion it brings. Ana María's death represents the death of the traditional female role in the society of the early twentieth century in Latin America. The survivors of Shrouded represent all of the facets of society that existed before Ana María's death, but by privileging Zoila, Elena and Sofia, and portraying them in positions independent of the men of their society, Bombal strengthens the image of the Latin American Woman and thus presents an important feminist work. Ana María passes away, but with her, the idea of the passive, tolerant woman also passes away. The true strength of the women in Bombal's narratives appears in the surviving women, those who exist outside of the patriarchy and who, despite public opinion, exist at peace and in harmony with their world.

Chapter III

Lingering Voices: Death and (the Death of) Society in Pedro Páramo

When one considers the motif of death in the Latin American narrative, it is impossible to ignore Juan Rulfo's Pedro Páramo (1955), a novel abounding in death. Antonio Aliberti has accurately stated that "Pedro Páramo es una novela escrita desde la muerte" (34) because death pervades the entire text and affects everything from the plot to the structure of the narrative. Perhaps Rulfo's greatest accomplishment with the novel is the way in which he renders the lines between life and death virtually nonexistent. Once we enter the text, we find ourselves in a world that bears resemblance to the desert of southwest Mexico in a time vaguely reminiscent of the years surrounding the Mexican revolution, but strangely void of the familiarity and predictability of life in a modern society. This phantasmagoric projection of Mexican society is generally hailed as the defining feature of Pedro Páramo, because, as Danny Anderson states, it "involve[s] readers in the process of understanding the complex relationship between past and present in early twentieth-century Mexico."

In the first two chapters of this study, I looked at how death affects individual characters within the works and how it liberates these characters to speak out against society and its ills. In Pedro Páramo, death does not occur to only a few of the characters, but to all of the characters in the work. Despite this being the case, it is not merely a catalogue of each character's death, but an expansive conceit that allows insight into the rules and structures that control the characters of the novel, and hence, their society. As

each character “speaks” in the narrative, the common criticism is against Pedro Páramo, the cacique whose greed and power pervaded every facet of life in the town. Pedro Páramo shows the pernicious social practices that are criticized in Machado’s works and allows them to play out to their end. Thus, Rulfo’s text is the speculation of an entire town destroyed by egotism and selfishness. Using Roberto González Echevarría’s theory of myth and archive in Latin American narrative, I will show how Pedro Páramo establishes a literary Comala that exists independently of the real, physical Comala, and peoples it with the “voided presences” of Mexico. Rulfo’s Comala is accessible only through death, which creates an immense gap, or lacuna, in which the narrating voices exist as echoes of a corrupt and fatally flawed society. As the reader enters the text, guided by the Virgil-like Juan Preciado, we quickly learn that the victory over life that Brás Cubas claims at the end of his memoirs, and the peaceful “muerte de los muertos” that Ana María awaits at the end of her tale is nonexistent for the characters in Rulfo’s novel. Any resolution to the tragic tale of Comala must be provided by the reader. Death in this novel establishes the entire town of Comala as the literary space from which the work proceeds. Like the Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas, Pedro Páramo emerges from the voice(s) of deceased characters trapped in a space that allows the living and the dead to intermingle.

Pedro Páramo⁵² is a landmark narrative in Latin American literature and one of the greatest precursors to the Boom of the 1960s because it successfully detaches itself and the reader from time while maintaining a solid foundation in a distinct space that can only be Juan Rulfo’s Mexico. This novel is an integral part of the foundation for other

⁵² Future references to this work will be written as Páramo.

narratives that would become internationally significant with Gabriel García Márquez, Julio Cortázar, Carlos Fuentes, and the other writers who would achieve international acclaim only a few years after Rulfo published Páramo. In this chapter, I will show how death functions on different levels both inside and outside of the narrative and how death appears both literally and symbolically in the text as the reader learns of the destruction of an entire town and its inhabitants. Death is an important element throughout this work because not only does it affect the form of the narrative, but it allows the reader to gain insight into the social, political and religious facets of Mexican life, primarily through a consideration of the patriarchal structures that exist in society. Each of the characters in Comala is bound by his or her death, and the relationship each has to death and the way in which each person views his or her life allows us an understanding of Comala's social structure. This, as Anderson explains, "creates for us through the act of reading a specific experiential understanding. [...] Pedro Páramo pushes readers toward a transformative knowledge of Mexican society and its historical struggles." It is this experience and the way death in the narrative facilitates this for the reader that I will examine in this chapter.

Set in the state of Jalisco, Mexico, Pedro Páramo unfolds as a new kind of regionalist narrative, with a strong focus on the region, its climate, and Mexican society. The text relies a great deal on the desert setting and utilizes the heat and humidity common to southwestern Mexico to underscore the actions and speech acts of several of the characters. Mexican history also influences the plot as different characters from the novel interact with the Mexican revolution as it approaches (but never enters) Comala. Notwithstanding the regionalist elements of the text, its complexity resists any critical

assignment to such a specific genre.⁵³ Luis Harss wrote, “El escenario, jalisco en sus contornos generales, se propone como dijo el mismo Rulfo, ser más representativo de México en su conjunto que de una provincia en particular. A Rulfo le interesa la precisión geográfica aunque también el ambiente anímico” (87). Although Rulfo situates the novel in a specific location and remains truthful to the description of climate and geography of the area, by removing the place from any chronological or social markers, he establishes Comala as an island completely detached from the rest of the world, familiar only to those who were unfortunate enough to be a part of its destruction.⁵⁴ The Comala of Páramo is so well isolated by the cacique Pedro Páramo that even the Mexican revolution is incapable of affecting it directly. In contrast to its real counterpart, Rulfo’s Comala remains a mystery, inaccessible to outsiders, to readers, and to the characters themselves, the primary example of which is Juan Preciado, the opening narrator.

The first thing we notice as we read the opening lines of the narrative is that Juan Preciado is as unfamiliar with the territory as we are, and we therefore do not have the benefit of following a knowledgeable guide into the region (or the narrative). This is different from the promises made by Brás Cubas, Casmurro and even Riobaldo, because the first-person narrator makes no attempt to establish a relationship with the reader. These three narrators pride themselves in their experience and repeatedly reassure their readers that they can be trusted. In Páramo, the first-person narrator never acknowledges his reader, much less involve him in the narrative. Once again, this bears resemblance to

⁵³ Sylvia Molloy and María Luisa Bastos prize the novel’s complexity, but do not dispute the fact that the narrative is inextricably linked to Rulfo’s Mexico. They write, “Se ha tratado de situar la novela en la llamada narrativa de la revolución mexicana, o se ha intentado clasificarla dentro de la narrativa regionalista [...] universalizando lo meramente local” (246).

⁵⁴ Although it is a Mexican novel, Páramo bears a striking similarity to other Latin American texts as it shares the common roots identified by Roberto González Echevarría in his Myth and Archive.

Bombal's Ana María, who does not address her reader, but allows the "narradora" to clarify those discoveries pertinent to the text. Rulfo's narrative structure echoes Bombal's narrative, but unlike Bombal's texts, the third person narrator does not offer any clarification whatsoever to the reader. Therefore, the reader of Pedro Páramo is entirely alone in his journey into the text.

Juan Preciado has traveled to Comala to fulfill a promise to his dying mother, whose descriptions of a beautiful and flowering city led him to "llenar[se] de sueños, a darle vuelto a las ilusiones [y formar] un mundo alrededor de la esperanza que era aquel señor llamado Pedro Páramo" (149). Juan Preciado is inspired by his mother's tales of Comala and his desire to go there is fueled by the illusions of obtaining wealth and power from his father. What he finds, though not entirely unexpected, is surprising nonetheless. Juan's narration of his approach to Comala alerts the reader immediately to the otherworldly nature of the town he seeks. As Juan Preciado approaches Comala side by side with the muleteer, Abundio, his conversation reveals his lack of knowledge about Comala, and thus allows the reader to identify with the narrator and familiarize himself with the destination. In what appears an attempt at casual conversation, Juan Preciado declares:

—Hace calor aquí.
—Sí y esto no es nada—me contestó el otro.
—Cálmese. Ya lo sentirá más fuerte cuando lleguemos a Comala. Aquello está sobre las brasas de la tierra, en la mera boca del infierno. Con decirle que muchos de los que allí se mueren, al llegar al infierno regresan por su cobija. (151)

This conversation is far more significant than small talk about the climate in Comala because Abundio, a native of the town, is drawing links between Comala and hell. Even more importantly, the "joke" that those who die in Comala and arrive in hell are allowed

to return for their blankets, opens the text and prepares the reader for the encounters with the many spirits who wander the streets of Comala. Juan does not perceive the truthfulness of Abundio's statement because his only experience with death to this point is his mother's. She made him promise to seek out his father, but it becomes rapidly apparent that this journey is far more profound than a lost son's search for his father.⁵⁵

The deceptively innocuous conversation between Juan Preciado and Abundio harbors sinister undertones, for Abundio's fatalistic declaration that "los que allí se mueren, al llegar al infierno" does not promise hope for salvation or entrance into heaven for any of Comala's residents. From this simple declaration, it is safe to understand that if one dies in Comala, he or she will not go to heaven. Also, the description of the path to Comala, "el camino subía y bajaba: 'sube o baja según se va o se viene. Para el que va, sube; para el que viene, baja'" (149) seems innocent enough, but establishes another physical association between Comala and the traditional concept of hell as lying somewhere beneath the earth. This maintains the hierarchy between the placement of hell, earth and heaven, with Comala at the bottom of the earth "en la mera boca del infierno" (151). There appears to be a glimmer of hope in the statement that "el que va, sube," but as the narrative unfolds, it becomes clear that few, if any, ever escape Comala once they have arrived. Abundio's reluctant conversation presents a fatalistic view of the society that the ingenuous Juan Preciado is hoping to enter as the only legitimate son of Pedro Páramo.

⁵⁵ Several critics have linked Juan Preciado's journey to Comala with the mythological journeys of Orpheus and Virgil into the underworld. Carlos Fuentes and Julio Ortega have declared that Juan is a figure of Ulysses's son, Telemachus, searching for his lost father. It also has a significant parallel with Grande Sertão: Veredas and the relationship between Riobaldo and his mother and absent father.

Juan's innocent observations of his surroundings foreshadow his imminent death in Comala, with all of nature announcing it to him. Comala appears on the horizon and, as Abundio identifies the town, "una bandada de cuervos pasó cruzando el cielo vacío, haciendo cuar, cuar, cuar" (151). The superstition that a crow calling three times is an announcer of death may be lost on the eager Juan Preciado, but we are given ample evidence of the fate that awaits the young pilgrim: Juan Preciado is traveling to Comala to die. His location is evident at the beginning of the narrative because he speaks from Comala, having arrived but never escaped, as evidenced by the opening words of the text, "Vine a Comala" (149). The narrator speaks from within the confines of Comala, but does not proffer any additional information as to the outcome of his journey; the reader must discern this as he or she engages the narrative, following Juan into Comala in search of the novel's title character. The greatest challenge to the reader is that, like Machado's Memórias Póstumas and Casmurro, the novel is fragmented; with short vignettes that function as chapter divisions and that generally stand independent of the surrounding chapters. These narrative fragments reveal pieces of Comala's history without chronology or order, and the responsibility of ordering them falls to the reader. The benefit to such a structure is that the distinct ruptures in the action alert the aptly conventionalized reader to his or her responsibility for reconstructing the history. The abrupt divisions initially appear to complicate the text, but ultimately force the reader to heighten his sensibilities to anachronisms within the text, better preparing him to engage the work.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ This is in direct contrast to Grande Sertão: Veredas, which presents fragmented episodes in the form of stream-of-consciousness narrative without the benefit of structural markers built into the text.

Like Bombal's La amortajada, Juan Preciado is not the only narrator in the novel, and Pedro Páramo splits the narrative authority between first-person and third-person narrators. Juan Preciado resembles Brás Cubas, Dom Casmurro, Ana María and Riobaldo because he is a character in his own narrative and his vision is limited by his experience and understanding of the world surrounding him. Unlike Brás Cubas, Casmurro or Riobaldo, however, Juan Preciado does not openly identify a reader or interlocutor to whom he directs his narrative and his story begins without any expressed reason for why he is speaking. The reader must accept the responsibility for receiving the narrative and, by doing so, immediately becomes involved in Preciado's history. At the halfway point in the text, Juan identifies an interlocutor, Dorotea, who critics have argued is the recipient of the narrative from the opening lines.⁵⁷ In spite of Dorotea's presence being revealed post facto, because the narrator does not introduce her immediately in the opening pages of the narrative, the reader is obligated to assume the role of recipient and therefore accompanies Preciado on his journey to Comala.⁵⁸ Didier T. Jaén argues:

La narración va avanzando casi cronológicamente para desembocar en la sorprendente, extraordinaria revelación de mediados del libro, de que todo lo narrado hasta entonces ha sido narrado por un personaje ya muerto, que todo ha ocurrido no sabemos cuánto tiempo antes de su muerte, y que lo que creíamos una narración dirigida hacia nosotros los lectores no era sino parte de un diálogo sostenido por dos muertos en su fosa común. (229)

⁵⁷ Mariana Frenk states, "De pronto, cuando ya hemos leído casi la mitad del libro, descubrimos que el relato de Juan Preciado no iba dirigido a nosotros, sino que ha sido un monólogo y parte de la conversación que Juan, un hombre muerto, está sosteniendo en la tumba con Dorotea, una mujer muerta" (Aliberti 35). Joseph Sommers declares, "The central narrative device of the second half consists of dialogues from the tomb, between Juan and the old woman Dorotea, with whom he lies buried. It now becomes clear to a startled reader that Juan's earlier first-person remembrances were also part of this exchange between two dead characters" (Álvarez 17).

⁵⁸ This technique is echoed in Grande Sertão: Veredas, with the narrator speaking to an unidentified interlocutor who becomes synonymous with the reader.

Structurally speaking, the chronological advancement of Juan Preciado's plot should be familiar to the reader. The surprising revelation that Juan dies midway through the novel is certainly challenging to the reader and the revelation that it is Dorotea to whom Juan is speaking (not the reader) serves to further separate the reader from Juan Preciado and force him or her into complete responsibility for the text.

After Juan Preciado ceases to narrate, the third-person narrator assumes control of the narrative, but rather than direct the events like the *narradora* of Bombal's narratives, Rulfo's narrator allows the characters to reveal their own histories through dialogue. This style holds to the end of the work because when Juan Preciado reappears in a later fragment, his narrative authority has diminished and his voice is only heard through dialogue with Dorotea. Alan Bell argues, "The second half of the work is narrated from the grave by characters who have understood the *desengaño* of their own existence" (242). It is true that the narrative shifts away from Juan Preciado, and that he and Dorotea hear the murmurs of other deceased characters, but the narrative is not entirely composed of separate first-person monologues or dialogues between characters as Bell would imply. The third-person narrator is a key element in uniting the tales of Comala's inhabitants, and although he does not actively participate in directing the reader, his presence is important for stabilizing the text because he is reliable and he exists independently of Comala and death. Near the end of the novel, the narrator adopts a more conventional position, narrating events in more or less chronological order en route to the destruction of Comala. Although we learn early on that Comala is a ghost town, we do not know how it occurred. This is where the third-person narrator becomes most important to the text, presenting the reader with the several narrative puzzle pieces regarding Pedro Páramo

and the destruction of Comala. Unlike Bombal's third person omniscient narrator, Rulfo's reveals no gender, remains completely detached from the narrative, and provides no commentary or insight within the text. Speaking of the creation of the work, Rulfo declared, "Quit  ciento cincuenta p ginas a Pedro P ramo: hab a divagaciones, lucubraciones m as, intromisiones, explicaciones m as propias del ensayo que de la novela. Saqu  todo eso. Quer a que el lector participara" (77). The reader bears significant responsibility for assembling the story and understanding the destruction of Comala, but the outcome will always remain the same: Comala and its inhabitants are destroyed.

The reader's role in this text is quite different than in any of the other works I examine in this dissertation; P ramo is a minimalist narrative, providing brief glimpses into the lives of the characters from Comala and it is the reader's duty to fill in the blanks, to reconstruct the puzzle of the destruction of Comala and its inhabitants. In this regard, the reader enters the text and must move through Comala with only Juan Preciado as an ineffective guide. Carol Clark D'Lugo writes:

Juan Rulfo presents an allegory of reading within the text, exemplified by a fictional character, Juan Preciado, who serves as surrogate for the real reader. Rulfo's strategy is to bond readers to their fictional counterpart as a means of repositioning them in their relation to the text and eliciting from them a liberated, active response to a similarly emancipated discourse. (468)

This is an interesting idea that further forces the textual responsibility upon the reader, making it what Barthes would consider a "writerly text." Clark builds on Ortega's and Fuentes's analysis of the Telemachus/Juan Preciado parallel and states, "In essence, Juan Preciado becomes the embodiment of the reader-in-the text. Readers have already identified with Juan's search for his father and have assumed Juan's curiosity as their

own; collectively readers are, with Juan, active seekers of story” (471). This approach adheres to Rulfo’s own comments about reader responsibility, “[yo] perseguía el fin de dejarle al lector la oportunidad de colaborar con el autor y que llenara él mismo esos vacíos. En el mundo de los muertos, el autor no podía intervenir” (38). This idea is striking because it implies that the author is unable to “intervene” in the “world of the dead,” but the reader can. In this sense, once the work is published, the author dies and the life of the text is wholly in the hands of the reader. This experiment echoes the rebirth of the reader as “taught” in Memórias Póstumas and Casmurro, and upheld by Roberto González Echevarría, “that each reading of the text is the text, [and] yet another version added to the Archive” (26).

As the most significant element of the narrative, death appears on almost every page. Death opens the narrative, closes it, and punctuates nearly every episode contained within. Throughout the work, death functions on a number of different levels, with each appearance of death altering the direction of the narrative. Joseph Sommers argues that, “Death as a narrative vantage point heightens the sense of inexorability. The fate of those whose lives are recalled is viewed from a perspective which reduces the importance of anecdote and conflict, since climax and resolution are cut off in advance” (74). In this sense, death is no longer a climactic event (or a resolution). Hence, death in the narrative serves to confuse Juan Preciado and the reader. It forces a reevaluation of what it means to be alive or dead. In Comala, the lines between the living and the dead are so fine that they are almost nonexistent. Juan Preciado is unable to discern that the people with whom he speaks en route to Comala and within the city limits are dead. Naturally, he would assume that they are alive because the constraints of reality (and of traditional narrative

realism) generally do not allow living persons to associate with spirits of the dead. As Juan gradually becomes aware of the state of Comala and is able to perceive it in its true state, not through his mother's eyes or the illusions he had created for himself, he becomes a permanent part of Comala, adding his voice to the multitude of disembodied voices that echo through the streets and buildings of the town.

To understand death in the narrative more clearly, it is important to consider how death has affected Comala itself, because Comala is as important a figure in the narrative as the characters. Rulfo declared that Comala “es un pueblo muerto donde no viven más que ánimas, donde todos los personajes están muertos, y aun quien narra está muerto” (qtd. in Álvarez 15-16). We know of Comala before we know anything else about the narrative. After the opening paragraph of the novel, we do not know who the narrator is or who his mother is, but we know that Comala is the location of the novel and that “acá vivía [...] un tal Pedro Páramo” (149). As Juan Preciado approaches Comala with Abundio, he sees the run-down state of the town and comments, “El pueblo [...] se ve tan solo, como si estuviera abandonado. Parece que no lo habitara nadie.” Abundio then replies, “No es que lo parezca. Así es. Aquí no vive nadie.” With such a revelation, Juan immediately inquires about the object of his search, “¿Y Pedro Páramo?” and learns that “Pedro Páramo murió hace muchos años” (152). Notwithstanding this revelation, the two continue toward Comala. Upon arriving, Juan notices that “aunque no había niños jugando, ni palomas, ni tejados azules, sentí que el pueblo vivía” (153). Something attracts him to the town, luring him inward and holding him captive. At this point we can only imagine that it is his mother's description of the paradisiacal Comala of her youth and his desire to inherit his father's wealth that keeps him from leaving. This desire to

understand Comala, the sense of life that Juan Preciado describes justifies his presence and further invites the reader into the text.

We have seen that Comala sits, figuratively, in the mouth of hell, and the fact that it is inhabited by spirits but accessible by the living gives it a unique position among earthly cities. This immediately calls to mind the town of Macondo from García Márquez's Cien años de soledad, which is an earthly paradise initially untouchable by death. Comala is the opposite of Macondo: an earthly hell that can be visited by the living. Nicolás Álvarez explains:

Si Comala representara justamente una región infernal, no cabría en la misma la coexistencia de vivos y muertos, mas tal como le confía Dorotea a Preciado: “Me senté a esperar la muerte. Después que te encontramos a ti, se resolvieron mis huesos a quedarse quietos. . . . Me enterraron en tu misma sepultura” (199). Por lo que habrá de concluirse que la alcahueta estaba viva al deceso de Preciado y que, por tanto, Comala no era un pueblo habitado únicamente por muertos. (20)

Although Álvarez points out the coexistence of living and dead characters in Comala, he fails to recognize that there is no evidence after Juan's death that life continues in the city. Dorotea essentially narrates her death in the same manner that Juan Preciado does, and Donis and his sister disappear completely from the narrative. In this manner, the only living soul remaining in Comala is the reader, brought there by Juan Preciado's narrative. Comala is for Juan Preciado what the text is for the reader; a place in which the living and the dead can interact. The voices in Comala are so significant that Rulfo initially titled the novel *Los murmullos*, an act that strengthens the importance of speaking, especially among a community of disquieted souls. The characters are given freedom to speak as long as the reader remains involved in the text. For Rulfo to change the title of the work to Pedro Páramo places more emphasis on the structure of the society and the

poisonous influence of the feudal system. The murmurs of the deceased become ever more important to the work as they struggle to be heard through years of tradition and abuse of power.

Alicia Perdomo acknowledges the significance of liberating the characters through death. We read, “Al revelar que tanto Juan Preciado como el resto de los personajes están muertos, Rulfo altera el curso de la narración y, además, da un sentido diferente al tiempo y al espacio narrativo: desprende la novela del referente y la saca del realismo” (88). The decision to give such characters a voice beyond the grave automatically detaches the text from reality, but more importantly, according to Rulfo, “personajes muertos [...] no están dentro del tiempo ni del espacio” (qtd. in Aliberti, 37). By removing them from time and space, the author liberates his characters so that they simply exist. This concept forces us to reconsider what death does. In the narrative, death does not end an existence, but perpetuates each character’s greatest flaw or regret. This being the case, it behooves the reader to consider the significant characters in the narrative and the way in which death simultaneously fetters and liberates each of them. The text suggests that Comala dies because Pedro Páramo wills it. Nevertheless, Rulfo has stated that Comala is “un pueblo que va muriendo por sí mismo. No lo mata nada. No lo mata nadie” (qtd. in Perdomo 84). What is significant about Rulfo’s declaration is that it is the pueblo that dies, not the town. We must make a distinction between the physical presence of Comala, its buildings and roads, and the lifeblood of the town, which are the people that inhabit(ed) it. As each person from Comala dies, part of the community dies as well, until Pedro Páramo seals the fate of the town and closes the narrative with his own death. The perpetual state of “almas penando” in Comala presents the reader with a

synchronic look at the diachronic process of the destruction of society. The death of each character provides the reader with the opportunity to explore the cause of their destruction and the mistakes that each of them made.

The first death in Páramo is that of Dolores Preciado, Juan's mother, and the opening lines of the text reveal that Juan Preciado's journey into Comala is the direct result of his mother's dying wish. Juan states, "Vine a Comala porque me dijeron que acá vivía mi padre, un tal Pedro Páramo. Mi madre me lo dijo. Y yo le prometí que vendría a verlo en cuanto ella muriera. Le apreté sus manos en señal de que lo haría pues ella estaba por morirse y yo en un plan de prometerlo todo" (149). Juan, like Brás Cubas and Riobaldo, faces a new life direction after his mother dies. Death sets the plot in motion and keeps it in motion (although not in a specific direction) throughout the work. Dolores Preciado dies before the novel begins, but her death is the event that catalyzes the narrative. Although she does not appear in the narrative, Dolores is an important figure in the novel because of what she represents. She is the first of Pedro Páramo's wives, and according to Catholic tradition, the only legitimate wife of the cacique. Her marriage to Pedro, although a complete farce, represents the social order found in the early days of Comala.

As the story unfolds, we see that she chose to abandon Comala shortly after her marriage to Pedro Páramo because she was unhappy with him. The narrative reveals that Pedro married Dolores to escape paying the debts he owed to the Preciado family (who owned vast tracts of land and whose primary heir was Dolores). When Fulgor Sedano courts Dolores in Pedro's name, she is giddy with delight at being considered for marriage. Her naïveté is evident as she accepts the proposal without considering the

financial implication that the arrangement would have on her family estate. After she marries him and hands over her land, there is nothing left for her in Comala. Although she does not realize it, her salvation comes as she is able to live with her sister in Sayula and die away from her beloved home. Unable to return to the Comala she left years before, she sends her son with the promise that “Allá me oirás mejor. Estaré más cerca de ti. Encontrarás más cercana la voz de mis recuerdos que la de mi muerte, si es que alguna vez la muerte ha tenido alguna voz” (154). Juan was told to find Pedro Páramo and “cóbraselo caro” for abandoning them in Sayula. This assignment bears two purposes. First, Dolores wants her son to know her place of origin and feels that if he knew Comala, he would understand her better. Second, Dolores obviously bears animosity for Pedro Páramo and wants her son to redeem her honor and name.

Juan Preciado’s relationship with his mother echoes the relationships between Bento Santiago and his mother as well as Riobaldo and his mother. When we consider these three mothers, Dolores is the only woman who is given a name or identity in the text. Juan Preciado is an extension of her rather than Pedro Páramo because he bears her family name. Once Pedro Páramo married Dolores and took over her land, he eliminated the Preciado family from Comala. Damiana Cisneros tells Juan that she was his nursemaid while he and his mother lived in the Media Luna, thus showing that Juan should have been recognized by his father and naturally bear the Páramo family name; however, after Dolores left Comala, she gave her son her own family surname rather than his father’s.⁵⁹ Dolores’s final desire to have her son return and force Pedro Páramo to

⁵⁹ When Abundio supposes that Pedro Páramo had both he and Juan Preciado baptized, he emphasizes the disconnect between Pedro Páramo’s world and regular society. A father who has his children baptized makes a promise to God and the Church that he will be responsible for them. Pedro goes through the

recognize him and repay the injustices he committed against her reflects her desire to restore the Preciado family name to Comala. Juan reveals that he did not intend to fulfill his promise to his mother, but once he begins to dream of inheriting his father's power and wealth, he undertakes the assignment to be recognized by his father, to become a *Páramo*. In this sense, Juan does to Dolores what Bento Santiago does to his mother and erases her identity entirely from Comala. The irony of Dolores's situation is in the fact that she died away from her hometown, longing to return. Despite her desire, her soul never journeys back to Comala and therefore she is freed from the "penando" that so many others of her friends and acquaintances are doomed to in the ghost town.

Dolores's death is the first significant death of the narrative because it sets the novel in motion, and Nicolás Álvarez argues that without her death, there is no story. He states, "Preciado no existe como personaje hasta la muerte de su madre y el inicio de su viaje a Comala, puesto que Rulfo evidentemente suprimió toda presentación de su vida anterior, haciendo que en ningún momento se nos ofrezca estampa alguna de su infancia o niñez ni tampoco de su supuesta juventud o madurez" (26). This leads us to the second significant death in *Páramo*: that of Juan Preciado. Juan must die in Comala because of who he is and because the narrative would be incomplete without the story of his death. Full of illusions and hoping that he will be received with open arms by a father he never knew, his journey into Comala is the only story of his life. Sylvia Molloy explains, "Muerto el padre, el viaje perdería significación; sin embargo el pacto con la madre ha adquirido fuerza sacramental. La misión se realiza de manera lateral, inesperada: Juan Preciado no la llevará a cabo en los términos propuestos por la madre pero cumplirá

motions, but abandons all of his children (except Miguel). That Dolores gives Juan her own family name is a direct assault on Pedro's paternal authority.

terriblemente la misión que él mismo se ha forjado” (250). Once his journey has begun, Juan is unable to abandon it, even though it will lead to his own destruction.

As an outsider, Juan is unfamiliar with Comala. He bears the perspective of Sayula, a town vibrant with life.⁶⁰ As Dolores Preciado’s son, his naïveté echoes hers and is a disadvantage as he enters a world completely foreign to what he knew before. It is not so much the physical appearance of Comala that is unfamiliar to Juan, although the town bears little resemblance to the descriptions Dolores gave him of her childhood home, but the society (or echo of society) that lingers in Comala. Juan expects to find a recognizable social structure in Comala, but he is terribly disappointed. Naturally, what Dolores has prepared Juan for is nothing like what he encounters as he arrives in Comala. The first surprise comes when he approaches Comala with Abundio, who reveals that he, too, is a son of Pedro Páramo. As Juan inquires further about his father, he is told that Pedro is nothing more than “un rencor vivo” (151). Juan expects to find a powerful man who has wealth and status in a healthy community. Instead, he finds that his father’s name is synonymous with bitterness and resentment, and that this “rencor” is the only living thing in Comala.

The Preciados represent an interesting element of Comala society because Dolores is remembered by several of the remaining inhabitants, and Juan Preciado’s return is expected as a result.⁶¹ Notwithstanding the respect that women like Eduviges Dyada and Damiana Cisneros have for the Preciados (especially Dolores), Juan is a

⁶⁰ It is interesting to note that Sayula, Jalisco, is the birthplace of Juan Rulfo.

⁶¹ Eduviges Dyada informs Juan that his mother visited her and told her to prepare for his arrival. This revelation is the first moment in which Juan realizes that something is amiss in Comala and that the reality he expects is not the reality he is in.

stranger and his unfamiliarity with Comala and the current society mark him as an outsider and he is treated as such. This is easiest to see as Juan approaches Comala with Abundio, who initially avoids traveling with him and then insults him with, “¡Váyase mucho al carajo!” immediately after revealing that they are half-brothers. Juan innocently asks for clarification, “¿Qué dice usted?” but accepts Abundio’s change of the subject. Alberto Vital links this innocence with a lack of verbal authority. He writes, “Juan se halla siempre en un contexto verbal asimétrico y desventajoso: a su madre no le replica porque ella está a punto de morir; a los demás, porque en Comala es un forastero, y esta condición lo persigue al grado de no dejarlo emplear alguna estrategia comunicativa que atenúe esa situación desfavorable” (48). Because of this disadvantaged position, Juan cannot survive in Comala.

Without the ability to discern between living and dead characters, Juan Preciado suffers a breakdown and, ultimately, his own death. The reader’s association with Juan Preciado in the first half of the narrative breaks down as well, and therefore Juan Preciado’s death is metaphoric of the death of the traditional reader. We are outsiders and we have no knowledge of Comala, its inhabitants, Pedro Páramo, or the history of the town, but we find ourselves accompanying Juan Preciado toward Comala in an effort to familiarize ourselves with the community and, thus, the narrative. Everything in the text is either already dead (like Pedro Páramo) and we must find out how it happened and what is significant about it, or dies around us (like Juan Preciado), once again leaving us with the responsibility of determining the significance of such an event. This is where the reader gains power over death in the narrative. The relationship between the reader and Juan Preciado becomes paramount as Juan narrates his own death. Carol Clark D’Lugo

argues, “[Juan’s] being dead violates specific notions of traditional narrativity. With this realization, readers experience a definite, a violent, loss of innocence as to their relationship with the text” (471).

Juan eventually comes to the realization that he is essentially alone in a ghost town, interacting with the spirits of people long since dead and finds he cannot escape. As he struggles to understand his place in the community of Comala, the oppression overwhelms him and he succumbs, passing from life to death without any interruption of his narrative. Juan describes his death:

No había aire. Tuve que sorber el mismo aire que salía de mi boca, deteniéndolo con las manos antes de que se filera. Lo sentía ir y venir, cada vez menos; hasta que se hizo tan delgado que se filtró entre mis dedos para siempre. Digo para siempre. Tengo memoria de haber visto algo así como nubes espumosas haciendo remolino sobre mi cabeza y luego enjuagarme con aquella espuma y perderme en su nublazón. Fue lo último que vi. (196)

At this point, Juan loses narrative authority and it becomes evident that he is talking with Dorotea, who discredits his narration by questioning his authority. We read:

¿Quieres hacerme creer que te mató el ahogo, Juan Preciado? Yo te encontré en la plaza, muy lejos de la casa de Donis, y junto a mi también estaba él, diciendo que te estabas haciendo el muerto. Entre los dos te arrastramos a la sombra del portal, ya bien tirante, acalambrado como mueren los que mueren muertos de miedo. De no haber habido aire para respirar esa noche de que hablas, nos hubieran saltado las fuerzas para llevarte y contimás para enterrarte. Y ya ves, te enterramos. (196)

When Dorotea speaks, the reader ceases to be linked to Juan Preciado. Dorotea’s rejection of Juan’s description of his death separates the reader from the narrator and reminds us of Juan’s unreliability. After dying in Comala, Juan Preciado finds himself interred with other members of the community and seemingly accepts the finality of his position as an integral part of Comala’s deceased community. Whether he is restricted by

the physical confines of his tomb or something else, Juan Preciado's soul or consciousness does not return to the streets of Comala. Once Juan has revealed his fate, he joins the rest of the inhabitants of the town "[ni] dentro del tiempo ni del espacio" (Aliberti, 37). How Juan Preciado dies is not as important in the narrative as the fact that he dies.

There is a strong sense of destruction and hopelessness associated with Juan's death, but it is more significant because of his situation in Comala rather than the loss of his life. At no time in the narrative does Juan Preciado reveal anything in life that is worth living for. He promises his mother to visit Comala in search of his father, but it is significant that there is no life that Juan Preciado has left behind as he began his journey. The fact that Juan did not intend to fulfill the promise he made to his mother until after he had created his own illusions of power and wealth demonstrates a weakness that Padre Rentería identifies in his half-brother, Miguel: he has his father's bad blood. Juan Preciado bears the blood of Pedro Páramo, the man responsible for the destruction of Comala, and therefore it is only fitting that he should be trapped there. This lends a much more sinister meaning to Juan's statement about his mother, "Mi madre, que vivió su infancia y sus mejores años en este pueblo y que ni siquiera pudo venir a morir aquí. Hasta por eso me mandó a mí en su lugar" (203). Stagnating under the influence of Pedro Páramo, Comala and all of its inhabitants are doomed. Juan Preciado, who "personifica al hijo ilegítimo mexicano, nacido de la violación del abuso de su padre desconocido" (Aliberti 36), must return to Comala and fulfill his destiny. As Aliberti states, "la muerte en *Rulfo* es una gran metáfora: es el regreso al útero, a la madre que es recipiente del

mito. Tanto Doloritas, como Eduviges, Damiana y Dorotea conducen hacia el ‘padre de toditos los hijos de la chingada’, Pedro Páramo” (55). Octavio Páz declared:

Si el tema de Malcolm Lowry es el de la expulsión del paraíso, el de la novela de Juan Rulfo (Pedro Páramo) es el del regreso. Por eso el héroe es un muerto: sólo después de morir podemos volver al Edén nativo... El tema del regreso se convierte en el de la condenación; el viaje a la casa patriarcal de Pedro Páramo es una nueva versión de la peregrinación del alma en pena. (19)

Juan Preciado’s death completes his pilgrimage and seals the fate of Comala. He is the final heir of Pedro Páramo, and through his death obtains his inheritance.

Juan Preciado is only one of at least three of Pedro Páramo’s heirs. The other two are Abundio, whom the reader meets in the opening scene of the narrative, and Miguel, the only child who receives his father’s surname. In addition to the three sons, the novel mentions Pedro Páramo’s father and grandfather as well. Although the three sons, Pedro, his father and grandfather have different roles in the narrative and in society, it is important to examine who these men are and how their deaths appear in and affect the narrative. Pedro’s grandfather does not appear in the narrative, but in the first scene about Pedro’s childhood, his grandmother comments about the family’s poverty. She says, “con los gastos que hicimos para enterrar a tu abuelo y los diezmos que hemos pagado a la Iglesia nos hemos quedado sin un centavo” (158). The scene is likely to pass by the reader without much significance, but one of the early lessons in young Pedro’s life is that the church and death are responsible for his poverty. The next death to affect Pedro’s life is that of his father, Lucas, who is murdered. Once again, this event occurs without a great deal of description, but this death solidifies Pedro’s character. He inherits the Media Luna and becomes the patriarch of the Páramo family. This passing mention of an event encourages the reader to fill in the missing gaps (like in Dom Casmurro) and complete

the story. Based on Rulfo's own declaration that the reader should participate in the narrative, the reader's speculation of what happened outside of the pages of the narrative may be equally as important to the novel as how the reader responds to what occurs inside of it. The similarities between his father's murder and the way Pedro has others (like Toribio Aldrete) killed show just how significant Lucas Páramo's death is to the narrative, despite the fact that it is absent from the narrative.

Although death is important to the thematic development of the narrative, it is also closely linked to the structure of the narrative because immediately after the fragment in which Pedro learns of his father's death comes the fragment in which his son, Miguel, dies. These deaths are separated by at least a generation, but their juxtaposition within the narrative privileges death as a primary contributor to the development of Pedro's character. The only child Pedro ever acknowledged was Miguel, a child whose (unidentified) mother died in childbirth. When the priest took the infant to Pedro to be cared for, his declaration of Pedro's evil nature essentially sealed the fate of the boy. Miguel was given everything he wanted, and grew in even more excess than his father. His life is defined by abusing money, taking life, and raping several of the women and girls in the town. Miguel's death is one of the few that actually occurs in the narrative and it strengthens the way in which Comala is a haven for spirits to wander after they die. Miguel's death also occurs as he is traveling between Comala and another town. As Pedro Páramo's heir, Miguel possesses his father's promiscuity, his violent nature, and his excesses, but, like Juan Preciado, his fate is not to escape Comala. Miguel leaves Comala to court a girl from another town. His desire to possess a woman from outside of Comala (like his father with Susana San Juan) brought about his death.

The Páramo fate also touches Abundio. Upon arriving in Comala, Juan Preciado learns from Eduviges that Abundio is dead, but does not know how it happened. It is important to note that at this point in the narrative Juan still bears the perspective of an outsider and does not recognize he is associating with spirits. Regardless of his death outside of the narrative, Abundio is bound to Comala and the text, so his inheritance matches that of Miguel Páramo and Juan Preciado. Abundio's role in the narrative seems limited at the beginning because he passes through Comala and does not intend to stay in the town. He informs Juan that he lives on the other side of town (in the direction of the Media Luna) and welcomes him to go there with him, but once Juan has found Eduviges, Abundio disappears from the narrative as quickly as he entered it. Only at the end of the novel do we learn the significance of this simple muleteer: Abundio is the man who killed Pedro Páramo. In the dialogue between Abundio and Juan Preciado, we learn that Pedro "murió hace muchos años" but is "un rencor vivo." Abundio does not reveal that he is responsible for Pedro's death, but the fact that he guides Juan to Comala where he will meet his own death suggests that the simple man bears a much more significant role in Rulfo's narrative. Abundio opens and closes the text, guiding us into Comala and destroying Pedro Páramo. His Charon-like character initiates the narrative journey for Juan and the reader. Abundio travels to Comala and his residence is within the limits of the township, but his expressed intention to travel through town to his home prefigures where we reunite with him at the end of the novel. His final narrated act, his drunken attack on Pedro Páramo, closes the text.

The death of Pedro Páramo, the title figure of the novel, is also significant. As I have already mentioned, it is the last event in the narrative, but it is an event we know to

have happened long before the narrative opens. Pedro's death serves two important functions in the narrative. The first is that it closes the narrative. He is responsible for the deaths of everyone else in Comala in some way or another, and as he folds his arms and allows Comala to wither and die, it is only fitting that the man who holds such power over a town be the last person to die within the narrative and close the work. In addition to the act of dying, the way in which he dies is also significant to the work. Abundio, in drunken sorrow, attacks Pedro and stabs him. Pedro does not fight back and recognizes the moment of his death. We read:

Quiso levantar su mano para aclarar la imagen; pero sus piernas la retuvieron como si fuera de piedra. Quiso levantar la otra mano y fue cayendo despacio, de lado, hasta quedar apoyada en el suelo como una muleta deteniendo su hombro deshuesado. "Ésta es mi muerte," dijo. [...] Después de unos cuantos pasos cayó suplicando por dentro pero sin decir una sola palabra. Dio un golpe seco contra la tierra y se fue desmoronando como si fuera un montón de piedras. (254)

After Susana San Juan dies, Pedro does nothing more than sit and wait for his death. This recalls the words that Dorotea said to Juan Preciado when he finds himself in the tomb. "Me senté a esperar la muerte" (199). When the moment of his death arrives, Pedro is already resigned to his fate and accepts it without worry. The way in which he dies is also important. Ciaran Cosgrove states:

An examination of the novel's final sentence exposes something of a paradox in what Robbe-Grillet has called 'the movement of the writing'. For although, as noted above, we witness motions of 'undoing' throughout the novel, the sequences of disintegration are supplemented by the use of strong, and at times abrasive verbs and nouns that seem to countermand the very processes described. (80)

Pedro Páramo is reduced to a mound of rocks, which is the same thing he has allowed Comala to become. The rocks are unfeeling and harsh, but, most importantly, they are

infertile. As the novel closes, Pedro's death is the final event that seals Comala's fate as a barren wasteland.

If we look at the society that existed before Juan Preciado's arrival and the opening of the narrative, we see that at the head of the community was Pedro Páramo, the powerful landlord who reaped where he did not sow and, from a paternal standpoint, sowed but rarely reaped. Juan Preciado should have been the legitimate heir of Pedro Páramo, as he was born to Dolores Preciado, the only woman who was legally married to Pedro. Abundio, Juan, Miguel, and certainly other unnamed people could claim Pedro as their father, but they benefited nothing from the relationship. Of the three children we know belong to Pedro Páramo, Abundio, Juan Preciado and Miguel Páramo, are all different and bear the scars of their paternity in different ways. Each of them appears in the text, with Juan Preciado appearing as the most complex of the three, searching for a father he never knew, but Abundio, whom we meet as just another son of Pedro Páramo, is the very person who has killed Pedro. Miguel Páramo is a flat character, showing no promise of skill or intelligence, only wanton desire and abuse of power. It is this "legitimate" son who bears his father's surname and is allowed to flower in the desert. Miguel's demise is as complete as his father's, however, and like his father, his evil nature lives on in the haunted spirits of the town's other inhabitants. It is this influence that Abundio refers to as "un rencor vivo." Interestingly, Pedro Páramo's presence is evident in the Comala of the novel, but his voice is conspicuously absent. Only the scenes recalled by the third-person narrator give us insight into who Pedro Páramo was and how he lived. He and his sons (acknowledged or not) are the center figures of the narrative. They are the rocks and earth upon which Comala sits. Their disregard for society results

in the destruction of the entire town, and the primary evidence of this is the way in which the Páramo men associate with women in the community.

There are a number of women in the narrative who, as Sylvia Molloy and María Luisa Bastos point out, are surrogate mothers for Juan Preciado. The presence of each of these women in Comala, as well as each of their deaths serve to show how Comala is isolated from the rest of the world and doomed to remain so. Eduviges Dyada, Damiana Cisneros and Dorotea all have a history in Comala, but, even more importantly; they have a relationship with Juan Preciado as well as the Páramo family. Eduviges reveals that she should have been Juan's mother because she is the woman who spent Dolores's wedding night with Pedro. Damiana was the nurse who cared for Juan Preciado while his mother was at the Media Luna. These women all suffer for sins that they have committed and are trapped in Comala, but their voices show the extent of Pedro's influence over the town. It is through these women that Juan (and subsequently the reader) learns what has really happened. These women directly influenced or were directly touched by the deaths of the Páramo men in the narrative. Damiana Cisneros was present when Pedro died;⁶² Dorotea found Juan as he died and presumably chose to wait for death at the same moment, and Eduviges is the woman Miguel visits after he dies. Additionally, Eduviges's suicide is linked to Miguel's death by padre Rentería's recollection of the "estrellas fugaces" on the same night. In each case, these women have significant roles in the narrative and it is through their dialogue that we learn who the Páramo men are.⁶³ This narrative shows the

⁶² Several critics argue that Abundio stabs Damiana and kills her as well as Pedro Páramo. (see Paul Dixon's Reversible Readings)

⁶³ Susana San Juan is also an important woman to the narrative, but her relationship to the Páramo family is unique, therefore I will discuss her at length later in the chapter.

importance of women in society, as more than mere objects, although they are treated as such by Pedro and Miguel. The fact that it is the women who have a voice in the narrative demonstrates their key role in the establishment and maintenance of the community.

In spite of the feudal system that Pedro Páramo establishes in Comala, there is an undercurrent of matriarchy in the narrative that we need to consider. In the narrative, and in a fairly realistic representation of Mexican society, the women anchor the homes. Of all the characters who wander around the town, Juan Preciado finds women in a relatively constant location near or inside of their homes. They invite him to stay with them and they receive him into their homes (although they do not provide a great amount of comfort). The men, like Abundio and Donis, are not attached to their homes and even Pedro does not spend extensive time within the walls of the Media Luna. His lasting image is that of the man sitting on the porch, looking away toward the cemetery where Susana was taken and laid to rest. The men of the story all come and go, passing little or no time in the homes. It is the women who maintain the community and who see to it that something remains stable even after the destruction of the town and they are nothing more than spirits.

If we look at the way in which the women of Comala exert power, we must return to Dolores Preciado and her decision to leave Pedro and Comala. This echoes Ana María of Bombal's novels, except that Dolores took her son with her whereas Ana María returned with the hope that having children with Antonio would repair the fractured marriage. Although Dolores has the power to leave, she refuses to return without her husband calling for her. As she speaks to her sister Gertrudis about it, it looks as if this is a conscious decision that she makes, not one forced upon her by the rules of society.

Dolores declares, “¿Acaso él ha enviado por mí? No me voy si él no me llama” (163). It is obvious that as Pedro does not love Dolores and never calls for her, her attempt to control him through her physical or emotional prowess is a complete failure. The reader is aware that this is the case because we have seen the arrangements made between Fulgor and Pedro before Fulgor woos Dolores on Pedro’s behalf. There are some interesting similarities between La amortajada and Pedro Páramo in this respect, because the way in which the men are able to court and secure their marriages to Ana María and Dolores is quite similar. In a society in which the women must wait for the men to ask for marriage, it is apparent that land and wealth always adds desirability to the union. As in the case of Pedro’s marriage to Dolores Preciado, the economic union is the sole reason for the proposed marriage. Dolores’s eagerness to advance in society causes her to overlook the implications of the act and as the loveless marriage fails, the rest of the community begins to disintegrate as well. If anything, Dolores is shown to be naïve by falling for Fulgor’s lies about Pedro’s love for her. Her desire to be married outweighs any individual identity she may have sought or maintained as the owner of significant amounts of property. In contrast, Ana María is promised to Antonio because her father is able to speak for her. Ana María has no property and Antonio never desired the social advancement, but merely Ana María’s love. We see in Páramo that society has failed because of Pedro’s power over the land and its resources, but, excepting Dolores, all other women who appear in the novel are childless. It would seem that Comala’s only fertile male is Pedro Páramo. Without anyone else in the town willing or able to have children, it is natural that the town would die off.

The Páramo line is fruitless after Pedro, but Comala is too far corrupted to save itself. The reader discovers this as Juan encounters Donis and his sister just before he dies. This couple is living as husband and wife, and Juan notices they are naked, living in a quasi-Edenic state. Juan immediately asks, “¿No están ustedes muertos?” (187). Juan has begun his transformation and no longer holds to the realistic expectation of communicating with living persons. His transition into Comalan society is almost complete. Upon hearing Juan’s desperate question, this man and woman do not answer him, but merely presume he is frightened or drunk. Juan Preciado feels completely justified in asking such a question because Comala does not follow the pattern of life and reality that an outsider would expect. He is still attempting to understand the society in which he finds himself. Donis’s refusal to answer the question is most easily interpreted by the reader that they are alive. However, it could just as easily be interpreted that everyone in Comala is dead and that one should not expect to encounter the living. This inversion of logic is natural if we accept death as the normal state of existence and life as the aberrance. When Juan asks how long they have been in Comala, they reply, “Desde siempre. Aquí nacimos” (190). Again, the matter-of-fact answer could be interpreted in two different ways. Either they are the last remaining survivors in Comala or they are two of countless spirits who inhabit the ghost town.⁶⁴

The last vestige of Comala society is represented in Donis and his sister, who live as husband and wife, in a mockery of the familial structure that exists in normal society. This relationship echoes that of Adam and Eve from the Bible, with the man and woman naked and alone, existing in the town “desde siempre.” However, the incestuous nature of

⁶⁴ If we look back at *Memórias Póstumas*, we see antecedents of death being considered a birth.

their union upsets the biblically established social structure. If Donis and his sister only remain together out of the obligation to repopulate the town, the arrival of Juan Preciado should be a welcome event. When Juan arrives, it would seem natural that Donis would leave his sister in the care of Juan Preciado, a man who would restore legitimacy to the union and the community. Whatever Juan Preciado's responsibility for Donis's sister is remains unclear. Whether he is to take her as his wife and repopulate the town is uncertain and ultimately left to the reader to determine. It would appear that she intends for such a thing to occur as she coaxes Juan into her bed by assuring him that Donis has left for good. This woman's fate is unknown, because once Juan Preciado dies, she is no longer a part of the text; indeed, she has no identity by herself. She has no name, is dependent entirely upon Donis and/or Juan for her support and protection, and hasn't sufficient power to keep either man beside her. The Donis-sister-Juan triangle merits an Adam and Eve-type of identifier, but the fact that they are brother and sister and are unlikely to have children and repopulate the town shows the extent of the destruction of Comala. More importantly, as Juan Preciado moves into the home, Donis takes it as the perfect opportunity to abandon his sister and escape Comala altogether. She is left without hope or future, the one person who could restore life to a dying community has no promise of offspring or future herself. Family, life, society, marriage all wither and pass away with Juan Preciado's death, sealing the fate of the community of Comala.

There is one character in the novel that may have had the potential to save Comala: Susana San Juan. Susana is the childhood love of Pedro Páramo and in all of the scenes in which she appears with Pedro, either as a memory or in dialogue, Pedro shows kindness and tenderness toward her. Susana San Juan and her father, Bartolomé, are not

presented as original members of the Comala society. During life, the old miner lives away from Comala with his daughter, almost the mirror image of Juan Preciado and Dolores. Bartolomé and Susana are older, and entered Comala society before Juan Preciado, but it was Pedro Páramo who brought them there as well. Pedro loved Susana from his childhood and wanted to marry her. Bartolomé kept his adult daughter like a wife, in what appears to be an incestuous relationship. By Pedro's arrangement, Bartolomé San Juan is killed in his mine and Susana is brought to Comala, to the Media Luna, to be cared for by Pedro Páramo himself. What is significant about this arrangement is that Susana is a widow of a previous marriage. She still loves her first husband and this love is sufficient for her to remain completely independent (at least mentally) from Pedro Páramo. As she agonizes, she dreams herself once again with her first husband and actually speaks his name thinking Pedro is him. Although she spends the rest of her days cloistered at the Media Luna, Susana never becomes a part of Comala. She, like Juan Preciado, is only brought to Comala to die.

As evidenced by Juan Preciado's narrative, when most of the town's inhabitants die, their souls are bound to Comala and they remain a part of the community, reliving the moments of their greatest mistakes. However, in other cases, death does not imprison the characters but actually frees them. The primary example of this is Susana San Juan. Susana San Juan is brought back to Comala by Pedro Páramo and follows the pattern of death that occurs with the other inhabitants of the town. We learn that she is buried in the sepulcher next to Juan Preciado and Dorotea, and when the humidity sinks in, her bones become restless and she begins to murmur. This is the way in which Juan learns the fate of the town. Like Juan Preciado and Dorotea, Susana San Juan's soul evidently lies in the

tomb and therefore has not escaped Comala. She only stirs when moisture seeps into her sepulcher, but her relative state of peace can be linked to Juan Preciado's and Dorotea's because they are not forced to wander the streets as Eduviges, Abundio and the others do.⁶⁵ Susana San Juan has the benefit of having died in a state of madness, which liberated her during her life from both her father and Pedro.

It is important to recognize that Susana became mad after her experience with death while still a young girl. Bartolomé exploited her for her small size and once lowered her into a hole in the ground seeking gold coins from a fallen prospector. This experience is a symbolic death of the girl, for she is buried in the earth and forced to face death as she raids the tomb of the deceased prospector. She emerges alive from the metaphoric tomb, but her psyche is destroyed. At the end of her life, when she lay dying in the bed at the Media Luna, she rejects padre Rentería's attempts at confession and the supposed blessing of salvation. Her madness and death break the socially established pattern of life and death and, ironically, keep her free from falling prey to Pedro's desires.

Although Pedro feels tenderness and arguably genuine love for Susana San Juan, his character is insufficient to secure her love. It is in this failed relationship that the third-person narrative most effectively assists the reader in determining the true fate of Comala. During the first half of the narrative, we are given precious little evidence of Pedro Páramo's character and actions, but what we have seen illustrates his avarice from an early age, his disregard for human life and the law, and his power over the remainder of the community. The only contrast to these characteristics in the narrative is his desire

⁶⁵ The souls who wander are all guilty of sins they have committed or allowed to commit. Those who remain in their sepulchers are only guilty of inhabiting Comala.

for Susana. Early in the narrative, we read of his love for and his dependence on this missing person. It is not easy to identify the gentle and tender feelings written in this description as those of Pedro Páramo, but we are led to this discovery without confusion. Pedro is already married to Dolores Preciado, but he brings Susana San Juan to his home to care for her after her father dies in his mine. His first marriage was without feeling, an act committed entirely out of selfish desire for personal gain. His union with Susana San Juan is an attempt to possess the only thing he truly loved, but, like the first marriage, it is based entirely on lies.

Susana San Juan loved her first husband and although she consented to move to the Media Luna and be married to Pedro Páramo, she never makes the emotional connection with the man whose entire existence seems to revolve around her. We can only imagine that Susana San Juan is unhappy with the relationship that she is forced to maintain with her father, so when she consents to marry Pedro Páramo, it appears that she is doing so in an effort to escape the cruel and abusive paternal system she has known throughout her life. Her first husband is not present in the narrative, but the effect he has on her marriage to Pedro is so significant that it ultimately brings about Pedro's destruction. Florencio inhabits Susana's dreams, and it is this presence that keeps Pedro from having exactly what he desires in Susana. It is almost certain that she was aware that her love for Florencio would protect her from the abuses of Pedro Páramo. Susana San Juan's memories of her marriage to Florencio lead her away from Comala, to a paradisiacal time in which she was happy. This image strengthens the link to Dolores Preciado, whose memories of a beautiful, flowering Comala dominate her final hours.

When padre Rentería visits Susana's bedside to seek her confession, he belabors the point that she needs to confess all of her sins and receive absolution before she can find peace in her death. The priest's promise of peace in the afterlife is worthless, for none of the other characters in the narrative have found peace in death. This episode echoes Ana María's own death in La amortajada as she refuses to confess and ask for absolution. Whereas Ana María seemingly promised a confession and repentance "tomorrow" and then died without having the opportunity, Susana San Juan knows she is going to die and merely asks the priest to leave her in peace. She demonstrates no faith and is completely absorbed in the pleasantness of her dreams about her first husband, Florencio. This independence from religion and freedom in love demonstrates strength of character that is unnoticed or invisible in regular day-to-day actions of these two female characters. Their deaths reveal their independence within a society that would imprison them.

A closer look at Susana's actions before her death also shows that Susana San Juan echoes Elena and Sofía in Bombal's Shrouded Woman. These women are liberated to such a degree that they function completely independently of the men they love or marry. The nature of the tale that Rulfo has created does not give Susana San Juan much voice, but when she does speak, we see that she is strong enough to know what she wants and makes decisions without concern for social protocol. Susana accepts Pedro Páramo's offer of marriage out of convenience, reasoning that it is better for her and her father to be affiliated with Pedro at this point in their life. She does not love Pedro, nor is she moved by the memories that she may have of their childhood together. Susana San Juan cannot be controlled or dominated. She receives the news of her father's death with

apprehension, hoping to hear the words that he was murdered, but she is not surprised at the way in which the news is broken to her. After this, she withdraws into herself and her memories of Florencio and awaits her own death. The character that can choose to allow herself to die has a tremendous amount of power in a narrative that is replete with death, as is Pedro Páramo. Susana San Juan never requites Pedro's love, but her death is so powerful that it results in the destruction of Comala. This is the death that Pedro cannot cope with. Pedro suffered when his father died, and he suffered when his son, Miguel, died, but when his mourning and pain at Susana's death are not echoed by the remaining citizens of Comala, his grief combines with his misanthropy and he folds his arms and watches Comala wither.

Beyond Pedro Páramo and his bloodline, there are additional men who live and die in Comala and appear in the narrative. Of the other men who die in the novel, Toribio Aldrete and Bartolomé San Juan are killed for their opposition to Pedro Páramo. Juan Preciado learns of Toribio Aldrete's death on his first night in Comala, because Pedro's majordomo, Fulgor Sedano, carried out a false execution order against Toribio Aldrete in the back room of Eduvigis Dyada's house. Toribio's screams haunt the room, which happens to be the room Eduvigis has prepared for Juan to occupy. It is important to note that this room has been sealed shut since the murder of Toribio Aldrete, but it is open to receive Juan Preciado. This strengthens the foreshadowing of Juan's own death later that evening. Bartolomé San Juan was killed because he would not relinquish possession of Susana to Pedro. Regardless of their relationship to or conflict with the cacique, their deaths only serve to increase Pedro's power over the remaining inhabitants of Comala. Pedro's most effective means of consolidating power is to murder those who oppose him.

Fulgor Sedano is a more significant character in the novel because he represents the vestiges of the old society. Don Fulgor Sedano worked for Lucas Páramo, Pedro's father, and he continues to work for Pedro. Fulgor seems to have somewhat of a conscience and understanding of how things are supposed to function in a society (with regard to debt, marriage, community, even warfare), but allows himself to be bullied and silenced by Pedro out of fear for his job and position in the society that his master is destroying around him. Fulgor Sedano's experience and counsel is insufficient to alter the trajectory that the town is on with Pedro Páramo at the helm. Fulgor is killed as he follows Pedro's orders and marches out with a rag-tag bunch of soldiers to fight in the revolution. These men are merely mercenaries and do not function inside of Comala. Pedro's entire purpose with them is to keep the revolution away from his land. When Pedro receives news of the rout and Fulgor's death, he brushes it off without emotion or concern. For Pedro, even his friends mean nothing if they cannot help him obtain more power.

Because the novel abounds with death, it is significant to note that there is one character who avoids the fate that awaits all of the inhabitants of Comala. Padre Rentería is the only character who manages to escape Comala. Yet, Padre Rentería does not break free from Pedro Páramo's grasp without significant scarring, for he suffers a spiritual death while under Pedro's thumb. The only scene of the narrative that occurs outside of Comala is when Rentería is in Contla seeking absolution from another priest, who tells him it is impossible. As the priest in Contla sees Rentería approach, he asks, "¿Dónde está el moribundo, padre? [...] ¿Ha muerto alguien en Contla padre?" Hubiera querido responderles: 'Yo. Yo soy el muerto.' Pero se conformó con sonreír" (207). Rentería

recognizes his failure as a spiritual leader over the people of Comala. Rentería reveals his spiritual death at this point, having lost his faith somewhere in his pursuit of money and power under Pedro Páramo.⁶⁶ After Rentería's confession, the priest tells him, "Ese hombre de quien no quieres mencionar su nombre ha despedazado tu Iglesia y tú se lo has consentido. [...] No, padre, mis manos no son lo suficientemente limpias para darte la absolución" (208). Pedro Páramo owns Padre Rentería, who has pardoned and forgiven all of Pedro's and Miguel's excesses because of their money.

Rentería struggles with the hatred he feels for Miguel Páramo, who raped his niece and killed his brother. Inside, he prays that God will condemn Miguel, but he also offers the necessary sacraments and prayers because Pedro is able to pay for them. In contrast, Eduvigis commits suicide and because of her poverty is unable to pay for the funeral rites that should grant her access to heaven, so she does not receive the necessary blessings. Rentería recognizes this injustice, but also acknowledges that he is too weak to do anything about it. When discussing Comala with the priest in Contla, Rentería laments that he has brought the seeds of fruit trees to die. Rentería says, "Yo traje aquí algunas semillas. Pocas; apenas una bolsita. . . después pensé que hubiera sido mejor dejarlas allá donde maduraran. Ya que aquí las traje a morir" (209). This echoes the parable of the sower in the New Testament where the seeds fall on bad ground and therefore are unable to produce any fruit. Metaphorically, this summarizes the way in which Comala is dying under Pedro Páramo. Padre Rentería has lost all faith, having appeased and sponsored Pedro Páramo's sins for so long that even as his brother is killed and niece is raped by

⁶⁶ Rentería's tragedy echoes Miguel de Unamuno's San Manuel Bueno, mártir but lacks the self-sacrificing nobleness of the Spanish priest.

Miguel Páramo, he is powerless to do anything. He is reduced to a faithless prayer for the condemnation of Miguel.

For the spirits like Eduvigés Dyada, Abundio, and even Miguel Páramo's horse who all "andan penando," Alan Bell writes, "The guilt of the pueblo is found in its weak, frightened and dominated men, its condescending women and its cowardly and avaricious priest, Rentería (from rentero, a tributary) whose services can be had for proper reimbursement" (241). It is this guilt, this dysfunctional social order, that Pedro Páramo has created. This is all that is left of Comala. Religion has been shown to be at odds with Pedro's character because the church was partly responsible for his childhood poverty. When Padre Rentería abandons his flock in Comala and takes up arms in the war, this (corrupt) representative of God turns his back on the town, an act that symbolizes God's abandonment of the town. This final step appropriately relegates Comala to its isolated location at the mouth of hell and validates Abundio's description of his hometown in the opening scene of the novel.

Throughout the work, Comala is presented as both heaven and hell. All (or many) of its former inhabitants remain in spirit form in the ruins of the city, and without hope for another eternal reward, they identify Comala as paradise or purgatory, heaven or hell. Abundio situates Comala at the mouth of hell, but Dolores Preciado describes Comala as an earthly paradise to her son, Juan. She anticipates being closer to Juan when he is in Comala, and her voice is able to inform her friend, Eduvigés Dyada, of her son's imminent arrival, but Dolores never returns. Juan Preciado arrives in Comala anticipating a beautiful and blossoming city because his mother's memory has presented it thusly. For Dorotea, "El cielo [...] está aquí donde estoy ahora" (203). The irony of this statement

lies in the fact that padre Rentería told her she would never see heaven, so she has accepted her permanence in Comala as an alternative to hell. Interestingly, Juan asks, “¿Y tu alma? ¿Dónde crees que haya ido?” implying that her consciousness exists separately from her soul, which, Dorotea hypothesizes, “debe andar vagando por la tierra como tantas otras; buscando vivos que recen por ella. Tal vez me odie por el mal trato que le di pero eso ya no me preocupa” (203). Regardless of how its inhabitants perceive it, Comala remains a hot, humid purgatory from which few escape.

When Juan Preciado begins his journey, he and the reader are anchored in the reality that we know to exist in our own world. For Juan Preciado, it is Sayula; for the reader, it is outside of the pages of the text. The narrative is structured to encourage the reader to approach Comala with the expectation of a faithful narrative account, resembling reality. As we progress further into Comala and the narrative, we find that this is not the case, and we must abandon the stable moorings provided by expectations of a realist account and give ourselves over to the narrative completely. The philosophy of death as it appears in this narrative is quite different than in the other texts in this study. The other novels make an important distinction between life and death and, as the characters pass from one existence to the other, they debate and discuss what lies in store for them. In the other novels, although the living and dead retain some sort of voice, there is no way for them to communicate with each other, thus maintaining the realist separation between life and death. More importantly, the reader is acknowledged as an independent individual outside the confines of the novel. In Páramo, the living and the dead coexist, with several spirits able to communicate, wander, and carry out activities

that, realism dictates, belong only to the living. Paradoxically, the reader enters Comala with Juan Preciado and finds that he is alone and without a voice.

As is the case in Memórias Póstumas, death in Páramo moves the characters into eternity, which, as Brás Cubas informs us, is timeless. It is also without progress. Brás Cubas approaches the subject of his death as just another phase of existence. He died and left behind a handful of friends and associates, but he is not concerned with them because he never cared about them during life. In death, he has a lot of time to waste and therefore desires to pass the time by writing about his life. Brás Cubas's afterlife is a continuation of his philosophy and mortal existence; solitary, without responsibility or concern for others. Ana María, of La amortajada, finds herself in a stage between life and death, but, ultimately, awaiting the death of the dead in which she can rest and be silent forever. Her character has no hope of progress or improvement, although her sacrifice serves to strengthen the women who survive her. The death in her narration is merely a transition from activity to inactivity or from individuality to the community of nature. Pedro Páramo's Juan finds neither his mother's spirit nor his father in Comala. In each case, the reader is invited into the narrative, exposed to an existence beyond life, and given additional perspective on the way in which the living function in their society. All three narratives illustrate that no matter how important the social structure of the living may be, it cannot transcend death. During her interview with Juan Preciado, Eduviges suggests that she and Dolores intended to die together so they could travel to heaven together. After Juan tells her of Dolores's death, Eduviges says, "Pobre de ella. Se ha de haber sentido abandonada. Nos hicimos la promesa de morir juntas. De irnos las dos para darnos ánimo una a la otra en el otro viaje, por si se necesitara" (155). The other journey

Eduviges refers to would seem to be the journey to heaven, but there is no evidence to show that such a journey is possible.

If we recall the Comala that Juan Preciado began his journey in search of, it was an earthly paradise, described to him by his mother. That Comala died when Susana San Juan died and Pedro Páramo ceased supporting the town. Although Abundio and others remain after Pedro's death, once Pedro Páramo dies, the earthly Comala ceases to exist. Comala only remains in the echo of the inhabitants who spent their lives under Pedro Páramo's rule. The Páramos die out, but we must recall that Pedro has died before the beginning of the novel. It is Juan Preciado who is the last man to die in Comala. The reader's dependence on Juan Preciado as a guide has been severed by the second half of the novel in which the reader, now independent of Juan Preciado, receives the murmurs and echoes of the former inhabitants of Comala and can draw his or her own conclusions. As Juan Rulfo declared, Comala "va muriendo por sí mismo." Nevertheless, the ultimate fate of the town depends on the reader. As Alicia Perdomo writes:

En esta vida única y limitada que tenemos, en cada instante nos vemos obligados a elegir un solo camino entre infinitos que se nos presentan. Elegir esa posibilidad es abandonar las otras a la nada. Esa posibilidad que ni siquiera sabemos hasta dónde nos ha de llevar, pues nuestra visión del futuro es precaria y sentimos el mismo desasosiego que el navegante que debe pasar entre escollos peligrosísimos en medio de la niebla o la oscuridad. Apenas si sabemos con certeza que más allá está la inevitable muerte, lo que precisamente hace más angustiosa nuestra elección: pues hace de ella algo único e irreversible. (92)

By incorporating death as a thematic and structural element of the narrative, Pedro Páramo allows the reader additional layers of understanding as he or she contemplates the society in which he or she lives. Pedro Páramo challenges tradition and social structure by presenting the aftermath of one man's unchecked rise to absolute power. What

remains of Comala are the murmurs of the unfortunate victims who allowed themselves to be silenced during their life, but suffer the guilt of the destruction of their community. The reader, like Juan Preciado enters Comala not knowing what to expect, but quickly finds that previous assumptions about family and community are not reliable. Juan Preciado's breakdown and destruction acts as the metaphoric death of the passive reader, who upon finding him or herself alone in the ghost town of Comala must abandon any previously held assumptions of literature. As the reader assumes more responsibility for the text and seeks to understand the destruction of Comala, less focus falls on the title character and more on the countless other people who chose to uphold the cacique regardless of their suffering and their desires to escape his influence. In the end, Pedro Páramo is reduced to "un montón de piedras," but the voices of the many who were silenced by his injustices live on.

Although Pedro Páramo dies, Comala survives as a ghost town. The society of Comala is wiped out, but the murmurs and voices lamenting the many injustices of the town under Pedro Páramo's cruel and avaricious hand remain. They are evident in Dolores Preciado's dying wish to her son, Eduviges Dyada's eternal suffering, Toribio Aldrete's tormented screams, and Susana San Juan's semi-coherent babble within her tomb. The isolation and destruction of Comala occur in several stages. The town acts as a black hole, swallowing up all who enter, especially those of the Páramo bloodline. Society has withered under the influence of Pedro Páramo, beginning with his marriage to Dolores Preciado. Pedro's abuse of power is so pernicious and invasive that everyone associated with Comala is affected and eventually succumbs to him. The destruction of Comalan society foreshadows an apocalyptic ending to the town that will be echoed in

future Latin American narratives. One of the most significant is Cien años de soledad in which Macondo is destroyed by a whirlwind at the very instant the Sanskrit writings of the mysterious Melquíades are interpreted by the last Buendía. Roberto González Echevarría writes that, “Aureliano is the propitiatory victim necessary for us to be able to read [Cien años de soledad], for us to acquire the arcane knowledge we need to be able to decode it” (27). Melquíades’s prophecy is fulfilled and the destruction of Macondo is final, erased from the earth by a windstorm. However, no such prophecy or writings exist regarding the Páramo bloodline. Rulfo’s Comala remains on the earth, drawing spirits back from the grave to “andar penando” as they suffer punishment for actions taken during their lives. Juan Preciado is the reader’s Virgil, leading us into the mouth of hell, but his sacrifice is not propitiatory for the reader, because the reader does not gain added insight through Juan Preciado’s death. The narrator merely becomes another of Rulfo’s “murmillos” that echo through the literary streets of Comala and appear on the pages of Pedro Páramo. Juan Rulfo’s Comala is the space in which the “voided presences” of Mexico’s history exist, and the reader, whose participation in the narrative ultimately becomes yet another of the countless *murmillos* haunting Comala, becomes the keeper of the Archive.

Chapter IV

Death and the Deceit of Language in Grande Sertão: Veredas

João Guimarães Rosa's seminal work, Grande Sertão: Veredas combines many of the literary devices found in Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas, Dom Casmurro, La amortajada, The Shrouded Woman, and Pedro Páramo. Like the other novels in this study, Grande Sertão: Veredas utilizes a first-person narrator who seemingly possesses an enhanced perspective of life provided by his experience with death. In contrast to Memórias Póstumas, Amortajada, Shrouded, and Páramo, Grande Sertão: Veredas does not begin with death, nor does death appear as a primary trope within the work. In fact, in much of the work, death seems only to appear anecdotally, as the natural result of the situation narrated. There is one death in the narrative, however, that serves as the key to the work. This death not only catalyzes the narrative, but affects everything within the work, including the language, form and structure, and philosophy of the narrative. It is simultaneously a resolution and a complication to the narrative. A look at Grande Sertão: Veredas through this perspective shows that death is much more significant and meaningful to the work than it initially appears.

In this final chapter, I will look at death in Grande Sertão: Veredas,⁶⁷ and the way in which Guimarães Rosa establishes his narrative in a state of perpetual ambiguity through the death of a single character. Throughout the narrative, death establishes and reveals identity. It marks both the beginning and end of existence. Death both preserves

⁶⁷ Future references to this text will be written as Grande Sertão.

and destroys society because it functions as a unifying force as well as a dividing force. On the surface, death punctuates the different changes that the narrator/protagonist, Riobaldo, experiences in his quest for identity. Riobaldo's reaction to the deaths of those around him and his response to the challenges each death presents establishes his character. In addition to the way death affects the narrator/protagonist, it also acts as a revelatory tool, revealing Diadorim's identity, one that is painstakingly concealed throughout the character's life, as well as the narrative. This revelation alters the entire course of the work, because the knowledge possessed by the narrator and withheld from the reader until the closing pages of the novel nullifies one of the work's primary conflicts.

Grande Sertão is an excellent example of a "writerly text" because Guimarães Rosa's *sertão* represents a world that cannot be "traversed, intersected, stopped, [or] plasticized by a singular [lifestyle or profession]," a world that possesses a "plurality of entrances, [...] networks, [and an] infinity of languages" (Barthes 5). The *sertão* is presented as a microcosm of the world, with its greatest dangers and evils perpetually threatening its inhabitants. Although the Brazilian *sertão* is an actual place, the language and structure of the narrative render it unfamiliar to the reader, regardless of familiarity with the actual, physical region. The harsh environment of the *sertão* provides an excellent backdrop for the narrative, which is structured on the dichotomies of male and female, life and death, love and hate, and good and evil, represented primarily through debate over the existence of God and the devil. Despite the opposing nature of such relationships, Grande Sertão blurs the lines of distinction between them. By doing so, the narrative demonstrates the uncertainty of language and the resultant inability to

communicate, as well as the uncertainty of existence and the imminent destruction of life, faith, and society. The knowledge that Riobaldo possesses of Diadorim, of the *sertão*, and of the human experience unfolds in a carefully constructed stream-of-consciousness style narrative that is replete with unfamiliar terms to describe the *sertão*, its inhabitants, and the experiences of those who dwell therein. Guimarães Rosa's narrative is carefully written to confuse the reader, and the narrator's unique vocabulary is a key element of the work. By incorporating this new lexicon in the work, Guimarães Rosa demonstrates the destruction (death) of language and how, without it, the human experience is reduced to a loosely connected series of events without meaning or purpose.

I will begin my analysis of Grande Sertão looking at the structure of the work and by examining how the narrator develops a close relationship with the reader and the way in which he tells his story through confession. Like Machado's *Brás Cubas*, Riobaldo meanders through his memories, identifying significant personal life changes and punctuating them by narrating the deaths of people he associated with. In this sense, each death that Riobaldo narrates is symbolic of one of the pathways through life. Riobaldo is the only "speaking" survivor of the *jagunço* wars, and therefore represents a "successful" journey through the human experience.⁶⁸ Notwithstanding his success as a *jagunço*, Riobaldo questions the success of his life. Although he has survived the *jagunçagem* and found a comfortable life in the *sertão*, he has lost his dearest friend and, he fears, his soul along the way. The work is largely the narrator's hypothesis on the state of his soul after

⁶⁸ *Jagunço* translates into English as "thug," but identifies a member of a group of bandits who wandered the Brazilian backlands as a law unto themselves. This lifestyle is known as the *jagunçagem*.

his actions, and like Casmurro, Riobaldo expects his reader to validate his “existence” and uphold his conclusion at the end of the work.

Unlike Machado’s narratives, Grande Sertão provides few metafictional markers through which the reader may “enter” and actively engage the text. Also unlike Bombal’s or Rulfo’s works, there is no third person narrator to lend stability to the work or assist the reader in understanding Riobaldo’s narrative. The work on the whole functions as an uninterrupted monologue, lacking additional authoritative voices and characters.

Riobaldo differs from Brás Cubas or Casmurro because he does not rely on the structural devices of the novel to organize his thoughts and structure his argument. Whereas Machado’s works are clearly metanarratives, Guimarães Rosa’s narrator obscures all literary structure in a seemingly interminable stream-of-consciousness narrative. The only variations on this structure are the narrator’s comments to “o senhor,” and the occasional “questions” attributed to this unidentified interlocutor that Riobaldo answers throughout the text. These elements lend the work the appearance of a lengthy interview, but the absence of “o senhor’s” voice in the work leaves it a monologue. The experiences of the *sertão* are unfamiliar to the reader as evidenced by the opening line of the text, “Nonada. Tiros que o senhor ouviu foram de briga de homem não” (23). Apparently, Riobaldo’s audience has heard gunshots and has asked if there is a battle occurring nearby.⁶⁹ This gives the text a feeling of *in medias res* and evokes the structure and, quite possibly, expectations of an epic narrative. Nevertheless, the distant relationship between the narrator and reader, the unfamiliar territory of the *sertão*, and the interminable

⁶⁹ Riobaldo’s “audience” is one man. I use the terms interlocutor and reader to refer to him, although neither term completely identifies him, for he does not speak, nor is there a “text” for him to read. Several critics conveniently identify him as the reader of the text, which is what I will do as well.

monologue obfuscate anything familiar within the narrative. The reader's unfamiliarity with the *sertão* resembles man's unfamiliarity with death, and any sortie into the *sertão* is tantamount to a voyage into death. Riobaldo has successfully crossed the *sertão*, but at great personal cost. The purpose of his narrative is to inform the reader of his sacrifice.

The interview-type structure of the narrative gives the reader some opportunity to orient him or herself within the narrative, with the narrator reiterating questions that his interlocutor supposedly has asked (or should have asked) at the appropriate times in the narrative. As is the case with any first-person narrative, the reader must recognize the narrator's limited perspective and his potential for unreliability, and Riobaldo's monologue abounds with his personal biases and ideas. Despite this shortcoming, Riobaldo attempts to be reliable, and his voice echoes that of Brás Cubas or Dom Casmurro, his story wandering, often without concern for chronology and privileging events over order. Riobaldo states, "Ai, arre, mas: que esta minha boca não tem ordem nenhuma. Estou contando fora, coisas divagadas" (37) and "Ah, eu estou vivido, repassado. Eu me lembro das coisas, antes delas acontecerem..." (47). Riobaldo acknowledges his errant narrative and, by doing so, calls attention to his position of authority within the work, but is careful to downplay any doubt or concern as to the accuracy of his tale. In spite of his scattered recounting of events, he reassures his reader that he knows what he is doing and that he is reliable. Again, we read:

Desculpa me dé o senhor, sei que estou falando demais, dos lados. Resvalo. Assim é que a velhice faz. Também, o que é que vale e o que é que não vale? Tudo. Mire veja: sabe por que é que eu não purgo remorso? Acho que o que não deixa é a minha boa memória. A luzinha dos santos-arrepentidos se acende é no escuro. Mas, eu lembro de tudo. (160)

The fact that he is speaking “dos lados” alerts the reader to the missing middle, like Casmurro’s tale. From such commentary, it is evident that Riobaldo is older and he, like Casmurro, desires to tell the history of his young life. What matters most to him is that his reader accepts his tale as truth and he reassures us that he remembers everything perfectly, regardless of his inability to relate the events in chronological order, which he claims is nothing more than a symptom of old age.

Despite his age and rambling narrative style, Riobaldo repeatedly reminds his reader that everything in his story is significant and what he is telling is vital to our understanding. He states, “Agora: o tudo que eu conto, é porque acho que é sério preciso” (189). Regardless of the positioning or even apparent triviality of a given anecdote, the message he is attempting to convey is important and the reader is expected to receive it as such. Riobaldo strengthens his relationship with his reader by constantly encouraging him as he seeks to assemble the disconnected pieces of the narrative puzzle. Throughout the work, the self-conscious narrator acknowledges his weakness and praises his reader for his wisdom and intelligence. “Falo por palavras tortas. Conto minha vida, que não entendi. O senhor é homem muito ladino, de instruída sensatez. Mas não se avexe, não queira chuva em mês de agosto. Já conto, já venho falar no assunto que o senhor está de mim esperando. E escute” (506). This statement is metafictional because it forces the reader to assume the role of “o senhor.” This is the reader’s entrance into the work, and each instance in which Riobaldo addresses “o senhor” serves as a reminder to the reader of his or her responsibility to follow the events as Riobaldo narrates them. Although Riobaldo claims to admire his reader’s wisdom and intelligence, he is not willing to relinquish his creative authority over the text. He entraps the reader by attributing a desire

for clarification and understanding to “o senhor,” thus refocusing the reader’s attention on the signified, or the true nature of his relationship to Diadorim, while he continues with the signifier, or description of events surrounding the relationship. This position is reminiscent of Brás Cubas, who accuses his reader of impatience and a desire to rush to the end. This “flow,” as Brás Cubas calls it, is also important to Grande Sertão: Veredas because Riobaldo’s great narrative secret is carefully preserved until the end of the story, but unless the reader accepts the responsibility of interpreting the text and grappling with the issues presented throughout the work, Riobaldo’s tale is rendered meaningless after the final revelation is made.

Speaking further about his narrative, he states, “Teve grandes ocasiões em que não podia proceder mal, aindas que quisesse. [...] Esta vida é de cabeça-para-baixo, ninguém pode medir suas perdas e colheitas. Mas conto. Conto para mim, conto para o senhor. Ao quando bem não me entender, me espere” (161). Such a statement implies that the narrator expects the reader to be able to follow the development of the plot as he outlines it, but if we are unable to understand his message, we need only wait for him to reveal it. Although the narrative promises clarification, it directs the reader to question the lacunae within the work. Riobaldo reminds his reader of this by stating:

Ah, mas falo falso. O senhor sente? Desmente? Eu desminto. Contar é muito, muito dificultoso. Não pelos anos que se já passaram. Mas pela astúcia que têm certas coisas passadas - de fazer balancé, de se remexerem dos lugares. O que eu falei foi exato? Foi. Mas teria sido? Agora, acho que nem não. (200)

This confession further opens the text to the reader and invites him or her to find the contradictions within Riobaldo’s narrative. By playing with the verb tenses and claiming that what he said was exact, but would not necessarily have been under *different*

circumstances, the narrative opens another entrance to the reader and encourages additional interpretations.

The title of the novel, Grande Sertão: Veredas locates it in the *sertão*, Brazil's hinterland, but it highlights the different paths that traverse the region. On a literal level, Riobaldo's interlocutor, the reader, is presumably unfamiliar with the region, and therefore must accept Riobaldo's authority on the subject. Riobaldo establishes his authority by describing events of recent history and situations involving other people who are unimportant in his personal history; they are current neighbors or other acquaintances from the surrounding region who have no bearing on his current or past life. Riobaldo begins his tale as idle chit-chat, telling a couple of anecdotes and making insignificant observations about them. As long as the subject matter remains trivial, the reader has no reason to doubt the accuracy of what Riobaldo says. As he progresses through the mundane details and descriptions of unnamed and insignificant characters, he gradually turns his narrative to weightier matters, wrapped up in his own experiences. On a deeper metaphorical level, the *sertão* represents human existence, and the *veredas* represent the different roles available in society.

Riobaldo, the narrator/protagonist, is a complex and conflicted character who, as a native son of the *sertão*, has ties to all of the social groups of the region.

Notwithstanding, he lacks a complete identity of his own. In his search to understand his own existence and place in the human family, Riobaldo attempts to portray the reality of the world in his narrative. A large part of Riobaldo's tale recounts the life he led as a *jagunço*, a dangerous occupation in which death is extremely common. Grande Sertão echoes Euclides da Cunha's Os Sertões (1901), a discourse in which da Cunha catalogues

the land and life of the *sertão* and then chronicles the war of Canudos.⁷⁰ Guimarães Rosa's Grande Sertão, although fiction, presumably takes place around the same time as the battle of Canudos because the feeling of distrust and isolation chronicled in da Cunha's account is evident in the psychology of Guimarães Rosa's characters. Riobaldo is a native of the *sertão* and therefore possesses the same distrust for outsiders. His education and status in life at the time in which he narrates allows him to be more open to "o senhor," but his narrative reveals that he was not always this way.

Riobaldo's narrative echoes that of Brás Cubas or Juan Preciado in that as the narrator looks back on the events of his life, he recognizes significant events that led him to become the character he is and allowed him the perspective from which he narrates. As in Memórias Póstumas and Páramo, Riobaldo's significant life-changing events are accompanied by the death of a character or characters that were significant to the young man. In Riobaldo's case, death serves two purposes: it establishes his identity as a *jagunço* and a leader among men, and it desensitizes him to the dangers and evils of the world around him. Like Juan Preciado of Pedro Páramo, Riobaldo describes his mother's death as the event that launched him into the second part of his life. "Minha mãe morreu [...]. De desde, até hoje em dia, a lembrança de minha mãe às vezes me exporta. Ela morreu, como a minha vida mudou para uma segunda parte" (127). In keeping with the autobiographical nature of his tale, Riobaldo mentions the significance of his mother's influence on his life, but more importantly, her death leads directly to the second part of his life.

⁷⁰ The battle of Canudos was a battle between the sertanejos and the nascent republican government of Brazil. The leader of the sertanejos was Antônio Conselheiro, a messianic character who condemned the secularism of the new republic.

Orphaned by his mother and without a father, Riobaldo goes to live with his godfather, Selorico Mendez, a wealthy landowner, who provides him with an education and a luxuriant life. While living with his godfather, Riobaldo first encounters the *jagunçagem* and is disgusted by it. Selorico Mendez admires the *jagunços*, but Riobaldo does not. When he flees Selorico Mendez's home, Riobaldo takes up with an army battalion that seeks to eliminate the *jagunço* bands from the *sertão*. Riobaldo witnesses death in his first battle between the military battalion and a band of *jagunços*, and abandons his post immediately. At this point, death is repulsive to him and his fear of death forces him to seek his fortune elsewhere. Riobaldo rapidly passes from social group to social group in the early part of the narrative, glossing over much of his feelings as he steers his tale toward the moment in which he meets Diadorim. What is important about this section is how death pushes him forward and allows the reader to develop an understanding of the young protagonist, the forces at work in his life, and how he becomes the narrating Riobaldo.

Ironically, Riobaldo eventually unites with the *jagunçagem*, where he is exposed to death almost daily. This exposure desensitizes him to such a degree that he is able to find humor in even the most horrific situations. One example of this appears as Riobaldo recounts the weeks they were under siege at an abandoned house in which they must "bury" their dead in a closet. Several of his companions are killed during the siege, as well as their horses and cattle. The scene described in this episode is macabre as a whole, and the narrator gives detailed descriptions of the stench of the decomposing bodies and the repeated forays into the burial room as others of their group succumb to injuries or are killed outright. In spite of this grisly scene, Riobaldo manages to defray the seriousness

of it all with humor by including a stray cat among the inhabitants of the house in his recollection. When the *jagunços* can no longer tolerate the smell, they decide they must seal up the room containing their deceased comrades. They no sooner finish the task and, “a tanto, depois a gente ouviu miados. –Sape! O gato está lá...” –algum gritou” (367). This turn of events forces them to reopen the sealed room and face the gruesome death of their friends once again. When they finally manage to make their escape from the besieged house, someone calls out, “Não é que o gato ficou lá...” (386) Riobaldo describes this person as “risonho” and the others joke about the situation, but Riobaldo recalls the horror of death back in the house. This combination of death and humor illustrate how much a part of everyday life death has become for Riobaldo (and the other *jagunços*) at this point. Riobaldo’s account of the siege lasts for over thirty pages of the text and he faces some of the most difficult challenges of his life during this time. His companions die around him and he is fearful for his own life, but as each day passes, he solidifies his role as a *jagunço*, witnessing death around him as well as administering death to his enemies. He learns to accept the events as they occur, and death becomes nothing more than an inconvenience of the war in which he is participating, another hazard of the *sertão*. By introducing the humor of the cat into an otherwise incomprehensible scene of death and destruction, Riobaldo focuses the narrative away from this particular element of life in the *sertão*. Such anecdotes in the narrative introduce the interlocutor to the reality of death and even desensitize him or her to it as Riobaldo also was.

If we recall the position from which Riobaldo narrates his tale, later in life, after he is retired from the *jagunçagem*, we see that he does not fear death. The opening lines

of the text, in which he calmly informs his audience that the gunshots he heard are not shots from a battle and therefore not to be feared, illustrate his ease with death as a part of life, regardless of whether it occurs naturally or as a result of war. Riobaldo has come to recognize death as just another part of life, but this is only part of Riobaldo's character because he does more than tolerate death around him; he becomes an effective dealer of death. Riobaldo narrates the deaths of others as a result of the violent life they led as *jagunços*, while simultaneously revealing that he became a powerful leader among the men.

In response to the deaths that Riobaldo reveals in the narrative, we can see that he continually resists the assignation of the role of leader among the *jagunços*. While Medeiro Vaz lay dying, he tries to bestow on Riobaldo the responsibility of leading the group. He asks, "Quem vai ficar em meu lugar? Quem capitaneia?" Riobaldo then admits, "eu vi o olhar dele esbarrava em mim, e me escolhia" (95). Medeiro Vaz dies before he can physically point to Riobaldo, but the rest of the men knew he had been selected. Despite their encouragement, he deflects the authority onto Marcelino Pampa, the oldest and most experienced member of the group, who willingly accepts the responsibility. This event foreshadows Riobaldo's future as the *jagunço* leader, but he must witness and experience other deaths before he is prepared to accept the role. Joca Ramiro's assassination is the next life-altering death in Riobaldo's journey. Joca Ramiro was the overall leader of the *jagunços*. His second in command, Hermógenes, betrayed and murdered him. Riobaldo does not witness this event, but the impact it has on the narrator/protagonist is tremendous. Joca Ramiro is Diadorim's father, and Diadorim is the entire reason why Riobaldo is a *jagunço* at all. The relationship between Riobaldo

and Diadorim lies at the heart of the conflict of Riobaldo's narrative. I will further examine this relationship later in this chapter, but once Joca Ramiro is killed, Diadorim exists for the sole purpose of avenging his death. Because of Riobaldo's dedication to Diadorim, Riobaldo recommits himself to the *jagunçagem* and begins to accept more responsibility among the men in his effort to aid his comrade.

There are three other deaths in Riobaldo's tale that establish him as the leader of the *jagunços* and solidify his reputation as the greatest and most successful *jagunço* in the *sertão*. The first is symbolic, but represents the "death" of the passive Riobaldo. He has repeatedly refused to assume leadership over his company, tolerating the atrocities of war in order to remain close to Diadorim. At a place identified (incorrectly) as *Veredas Mortas*, Riobaldo finally decides to act upon his own destiny and attempts a pact with the devil, something that his enemy, Hermógenes, was rumored to have done.⁷¹ At this point in my analysis, the success or failure of the pact with the devil is unimportant, but what is significant is that after this experience, Riobaldo is a changed man, accepting, even seeking out the power that until this point he had previously shunned and fled. The passive Riobaldo has "died" and a new Riobaldo arises the following day, assumes leadership over the *jagunços*, and leads them inexorably toward the end of the war. The second and most important death of the narrative is Diadorim's. Riobaldo's campaign against the *hermógenes* culminates in an epic battle in which Diadorim faces Joca Ramiro's murderer in hand to hand combat while Riobaldo watches, powerless to interfere. Diadorim kills Hermógenes and Riobaldo's band of men eliminate their rivals, but Diadorim also falls in battle. By killing Hermógenes, Diadorim seals Riobaldo's

⁷¹ *Veredas Mortas* can be translated as "dead paths" or "dead ends."

identity as the most fearsome and successful *jagunço* leader in the *sertão*. The news of Riobaldo's success against Hermógenes, where every other leader before him had failed, spreads across the *sertão* and Riobaldo becomes famous and celebrated for this accomplishment. Diadorim's death is the climax of the work, but there is one final death that establishes Riobaldo in his narrating identity; that of Selorico Mendez, whose admiration for Riobaldo's feats as a *jagunço* leads him to bequeath the greatest portion of his estate to his godson upon his death. The irony of Riobaldo's life trajectory, becoming the epitome of the character that he despised as a young man, is evident in the narrative as the narrating Riobaldo questions his identity on a more profound level. Death has shaped Riobaldo's life. It has granted him an identity, status, and wealth, but, paradoxically, has left him incomplete by separating him from Diadorim.

To fully understand the significance of Diadorim's sacrifice for Riobaldo, it is imperative that we understand Diadorim's role in the development of Riobaldo's character and identity. Interestingly, as Diadorim stabilizes Riobaldo and pushes him toward a concrete identity, Diadorim lacks a solid identity. Diadorim appears in Riobaldo's tale under three different identities, and Riobaldo's first experience with Diadorim is narrated without this character even being given a name. This experience seems to stand alone and unsupported by the rest of the narrative, but is significant because it is the most in depth explanation of Riobaldo's youth in the entire narrative. As with all other significant character descriptions of himself, this episode is not focused on Riobaldo, but his companion. Notwithstanding, this episode allows the reader insight into Riobaldo's character by observing his actions and reactions to this new influence. When Riobaldo first meets Diadorim, he is embarrassed about his begging and hides his sack of

alms while he approaches the beautiful youth. He describes his impression of this boy in this manner:

Mas eu olhava esse menino, com um prazer de companhia, como nunca por ninguém eu não tinha sentido. Achava que ele era muito diferente, gostei daquelas finas feições, a voz mesma, muito leve, muito aprazível. Porque ele falava sem mudança, nem intenção, sem sobêjo de esforço, fazia de conversar uma conversinha adulta e antiga. Fui recebendo em mim um desejo de que ele não fosse mais embora, mas ficasse, sobre as horas, e assim como estava sendo, sem parolagem miúda, sem brincadeira—só meu companheiro amigo desconhecido. (119)

Riobaldo has not spoken of any friends from his youth or any social experiences he may have had to this point, but he seems capable of making a perceptive judgment on the refinement and pleasantness of this young boy. The final line, “meu companheiro amigo desconhecido” illustrates Riobaldo’s unwillingness or inability to develop close personal relationships as well as pursue intimate knowledge of another person. This young man remains “desconhecido” throughout Riobaldo’s youth, but his profound influence sticks with the socially disoriented Riobaldo throughout his life.

During this initial encounter, Riobaldo and his companion decide to take a canoe trip along the river, and the narrating Riobaldo makes two significant observations. The first, as they descend into the canoe, the young friend offers Riobaldo his hand to assist him in getting into the canoe. Riobaldo repeats this comment twice, “Ele me deu a mão, para me ajudar a descer o barranco” and “O menino tinha me dado a mão para descer o barranco.” These simple statements reveal a great deal about Riobaldo’s character. First, Riobaldo is a follower. He has revealed his fear of water and inability to swim, yet his intense desire to please this unknown friend overcomes his fear and leads him to risk his life in the attempt. Second, Riobaldo introduces his fascination with the physical beauty of this companion, a fascination that he has with no other character in his narrative. As he

describes the simple act of being helped into the boat, he dwells on the young man's physical characteristics:

Era uma mão bonita, macia e quente, agora eu estava vergonhoso, perturbado. O vacilo da canoa me dava um aumentante receio. Olhei: aqueles esmerados esmertes olhos, botados verdes, de folhudas pestanas, luziam um efeito de calma, que até me repassasse. [...] Bom aquilo não era, tão pouca firmeza. Resolvi ter brio. Só era bom por estar perto do menino. Nem em minha mãe eu não pensava. Eu estava indo a meu esmo. (120)

This young man's influence is strong enough to lead Riobaldo into the unknown, to abandon his own fears and commitment to his mother. The resolution to "ter brio" is the first appearance of strength in the young Riobaldo, something that only this new companion can develop in him.

Throughout the entire narrative, the only physical contact that Riobaldo has with Diadorim is when their hands meet and he dwells on the pleasure that he receives from the contact at this time as well as later in life. Riobaldo repeatedly expresses his love for Diadorim in his writing and admits that at times he acted, whether consciously or not, upon those desires. "Mas minha mão, por si, pegou a mão de Diadorim. [...] Mão assim apartada de tudo, nela um suave de ser era que me pertencia, um calor, a coisa macia somente. [...] Mas aí espiei Diadorim, e ele despertou do que tinha se esquecido, deixado, de sua mão, que ele retirou da minha outra vez, quase num repelão de repugno" (376). The focus on Diadorim's hands establishes the desire Riobaldo feels for him and his repeated attempts to attain physical contact in their adult life.⁷² More importantly, this episode is significant for the revelation it provides of the young Riobaldo's character. His desire to accompany the boy, to please him by being brave and accompany him on this

⁷² This echoes Bombal's focus on the protagonist's body as the site of the narrative.

adventure outweighs not only his love for his mother, but his fear of death as well. Under the influence of this beautiful companion, Riobaldo decides to “ter brio,” and his reward is to witness more of the young man’s character while picnicking on the river. He admires his fearlessness and longs to be like him. However, the adventure ends and Riobaldo returns home with his mother. The singular experience of this afternoon is unlinked to anything else Riobaldo tells of his early life and appears to not alter his ambition in any way, but once again, if considered through the perspective of death, it is evident that Diadorim’s influence over Riobaldo outweighs any other emotion he may have, including fear of dying.

Riobaldo next encounters Diadorim while fleeing from Zé Bebelo’s company of soldiers, but once again, Diadorim is disguised under a different name. Riobaldo finds himself in a life-threatening position, having abandoned the military and being caught by the *jagunços*. The natural distrust that exists among the *sertanejos* is sufficient that they could kill him. At the moment of greatest danger, a young man identified as Reinaldo enters the room and Riobaldo’s life changes forever. Riobaldo immediately recognizes Reinaldo as the same young man from the afternoon on the São Francisco River several years before, and apparently Reinaldo also remembers the encounter. Riobaldo opts to join the group, vouched for by Reinaldo, who at this point is a prominent figure among the *jagunços*. From this point on, Riobaldo is content to follow Reinaldo, regardless of the physical danger in which he may find himself. This decision follows the pattern established in the singular afternoon on the São Francisco River, and Riobaldo picks up as if his relationship with Reinaldo were never interrupted. The union of these two characters is only strengthened on the occasions in which Riobaldo tries to flee from the

jagunço life because of discontent, fear or restlessness, but each time his desire for “Reinaldo’s” companionship brings him back, or Diadorim physically pursues him and brings him back.

As their friendship grows, Diadorim reveals yet another identity to Riobaldo. We read, “Riobaldo, pois tem um particular que eu careço de contar a você, e que esconder mais não posso...Escuta: eu não me chamo *Reinaldo*, de verdade. [...] Pois então: o meu nome, verdadeiro, é *Diadorim*” (171). With this new revelation, Diadorim and Riobaldo recall the afternoon of their first meeting on the São Francisco River, and at this point, three identities become one. Riobaldo’s narrative demonstrates that as he becomes a *jagunço* and solidifies his identity, Diadorim’s identity becomes vaguer because each new revelation simultaneously clarifies and discredits the reader’s understanding of who Diadorim truly is. The final revelation of Diadorim’s identity occurs concomitantly with the sacrifice that solidifies Riobaldo’s identity.

After Diadorim is killed in battle with Hermógenes, the body is taken to Hermógenes’s wife for dressing for burial. Hermógenes’s wife attempts to close everyone out of the room in which she will dress the body, but Riobaldo refuses to leave, insisting that as his closest companion, Diadorim would have wanted him there. After preparing the body, she finally says, “a Deus dada” and “pobrezinha” referring to Diadorim. Only upon hearing this term and phrase does Riobaldo finally comprehend the true identity of his dearest friend. Diadorim is a woman. At this moment of greatest revelation, Riobaldo blandly states, “Que Diadorim era o corpo de uma mulher, moça perfeita.” Riobaldo hears the words of Hermógenes’s wife and sees the uncovered body of the fiercest *jagunço* he has ever known and understands the most significant conflict of his life. The

object of his love and desire was the “perfect woman.” This revelation, although significant to the story, is not entirely unexpected. Riobaldo explains, “Eu conheci! Como em todo o tempo antes eu não contei ao senhor — e mercê peço: — mas para o senhor divulgar comigo, a par, justo o travo de tanto segredo, sabendo no átimo em que eu também só soube” (615). All of the attempts to get closer to him, to love him both platonically and physically rush upon Riobaldo once again and he claims, “Eu conheci!” this simple phrase strikes initially as a full awakening into something he had suspected throughout his life with Diadorim, but always remained in doubt of.

Upon revealing the truth of Diadorim’s identity to the reader, Riobaldo candidly confesses that he withheld the knowledge of Diadorim’s gender from the reader so as to require him/her to experience the same confusion and frustration that he himself did. If we consider the work as less of an autobiography of the events (deaths) that shape Riobaldo’s identity and more of a memoir, which Virginia Woolf defines as, “not what happens, but the person to whom it happens” (Calkins, 21), Riobaldo’s relationship with Diadorim acquires a more human and tragic tone.⁷³ The relationship between Riobaldo and Diadorim provides the conflict that perpetuates the narrative. Diadorim is the single most important person in Riobaldo’s life, and without her, Riobaldo’s existence is meaningless.

From the first mention of Diadorim in the narrative, it is apparent that Riobaldo has a strong physical desire to be near Diadorim. Their relationship seems to be more than mere friendship, but is frustrated by a desire that is socially unacceptable.

⁷³ In identifying the difference between autobiography and memoir, William Zinsser states, “Unlike autobiography, which moves in a dutiful line from birth to fame, omitting nothing significant, the writer of a memoir takes us back to a corner of his or her life that was unusually vivid or intense” (21).

Riobaldo's desire to possess Diadorim places him in conflict with the masculine identity he must have in his world and leaves him unfulfilled and torn. The narrative is carefully constructed to present these desires to the reader in both veiled and open declarations, while Riobaldo constantly maintains his masculinity and innocence in spite of his narrative confessions. This forces the dilemma upon the reader while Riobaldo seemingly refuses to take any responsibility for or explain his actions or state of mind. Riobaldo does not equivocate about his feelings, romantic or otherwise. He repeatedly denies his desires, aware of the social and gender restrictions that exist against homosexual relationships, but he continues to press the issue upon the reader. For Riobaldo, Diadorim is unattainable primarily because the love that he feels is socially unacceptable. He states:

Ponho minha fiança: homem muito homem que fui, e homem por mulheres! –nunca tive inclinação pra aos vícios desencontrados. Repilo o que, o sem preceito. [...] Mas eu gostava de [Diadorim,] dia mais dia, mais gostava. [...] Era ele estar perto de mim, e nada me faltava. Era ele fechar a cara e estar tristonho, e eu perdia meu sossego. Era ele estar por longe, e eu só nele pensava. E eu mesmo não entendia então o que aquilo era? Sei que sim. Mas não. E eu mesmo entender não queria. Acho que. Aquela meiguice, desigual que ele sabia esconder o mais de sempre. E em mim a vontade de chegar todo próximo, quase uma ânsia de sentir o cheiro do corpo dele, dos braços, que às vezes adivinhei insensatamente – tentação dessa eu esparecia, aí rijo comigo renegava. Muitos momentos. (162-63)

From declarations like this one, it appears that Riobaldo would have the reader believe that the love he feels for Diadorim is improper. He goes even further as he reaches the point of declaring, “Nego que gosto de você, no mal. Gosto, mas só como amigo!” (307). Riobaldo's struggle with the unnatural desire he feels for another “man” reflect the strict social code of the *jagunços* as well as the other elements of the society to which he belongs.

Because of the nature of their relationship, Diadorim's death is more significant to the work than the deaths of other characters in the text. Riobaldo knows something about his relationship with Diadorim that he wants to reveal to his interlocutor, but struggles to reveal his secret at exactly the right moment. If we recall the novel's narrative structure, we know that Riobaldo possesses the full knowledge of the beginning and end of the tale he tells. He is the expert on life in the *sertão*, and the autobiographical nature of his story places him in a position to recount the most significant events of his life and how they influenced him. The reader cannot question Riobaldo's authority on the *sertão* or the events that occurred in his early life, but it becomes rapidly apparent that Riobaldo struggles to both explain and conceal attitudes that he cannot control. When Diadorim dies, the socially unacceptable relationship should no longer be an issue and therefore Riobaldo's burden should die as well, but this is not the case. Riobaldo painstakingly recounts his conflict in the narrative, reliving and agonizing over the physical desires he feels and the social restriction against realizing those desires. In keeping with the epic style of narrative, Diadorim's death acts as a *deus ex machina*, conveniently providing an escape for the conflicted narrator while preserving his social (and sexual) integrity by resolving the gender issue on the page. However, by keeping Riobaldo's secret until the end of the work, rather than resolve the conflict, the revelation highlights the gender confusion and homoerotic desire present throughout the narrative and requires the reader to reconcile the feelings and confusion that Riobaldo bemoaned throughout the work. Paulo Hecker Filho has determined the relationship between Riobaldo and Diadorim to be the most important element of the novel because of its homosexual undertones. Their relationship is the most important element of the narrative, but not because of the taboo

subject of homosexuality. It behooves the reader to discern the true nature of the relationship between Riobaldo and Diadorim, because the relationship between the narrator and the reader bears strong resemblance to the narrated relationship and the failure of this one will provide clues to how the other might succeed. This way, the fictional account of the relationship between Riobaldo and Diadorim becomes a metaphor for the relationship between the reader and the text.

Riobaldo's relationship with Diadorim becomes the narrative's representation of the delicate balance between good and evil, and therefore God and the devil. Riobaldo and Diadorim together form the male/female dichotomy, but by concealing Diadorim's gender, the narrative challenges the most simple and basic unit of society. With this dichotomy cast into doubt, others also begin to lose their clarity and definition. The nature of Riobaldo's *sertão* initially appears to uphold the distinct dichotomies of male and female gender roles, life and death, good and evil, and God and the devil, but as the narrative progresses and Riobaldo's "unnatural" desire for Diadorim becomes apparent, the narrative disrupts the traditional male/female dichotomy, and calls into question the others as well. As this happens, the narrative language reveals itself to be inadequate to describe the experiences that Riobaldo attempts to portray, and when original language fails the narrator, Riobaldo incorporates familiar maxims in his discourse to express traditional thought.

Thomas Braga has catalogued and separated the maxims within the work into four main thematic categories: (1) the *sertão* and the *jagunço*, (2) life and death, (3) God and the devil, and (4) love and friendship (76). The first and fourth categories are closely related, symbiotic relationships while the second and third categories are binary

opposites. Braga orders the themes by the frequency in which they appear in the work, and because the first category is the largest, he focuses the majority of his analysis on the most concrete of the themes (*sertão* and *jagunço*) and marginalizes the most abstract (love and friendship.) In doing this, Braga privileges those elements that are easier to comprehend and avoids a close analysis of the latter, more ethereal subjects.

Nevertheless, the way in which the narrative unfolds is exactly the opposite. Because Riobaldo understands the physical nature of the *sertão* and the *jagunço*, but not love and friendship or God and the devil, he emphasizes his interest in the latter through protracted discourse and hypothesis rather than reduce their significance through common maxims. It is the uncertainty of the relationship between God and the devil and love and friendship that drives Riobaldo's increasingly complex monologue. If previously defined gender roles can be confused, what does that mean for less familiar but equally important elements of the human experience?

Above all is the question of God and the devil or good and evil, which plays directly to Riobaldo's questions of truth and identity. When maxims are insufficient, Riobaldo attempts to illustrate his philosophy with the more familiar elements of the *sertão*. For example, Riobaldo repeatedly speaks of manioc, which can be either tame or wild.⁷⁴ Domestic manioc is a valuable food substance: wild manioc is poisonous. Both are identical and can even change from one to the other without reason or detection. The life/death implications of such a dual nature guide the entire discussion of the narrative, for man/woman, good/evil, god/devil, and life/death are all dichotomies that are blurred in the narrative. Riobaldo uses the manioc to represent himself because he is uncertain of

⁷⁴ The Portuguese term is "mandioca."

his status in the balance between good and evil. It is evident in the narrative that he desires to be beneficial, like the tame manioc, but he cannot escape the memory of his evil acts, proof that he once was (and fears he continues to be) like the wild manioc.

The greatest cause for Riobaldo's concern is a direct result of Diadorim's death, for although it resolved the gender question and legitimized Riobaldo's feelings for Diadorim, it left him questioning the status of his soul, for he traces his success as a *jagunço* to the supposed pact that he made with the devil at *Veredas Mortas*. If he indeed made this pact, he fears his soul is in mortal peril. At each point in the narrative in which Riobaldo recounts an act of charity or kindness, a simple expression of faith, or anything else that would be contrary to the will of the devil, he seems to take a sense of reassurance that he did not succeed in selling his soul. However, he continually reaffirms his belief in the existence of the devil and, by extension, questions the status of his soul. The strongest argument he has for the existence of the supposed pact is his unexpected rise to power among the *jagunços*, his unprecedented success in traversing the *sertão*, and his uncharacteristically violent nature after the night of his "pact." His present, peaceful life is dedicated to a great deal of piety, with much of his hope for salvation in an afterlife hung on the piousness of his wife and other women who pray for him daily, but this faith is lacking, which becomes evident as he addresses his reader and reconstructs his past.

It behooves us now to look at the pact Riobaldo fears he has made and why it is significant to the narrative. As he describes the event, he infuses the experience with doubt because the anticipated physical appearance of the devil does not occur. He states, "Voz minha se estragasse, em mim tudo era cordas e cobras. E foi aí. Foi. Ele não existe, e não apareceu nem respondeu—que é um falso imaginado" (438). Yet after this

experience, Riobaldo is a changed man, accepting, even seeking out the power that until this point he has previously shunned and fled. Riobaldo is successful in his unprecedented march across the *sertão* in pursuit of “*os hermógenes*” and ultimately wins the battle. Still, Riobaldo cannot seem to convince himself that the pact actually happened. He states, “Ah, pacto não houve. Pacto? [...] O pacto de um morrer em vez do outro—e o de um viver em vez do outro, então?! Arrengo” (328). Riobaldo begins to question the pact itself. What was it that led him to make a pact with the devil, and what was the payoff? As he recalls the moment in which he sought to make the pact, Riobaldo states:

Eu queria ser mais do que eu. Ah, eu queria, eu podia. Carecia. "Deus ou o demo?" - sofri um velho pensar. Mas, como era que eu queria, de que jeito, que? Feito o arfo de meu ar, feito tudo: que eu então havia de achar melhor morrer duma vez, caso que aquilo agora para mim não fosse constituído. E em troca eu cedia às arras, tudo meu, tudo o mais - alma e palma, e desalma... Deus e o Demo! -Acabar com o Hermógenes! Reduzir aquele homem!.. "-; e isso figurei mais por precisar de firmar o espírito em formalidade de alguma razão. (437)

The pact that Riobaldo describes here echoes the Faustian pact of trading his soul for mortal success, but earlier rumination about the pact belies this intention. By considering the idea of “um morrer em vez do outro,” Riobaldo is talking about vicarious sacrifice, reminiscent of the Christian faith that he claims to follow at the beginning of his narrative. At this point in the story, he has not revealed to the reader that Diadorim was killed in the final battle against Hermógenes, but he unequivocally situates Diadorim in the equation by referring to one person dying for another. Riobaldo’s desire to do away with Hermógenes was fulfilled, so the second part of his pact would seem to be fulfilled, but rather than kill him himself, he is overcome by catalepsy and watches helplessly as Hermógenes and Diadorim kill each other. The last part of the comment, “um viver em

vez do outro,” also refers to Riobaldo himself. With Hermógenes and Diadorim dead, the only person of significance in the equation is Riobaldo. Diadorim thus dies for him and he lives on with the burden of Diadorim’s sacrifice.

Like Casmurro, Riobaldo feels guilty for Diadorim’s death and he must enlist his reader to assist him in expiating the guilt he feels for his actions. In spite of his supposed pact with the devil, Riobaldo doesn’t worry about his fate until he witnesses Diadorim’s death. As he lay paralyzed and helpless, he watches Hermógenes and Diadorim slay each other. He laments that as the leader, he should be in the middle of the battle, protecting his men, but at the same time, it is evident that his concern is primarily for Diadorim. “O senhor soubesse...Diadorim—eu queria ver—segurar com os olhos. [...] Como, de repente, não vi mais Diadorim! No céu, um pano de nuvens...Diadorim! [...] De mais longe, agora davam uns tiros, esses tiros vinham de profundas profundezas. Trespassei” (611). The “tiros” he heard are the gunshots of the other *jagunços* engaged in battle on the same street, yet he perceives them as coming from “mais longe” and as if they were fading into the distance, becoming as unimportant to him as the initial gunshots that open the narrative, to which he responds, “Nonada.” With his focus on Diadorim, we can see that Riobaldo considers this death to be his greatest loss, if not punishment for selling his soul to the devil. The remorse he feels for losing his dearest companion is only compounded by the doubt he feels concerning the status of his soul.

Diadorim’s death is the result of a combination of factors that all stem out of her decision to disguise her identity. Diadorim’s identity is considerably more complex than Riobaldo’s, not only because she hides her gender throughout the novel, but because she has rejected the traditional role that society would normally place upon her as a woman in

the *sertão*. Diadorim enjoys a unique place in the narrative because her identity is independent of the society around her in spite of her gender. Paul Dixon's Reversible Readings considers Diadorim's carefully guarded identity as a literary device, because the plausibility of a beautiful woman disguising her gender for so long amid such intimate company in real life is nonexistent. It is done successfully with the written language because language can be manipulated to only allow the reader to "see" what the narrator wants him or her to see. Guimarães Rosa's insistence upon returning to the gender conflict that Riobaldo struggles with leads the reader to question the image produced by the words on the page. We are first introduced to Diadorim on the São Francisco River. As I have mentioned previously, she remains nameless throughout this episode, but her character is immediately established as fearless and worthy of admiration. When a young mulatto man surprises the two during their interlude on the river, Diadorim dispatches the intruder with a calm that surprises Riobaldo. He tells, "Você, meu nego? Está certo, chega aqui... 'A fala, o jeito dele, *imitavam de mulher*. Então era aquilo?" The mulatto draws near to Diadorim, sits down beside him and, "Mulato pulou para trás, ô de um grito, gemido urro. Varou o mato, em fuga [...] O menino abanava a faquinha nua na mão, e nem se ria. Tinha embebido ferro na côxa do mulato, a ponta rasgando fundo" (124; italics mine). Diadorim calmly stabs the intruder in the thigh, and as Riobaldo worries that the mulatto will run off and gather friends to help him exact revenge, Diadorim returns to the conversation as if nothing unusual had happened. Riobaldo then states, "Não, medo do mulato, nem de ninguém, ele não conhecia" (125). It is important to note that Riobaldo recognizes the feminine sensuality in Diadorim's voice and demeanor, and highlights it in his account of the event, but as

quickly as it appears, the violent act of stabbing the mulatto in the thigh obscures the revelation by focusing on Diadorim's action with the knife rather than words or physical attributes. Also during this conversation, Riobaldo learns that Diadorim lives with an uncle, not a mother or father.⁷⁵ Regardless of the ambiguous familial relationship between Diadorim and Joca Ramiro, it is the exact opposite of the family that Riobaldo belongs to, with a mother and no father. Whereas Riobaldo relied on the influence of a strong woman in his life, Diadorim only knows the companionship of strong paternal figures.

Riobaldo's and Diadorim's families were incomplete, and each of them adopts character traits in their adult life that are closer to the traditional characteristics of the gendered parent who raised them. As the most basic element of society, the portrayal of the family in the work is indicative of the overall condition of society. The fact that Diadorim follows her father into the *jagunçagem* and Riobaldo avoids violence inverts the traditional gender-specific roles in any society. Life in the *sertão* may provide limited options to the inhabitants of the region, but stability is most easily maintained when those inhabitants uphold the established social norms. Diadorim's ferocity as a *jagunço* is well known to the other men in the group, and although her physical appearance provokes questions from some of her comrades, she is successful in maintaining her chosen identity. Diadorim's false identity as Reinaldo allows her to move freely within the company of the other *jagunços*, but she cannot conceal her true identity completely.

A *jagunço* is to be the epitome of strength and ferocity. They exist for violence and pleasure only, and it is apparent that violence gives them the most pleasure.

⁷⁵ It is later revealed that the man Riobaldo thought was Diadorim's uncle is actually her father, Joca Ramiro, head of the *jagunços*.

Masculine features are a very important part of the *jagunço's* image. This is evidenced by the teasing that some of Hermógenes's men do to "Reinaldo" about his lack of manliness, insulting him over his inability to grow a beard and further insinuating other feminine features. Like the episode with the mulatto on the São Francisco River in which Riobaldo hints at a feminine voice, this episode should increase the reader's doubt as to Reinaldo's gender identity, but Reinaldo silences them by immediately challenging them, knocking Fulorêncio to the ground and pinning him down, knife drawn and ready to kill.

Reinaldo's reputation as a fierce fighter quickly quiets his antagonists once they see him wielding the metaphorically phallic knife. Riobaldo repeats the imagery of the knife in this episode, linking this and his first experience with Diadorim as a youth, thus forcing the gender issue upon the reader once again. This episode looks back to Ana Maria's response to losing Ricardo in Bombal's Shrouded Woman, "Because of those words, I threw myself at you with that blind fury which has caused me to lose every battle in life. I began to beat and abuse you. For violence has always been my argument at critical moments when the injustice of others makes the words choke in my throat" (36). Ana María recognizes that rational communication and violence cannot coexist, and when communication breaks down, violence is her only "argument." Diadorim's decision to assume the identity of Reinaldo forces her into silence, and the only way in which she can maintain her status among the other *jagunços* is through assertion of her violence and fearlessness. Notwithstanding her ferocity, Diadorim's ability to respond to such attacks on her person are inconsistent with her character, for she maintains a level of decorum and respectability throughout her life as a *jagunço* that Riobaldo not only notices, but admires.

Diadorim guards her secret most effectively by maintaining silence. This is not always the case, however, as Riobaldo reveals that Diadorim not only shared some of her secrets with him, but was also a trusted advisor to Medeiro Vaz. Notwithstanding his love for Diadorim, Riobaldo struggles with his dependence on Diadorim as much as he struggles with his “unnatural” desires to possess her. Once again, the social construction of his community requires the man to be the dominant role in the relationship and Riobaldo cannot be dominant in the relationship with Diadorim, regardless of her gender. He always follows her, depending on her and looking to her for approval of his actions. Diadorim is the exact opposite of Riobaldo in the narrative. Diadorim is a strong enough character that she counsels with Medeiro Vaz and convinces him to traverse the *sertão* and launch an unexpected assault on Hermógenes and his band. Her desire to avenge her father’s murder drives her to this decision, but it is most significant that she did not have the authority to make such a decision. When the journey fails, it is Medeiro Vaz who looks the fool, but Riobaldo learns that Diadorim is responsible for the decision to attempt the crossing. Later, when Riobaldo becomes the *jagunço* leader, he successfully completes the journey, an idea he got early on from Diadorim, but claims as his own so as to demonstrate his strength in leadership and power over the *sertão*.

When Riobaldo finally accepts his role as leader of the *jagunços*, his transformation is complete because he has accepted an appropriate gender role in his society. Diadorim, on the other hand, continues to reject her gender role and her power and influence begin to fade. Riobaldo’s apprenticeship under Diadorim is over and in his rise to prominence in the *sertão*, he leaves Diadorim in obscurity. What is most significant, however, is that the union of Riobaldo and Diadorim is absolutely necessary

for them to exact revenge upon Hermógenes and the rest of Joca Ramiro's murderers. Diadorim has groomed Riobaldo to assume leadership of the group by protecting and encouraging him. Her secret friendship with Riobaldo has given him access to the ideas and strategies of warfare that led him to assault "*os hermógenes.*" Riobaldo has depended entirely on Diadorim for his position and success among the *jagunços*, and he has protected her (at least tried to) when necessary. Their opposite natures complete one another and together they are able to bring peace to the *sertão*. Unfortunately for Riobaldo, as long as Hermógenes lived, Diadorim couldn't. The first time Riobaldo allows Diadorim to speak in the narrative, we learn the dilemma that she faces, "Não posso ter alegria nenhuma, nem minha mera vida mesma, enquanto aqueles dois monstruos não forem bem acabados..." Riobaldo reiterates this feeling and adds additional commentary, "Enquanto os dois monstros vivessem, simples Diadorim tanto não vivia. Até que viesse a poder vingar o histórico de seu pai, ele tresvariava" (46). Riobaldo double-speaks here, for as long as Hermógenes survived, Diadorim was Reinaldo, dedicated to avenging Joca Ramiro's death, and while Reinaldo existed, Diadorim did not; she was only a private name and an unobtainable love for Riobaldo.

Once Riobaldo has assumed leadership over the group and begun his assault on Hermógenes, Diadorim attempts to reveal more of her identity, but she is unsuccessful. When we look at the attempts of both Riobaldo and Diadorim to discuss their relationship, we see that they never succeed, in spite of their desire and love for one another. There is an obvious disconnect between the Riobaldo of the story and the narrating Riobaldo, because the older Riobaldo is free with his feelings for Diadorim as

he tells his story, but when he recalls Diadorim's own words, we see just how much their relationship lacks. Riobaldo quotes Diadorim:

“Riobaldo, pois tem um particular que eu careço de contar a você, e que esconder más não posso... Escuta: eu não me chamo Reinaldo, de verdade. Este é nome apelativo, inventado por necessidade minha, carece de você não me perguntar por qué. Tenho meus fados. A vida da gente faz sete voltas - se diz. A vida nem é da gente.” [...] “Pois então: o meu nome, verdadeiro, é Diadorim...Guarda este meu segredo. Sempre, quando sozinhos a gente estiver, é de Diadorim que você deve de me chamar, digo e peço, Riobaldo.” (171-72)

Diadorim's desire to reveal more of her identity begins with her name. The fact that Diadorim reveals her name to Riobaldo, but conceals it from the other *jagunços* is significant, because Guimarães Rosa incorporates names in the novel's debate over changing identity. Riobaldo admits that learning Diadorim's "secret" name drew them closer, but the simple fact of having a different name by which to address his companion does not provide him with any more knowledge of who this person is.

The identities of the major characters in the narrative are closely linked to the names that they bear, but, like their roles in society, their names change to reflect an element of their character. Diadorim disguises her identity first by assuming the public name of Reinaldo. Once she reveals her true name to Riobaldo, he shares this information with his reader and ceases referring to this dearest of friends as Reinaldo in the narrative and calls her Diadorim. Again, we see how the image of Diadorim that the narrative portrayed initially is altered by the words used to describe him/her. Diadorim's identity as Reinaldo remains intact for the *jagunços*, but Riobaldo's narrative decision to invite the reader into the close personal relationship between himself and Diadorim further emphasizes this relationship as the core element of the narrative. Despite this revelation of Diadorim's true name, Riobaldo does not yet reveal her identity as a woman,

maintaining the gender conflict before the reader. Diadorim's true, private name with Riobaldo and her public name of Reinaldo among the remainder of the *jagunços* is only a small part of the significance of names and identity within the novel. After Diadorim's death, Riobaldo seeks her history but only finds her full name on a baptismal certificate, "Maria Deodorina da Fé Bettancourt Marins" (620). The name links her to a family, a place, an identity, but there is no memory of her other than that of Riobaldo, and his memory is incomplete and erroneous.⁷⁶ In this sense, the original name of Diadorim means nothing because she is not remembered by anyone under that name. Even "Diadorim" is meaningless to anyone but Riobaldo and his interlocutor because she is remembered by all of her company as "Reinaldo." After learning Diadorim's name, Riobaldo muses over the importance of a name, "Que é que é um nome? Nome não dá: nome recebe" (172).

Diadorim's name and identity are echoed in Hermógenes's wife, who remains unnamed throughout the work. She is a strong character and Riobaldo is impressed by her ability to bear up her burdens and suffer her captivity without struggle or complaint. Although Hermógenes's wife and Diadorim occupy different roles in the *sertão*, their anonymity unites them in the secret that no other person is able to discern. They are far closer to each other than Riobaldo initially allows them to be in his narrative, but it is Hermógenes's wife who assumes the intimate responsibility of preparing Diadorim's body for burial. Hermógenes's wife is only identified by the man she married, but it is also apparent that she despises him and is not upset in the least with his death. Riobaldo

⁷⁶ The act of returning to a hometown in search of identity is echoed throughout the works in this study. *Pedro Páramo*, and *La amortajada* both rely on the family's ties to the land and community to establish identity. In contrast, *Dom Casmurro* erases his mother's identity by marking her grave only with the words, "uma santa." Diadorim's identity is found after her death, but relegated to the memory written on the page.

allows her to speak, albeit briefly as he considers the outcome of the final battle between his men and “*os hermógenes*.” “Aquela Mulher ia sofrer? Mas ela disse que não, sacudindo só de leve a cabeça, com respeito de seriedade. –Eu tinha ódio dele... –ela disse; me estremecendo” (613). The only distinction that Riobaldo gives this long-suffering woman is to refer to her as “Mulher” with a capital “M.” Riobaldo, whether intentionally or not, perpetuates the silencing and anonymity of this woman by not learning her true name; nevertheless, we are led to understand that even if we were told her name, it would mean nothing more than the name of Diadorim at the end of the tale.

Of the other characters, there are important names that Riobaldo and Zé Bebelo adopt to reflect their position in society. Riobaldo becomes Tatarana and Urutú Branco to symbolize his skill in marksmanship and fierce leadership. Zé Bebelo adopts the names of former *jagunço* leaders when he assumes the role of leader, calling himself “Zé Bebelo Vaz Ramiro” to win the allegiance of the men. Riobaldo unconsciously recognizes the importance of names and questions Zé Bebelo on his dedication to the *jagunços* when the latter writes a letter to the military informing them of the whereabouts of both of the *jagunço* factions and signs using his military name and title. Zé Bebelo carefully diffuses the tension between himself and Riobaldo by explaining the force his original name has among the government and military leaders. When Zé Bebelo took over control of the *jagunços*, he changed his name to reflect the strongest leaders before him. In this sense, a name is only significant for the meaning it carries among the community or society to which one belongs. Here is the first time in which Riobaldo begins to illustrate the importance of language and the way in which it influences communication and perception within a society.

The importance of the collective identity of the group is also established through the use of names in the narrative. Not only do the individual characters change their personal monikers to portray characteristics desirable to them, but entire groups adopt the names of their leaders to show allegiance and identify themselves as part of a community. The most apparent example of this in the text is the use of the name “*os hermógenes*” to represent Hermógenes’s band of men. Beyond this, the regional identity of “*sertanejos*” becomes significant for the people of the narrative because regardless of their social or political position, they are united in the common struggle against the *sertão* and its harsh environment. Ultimately, like the difference between *jagunço* and soldier, Riobaldo’s narrative shows that beyond “*sertanejos*,” any additional distinction is merely lexical.

Any attempt by Diadorim to tell Riobaldo who she is by telling him her name is unsuccessful, but where names fail, descriptions may succeed. During the intimate moments that Riobaldo and Diadorim share, there are times in which Diadorim seems ready to divulge her secret to Riobaldo but is unable to. As they approach the location of the final battle, Riobaldo recalls, “‘Riobaldo, o cumprir de nossa vingança vem perto... Daí, quando tudo estiver repago e refeito, um segredo, uma coisa, vou contar a você...’ Ele disse, com o amor no fáto das palavras. Eu ouvi. Ouvi, mas mentido. Eu estava longe de mim e dele. Do que Diadorim mais me disse, desentendi metade” (126). At this point, although Diadorim seems poised to reveal her identity as a woman, Riobaldo tells us that he was incapable of comprehending her. As the narrator of his story, Riobaldo presents these moments to illustrate how the inability to communicate leads to death, as evidenced by Diadorim’s sacrifice, but also that death is a metaphor for the inability of language to communicate. In this sense, as long as we are trapped in the attempt to describe

something, like the *sertão*, we will never fully capture the truth of its substance or existence. Riobaldo portrays this in the multiple attempts at explaining his feelings for Diadorim both to her and to his reader. Riobaldo's narrative depends entirely on his ability to tell the story and the reader's ability to decipher the language he uses. As long as Riobaldo is incapable of expressing himself to Diadorim and Diadorim is unable or unwilling to reveal her true identity to Riobaldo, the relationship is doomed to failure, which it does with Diadorim's death.

As the male/female dichotomy breaks down because of the gender confusion surrounding Diadorim, Guimarães Rosa upholds the established social order by introducing Otacília as the perfect woman and Riobaldo's ultimate choice for his bride. Otacília acts as a foil to Diadorim, exemplifying the traditional role of woman. Although Riobaldo's relationship with Otacília is not developed in the narrative, it is apparent that he has assumed a patriarchal role of protector over her and their traditional marriage perpetuates this social construct. Riobaldo establishes this organization as what initially appears as a sideline to the rising action of his tale about Diadorim. As he and his men close in on "*os hermógenes*," he hears the rumor that Otacília and her father have traveled to meet him. Riobaldo recognizes the imminent danger that such a visit would place her in and desires immediately to rescue her. He sends two of his best men to protect her, stating, "eles tinham de encontrar a minha Otacília, a ela render boa proteção" (587). At this point, he has made his decision to love and accept Otacília as his wife, thereby sublimating his desire for Diadorim. This decision shows the power of established social order and the patriarchal structure of the *sertão*, for despite all of Riobaldo's desires, he ultimately chooses Otacília over Diadorim.

As with the other texts I have examined in this project, society is one of the strongest forces within the work to establish character identity and dictate behavior. Riobaldo's decision to marry Otacília is a direct result of his desire to uphold the established social norms. His success in his life is measured primarily by the way in which he fulfills the roles of *jagunço*, leader, and husband. The narrating Riobaldo is at the pinnacle of his society, but Diadorim was destroyed because she did not conform to social norms. The most shocking revelation of the text occurs when the reader (together with the narrator) learns the true identity of the central character. Because Diadorim's identity was concealed throughout her life, it is necessary to explore why she chose to conceal her identity and try to understand her unsuccessful attempts to reveal it to Riobaldo throughout their friendship. Diadorim is the most complex of all the characters of the work, because it is she who does not fit the social roles dictated for her in the *sertão*. I will look closely at those roles and Diadorim's rejection of them a little later, but it is now necessary to see how society appears in the novel and its influence on gender roles and the individual identities of the core characters of the narrative. In addition to this, I will examine the way language can be manipulated to strengthen, diminish, or alter identity depending on the speaker's desire.

The inhabitants of the *sertão* are made up of two fundamental groups; the wealthy landowners and the peasants who work for them. The landowners, like Riobaldo's godfather Selorico Mendes, have a certain responsibility to support the peasants and laborers.⁷⁷ The *fazendeiros* provide opportunities of employment to the peasants as well

⁷⁷ This is a generalization of roles that in reality are not always assumed. The *fazendeiros* are generally not concerned about their laborers, but depend on them for the maintenance of their wealth. The laborers know that their best means of survival is to find steady employment on a *fazenda*.

as pay tribute/taxes to the *jagunço* gangs for their “protection.”⁷⁸ In a society with little opportunity for social or economic advancement, the peasants can choose between two other professions, either soldier or *jagunço*. The man who chooses to be one or the other no longer works the land for support, but receives wages through taxes on the landowners. Zé Bebelo is an example of how closely the profession of soldier is to that of *jagunço*. He begins as a soldier, dedicated to the eradication of *jagunço* gangs in the *sertão*, but eventually becomes the leader of the very group of bandits he hunted. Riobaldo also does this, only less expertly. The main difference between the soldier and the *jagunço* warrior is primarily education. Both Zé Bebelo and Riobaldo are educated and therefore presented as contributing members of society. Their presence among the people of the *sertão* is evidentiary of the republic’s desire for order and progress. However, the fact that both men abandon their government function and become outlaws demonstrates the flaw in such a desire. Riobaldo makes little distinction between soldiers and *jagunços* on the *sertão* because they are essentially the same thing, nomadic men with guns. Riobaldo’s success among the landowners is summed up in the closing pages of his narrative as Seô Ornelas and his family convince him that he “tivesse vindo, corajoso, para derrubar o Hermógenes e limpar [os] Gerais da jagunçagem” (618). Zé Bebelo was an outsider and both as *jagunço* and soldier was unable to eradicate the *jagunços* from the Gerais. Riobaldo on the other hand, was a native of the area and was successful in his campaign. For all of his experience, education, and so forth, Riobaldo is foremost a *sertanejo* and therefore upholds the identity that such a term implies, regardless of the restrictions it imposes.

⁷⁸ This taxation is really nothing more than extortion, for the same bandits who protect the farm are the bandits who raid and plunder the farm.

If we look at the way men and women interact throughout Riobaldo's narrative we can see that Diadorim's death also serves to challenge the customary practice of marriage and family in a manner similar to what Bombal's Shrouded Woman does. In spite of Diadorim's rejection of the traditional role of a woman, Riobaldo and the other men and women in the narrative adhere strictly to the gender code, regardless of desires to do otherwise. Riobaldo is the prime example of a man striving to live up to the gender expectations placed upon him. Although he has no father figure in his life, he attempts to achieve manhood by imitating the successful men he encounters. Zé Bebelo, Medeiro Vaz, and Joca Ramiro are all successful leaders of men. Hermógenes, although a villain, is also a solid example of masculinity and leadership. The characteristics that Riobaldo describes in these men are physical strength, coarse and violent attitudes, ferocity and fearlessness as well as physical appearance. There are varying degrees of roughness described in all of these men, with Joca Ramiro, Medeiro Vaz and Zé Bebelo seemingly flawless in their physical aspect. Riobaldo says little about these men's appearance, but as he compares them with the brutality of the lower-level *jagunços*, these take on animalistic appearances, dehumanizing themselves as they seek to become their vision of the epitome of manhood. In contrast, Selorico Mendes, the wealthy *fazendeiro*, is not regarded highly by Riobaldo and therefore receives little attention and less praise for his stature within society. The landowners, including Selorico Mendes are all grouped into one entity represented by Seô Habão, who initially offers his support to the *jagunços* but would rather enslave them by having them work his land for their support.

The central question concerning Diadorim is not one of gender, for her true gender is revealed at the end of the work, thus eliminating the conflict that Riobaldo

struggles with. However, it does not answer the question as to why Diadorim chose to assume the identity of Reinaldo and fight as a *jagunço*. Her reason for continuing in the *jagunçagem* after Joca Ramiro's death is to avenge his murder, but there is no answer for why she originally chose to follow her father's profession. In fact, this is a question that Riobaldo never considers in his own narrative, but it should be one that the reader must at least acknowledge. If there is not enough background provided about Diadorim's life to allow the reader to understand this decision, then it can only be done through the presence of the other women in the story.

In general, there are two types of women in a patriarchal society: the wife and the prostitute. Representing the prostitutes, Nhorinhá is a lovely girl, very capable of providing physical pleasures to the men who happen upon her community. Riobaldo, as narrator of his own story seems to harbor a sense of ownership over the young prostitute even though it is apparent that he is not her first, nor her last, lover. Her mother, Ana Duzuza is ugly and diseased, evidently a product of the same lifestyle that Nhorinhá is currently living in. When talk turns to killing Ana Duzuza and Nhorinhá, Riobaldo fears for the safety of the young girl, but feels nothing for the old woman. Once the usefulness of her physical beauty is spent, the prostitute becomes nothing more than an obstacle to be ignored or destroyed.

The more accepted role for women in the *sertão* is that of wife, and Guimarães Rosa presents two important characters who fulfill this role appropriately, Otacília and Hermógenes's wife. Riobaldo regards Hermógenes's wife highly despite of her lack of physical beauty. Riobaldo treats her well while he holds her hostage and respects her dignity. She obtains the title of "Mulher" rather than receive a name, but this act gives her

more respectability within the narrative. Otacília is the woman who Riobaldo has chosen to be his wife. When his gifts to Diadorim are rejected, (Diadorim refuses to accept the topaz, pleading for Riobaldo to hold it until after the battle is over and she can supposedly reveal her true identity to him,) he sends it to Otacília and decides that she is the woman he will marry. Riobaldo's desire to comply with the social expectation placed upon him leads him to choose his "damsel" and in true quixotic fashion, dedicate his services to her honor. Otacília's virtue is unquestionable and her beauty is also apparent in his narrative. She is deemed to make him a fine wife and her piousness and other good features provide Riobaldo with the ideal spouse. This perfect woman is only overshadowed by Diadorim, whom Riobaldo mourns after her death as if he had lost his wife.

Diadorim's own words reveal that she longs for the traditional role as wife to Riobaldo, perhaps even mother, but she continually resists the temptation to reveal her secret. Despite the narrator's insistence that Diadorim is always "ele," by the final battle, it seems as if even the entire *jagunço* company "knew" Diadorim truly was "ela." After her death, when Riobaldo tells all of his men that "Reinaldo" was a woman, they mourn her in a way that is completely different than how they bury their other dead companions. For a stark contrast, we need only look at the others who fell in the final battle between the two groups of *jagunços*. The only tears shed were for Diadorim, all other losses were counted as normal. At this point in the narrative, the reader should begin to see just how unreliable language is altogether. The words on the page do not accurately portray human nature. This is not a flaw in the narrative, but I contend that it is a conscious decision

taken by Guimarães Rosa to frustrate the complacent reader and force him or her to reconcile what the eyes read and the mind is willing to believe.

Because Diadorim's gender is concealed throughout the work (as it supposedly was concealed from Riobaldo throughout her life,) we can extrapolate answers as to why she would disguise her identity by returning to the patriarchal structure of the society of the *sertão*. The only person who knows Diadorim's gender is Hermógenes's wife. It is this woman who becomes Diadorim's closest confidant because she is able to discern her true identity and understand her plight. Riobaldo cannot do this and it is apparent that even her father, Joca Ramiro, was incapable of understanding her needs and complexities because the two remain apart from each other throughout their adult lives. When Riobaldo finally meets Joca Ramiro and learns of Diadorim's parentage, he sees her father's pride as he examines her visage, yet he cannot comprehend more than this. Her beauty almost betrays her to Riobaldo and her love for Riobaldo is immediately recognized by Joca Ramiro, yet the social structure of the *jagunço* community forces them all to remain silent about their perceptions concerning the others. Diadorim does not have a maternal example in her life and therefore has nothing to draw her to that lifestyle. Hermógenes's wife is the closest thing to a mother that Diadorim has, and she is the embodiment of what Diadorim would become if she were to adopt her socially mandated role as woman. Although she is not beautiful, Hermógenes's wife is patient, strong and long-suffering. She is simple and plain, but she understands her role in the society. She despises her husband for who he is and what he represents, and it would be easy to understand that she despises Riobaldo and the other men of the group for the same reasons. Her strength and composure throughout her captivity impress Riobaldo, and he

treats her fairly and respectfully. His narration of her is significant in this regard because he does not criticize her as he does the other women he knew. In addition to this, Riobaldo allows her to speak, and when she does, she expresses her hatred towards her husband.⁷⁹ Most significantly, she is not free to speak until after Hermógenes's *and* Diadorim's death. As possessor of the truth of Diadorim's gender identity, Hermógenes's wife is the only person able to speak that revelation, but she remains silent on her feelings for her husband until after he is deceased. This Woman's simple utterances bear tremendous weight in the overall narrative for what they reveal.

Death affects and establishes identity in the novel because although Diadorim rejects the gender role that her physical nature would impose upon her during her life, once she is dead and her gender is revealed she cannot escape Riobaldo's descriptions and assignation to the highest status of womanhood. Diadorim's beauty, virtue and strength combine all of the qualities that Riobaldo values in a woman, making her the most perfect, most desirable companion. Diadorim is a complex character whose identity echoes the same restrictions that Capitolina faces in Dom Casmurro and that Ana María struggles with in La amortajada. By dressing as a man and pursuing a life as a *jagunço*, Diadorim willfully rejects any gender identity that society would have thrust upon her as a member of the "fairer" sex. Although her physique would betray her true identity to her companions, her ferocity in battle and reputation as the fiercest warrior of all the group more than compensate for her lack of masculine features. In this conflicted sense, she is completely unattainable both physically and linguistically. Diadorim must remain silent

⁷⁹ There is an important distinction to be made here between Hermógenes's wife and Nhorinhá or Ana Duzuza, the prostitutes. These two women are given names, but do not "speak" in the narrative. Ana Duzuza is reputed to be a fortune teller, but Riobaldo "fails" to ask his fortune of her, and thereby effectively silences her regardless of her reputation.

because she is a woman functioning in a man's world. Riobaldo's descriptions of her physical beauty and purity conflict with the ferocity she demonstrates in battle, complicating the narrative by calling into question the ways in which the separate, gender-bound social structures interact. Diadorim has willingly assumed the role of a man, hiding her gender from even her closest companions. Riobaldo perpetuates this disguise in the narrative, although he knows Diadorim's gender from the moment he begins his tale. Such an act challenges any preconceived notions that the reader has about gender-specific roles in society. Diadorim's success as a *jagunço* is not dependent on her gender, but on her strength and determination.

As further illustration of the strict gender roles in the *sertão*, Riobaldo tells of what the *jagunços* expect of other men and women. Riobaldo understands that he has power to take whatever he wants, including women, but he is acutely aware that Diadorim abstains from this practice. Riobaldo attempts to rationalize his behavior in light of Diadorim's, but is not successful. When he becomes the leader of the group, Riobaldo is influenced by Diadorim's behavior to such a point that he promises to protect the virtue of several young women and even provide them with a dowry for their marriages in the future. This is unusual behavior for such a man, considering the landowners expect to pay him tribute in whatever form necessary, including their daughters. Although he often refers back to his experiences with Medeiro Vaz, Zé Bebelo and Joca Ramiro as strong and just leaders to guide his own judgment, it is under Diadorim's influence that he champions virtue and prohibits his men from taking advantage of women and girls that are not already prostitutes. Such an act preserves the society of the *sertão*. Riobaldo does not make a moral judgment, but preserves the

freedom of the women to choose which of the two available roles they prefer to assume in their society.

Diadorim's death alters the direction of this narrative because the confusion surrounding death, the doubt of a life after this mortal existence, appears in the actual language and structure of the narrative. By not understanding death and what role it plays in an eternal progression (one in which God and the devil battle for the souls of men,) the narrator allows this confusion to guide his tale, an act that results in the destruction of a traditional narrative structure as well as traditional language altogether. What arises in its place is a unique narrative that is unmatched in Latin American literature. In the other works we have seen in this study, death appears as a central element of the narrative, either through the death of the narrator or protagonist and the narrative structure revolves around the way this death occurs or affects the remaining characters and the way in which they appear in the narrative.

One of the more significant commentaries that Riobaldo presents at the close of his narrative is that the *sertão* is the only eternal force and the primary influence on the life of man in the region. This becomes most apparent as Riobaldo witnesses the final battle between his men and "*os hermógenes*." As he struggles to regain his physical functions, he stammers, "*sertão*" when he has attempted to name the force holding him powerless before such a judgment. His ability to address "Satanás" or the devil in previous moments would seem to illustrate his belief in such a being as well as attribute a certain amount of power and authority to him. However, at the height of his power, Riobaldo is bound physically by a catalepsy that he has never before experienced. It would seem plausible that the narrator initially believes this state of being to be a result of

Satan exacting his revenge or claiming a portion of his debt, but the narrator's inability to speak anything more than "*sertão*" at this moment effectively unites both "forces" in one word. Satan becomes synonymous with the *sertão* and the entire narrative immediately adopts a more sinister meaning. Life and death in the most unholy of places now becomes a real and tangible struggle against what has previously been considered an intangible source of all evil. Aside from the *satanás/sertão* blend, we can see additional evidence of how the narrator's language use becomes paramount in the development of the work and its overall ability to communicate to the reader.

Eduardo Coutinho explores Riobaldo's use of the language in the narrative and the difficulty of successfully communicating with language. He writes:

Riobaldo is aware of the fact that every form of narrative, no matter how close it may seem to the reality it is representing, is always something different—another reality which exists per se, an object created in language—so that every attempt at transmitting his experiences through language will necessarily imply some distortion. (112)

One of the recurring leitmotifs in Grande Sertão: Veredas is that "viver é muito perigoso." This simple declaration that living is dangerous is considered by Coutinho to illustrate ultimate doubt in the narrator's existence. Even more importantly is that for Coutinho, "narrating, in its turn, is an arduous task in the sense that it is a *modus vivendi*, a part of man's living process, a voyage to the unknown" (114). Coutinho states that in a "dialectical process a term cannot exist without its negative counterpart" and therefore the leitmotif that *viver* is very dangerous is only half correct, for *morrer* is equally as dangerous. Narrating around the death of a loved one, as Riobaldo does, grants him an anchor to the other side of the dialectic. While he is alive, he will remain in doubt over his existence and position in life (as well as his afterlife,) but Diadorim, his counterpart,

has died and no longer exists in ambiguity. The narrator now understands the totality of Diadorim, for by discerning her true nature, he is able to trace her life back to her birthplace, find her full name, and know more about her. We could then consider Riobaldo's relationship with Diadorim to be more significant in the sense that together they create a whole entity, the yin-yang of humankind.

Early in his study, Coutinho states, "In the novel life is a crossing, a journey to knowledge, a process that stops only at the moment of one's death, and every step each man undertakes along his way is a moment of risk which places him face to face with mystery, with the unknown" (76). Naturally, the reader of a realist novel would expect the narrator to deal with known elements of life. The concept that learning ceases after death is too familiar in this light. However, in the light of the other works which I have included in this study, we can see that death is not merely the stopping point for learning. Although Grande Sertão is not fantastic or anti-realist in the sense of other Latin American novels of the same period, the way in which death factors into the narrative is profound. Concerning the use of language in the Latin American "new narrative," we can see that "the necessity to revitalize the language and structure of narrative [...] has taken the shape of an intense search for form [and revealed] a consciousness on the part of [20th century writers] of the role of language in a literary composition" (Coutinho, 35). Thus we can expect death to appear as a formal element of the work rather than merely thematic. With regards to Guimarães Rosa's work, language's inability to communicate the ideas and feelings is inextricably linked to the death and loss of the narrator's dearest and truest companion. Guimarães Rosa suggested this in his interview with Günter Lorenz by saying that form and content of a literary work are like the sound and meaning

of a word: they cannot be dissociated. Therefore any study of the language and form of the novel must include the content as well. (42).

As Riobaldo's narrative resolves each of the social and physical conflicts of his position in the *jagunço* society, the focus of the narrative falls even more on the use of language and the ability to tell the story. The reader is unlikely to understand the vast indifference of the *sertão* and the dangers of such a region, even after reading the work. In spite of the lack of experience, the narrator carefully guides his reader through the description and careful portrayal of his life so as to make the book itself a metaphor for life, and the *sertão* a metaphor for the world. The sheer immensity of the text, without break or reprieve provides every aspect of human existence from birth to death and forces the reader to comprehend it or at least arrive at a personal conclusion. Riobaldo concludes with a fatalistic perspective, eliminating the devil from the world, but fully attributing evil and suffering to mankind. Most importantly, though, he has created a complete world within the narrative, one that through the use of the basic tools of narrative has created an effective portrayal of human existence. The Brazilian *sertão* represents human existence. The struggle with identity, community and language are universal, and thus the cycle continues. Ultimately, death serves as a metaphor for lost language, both in reality and in narrative. At the end of the novel, it is not merely the words "existe é homem humano. Travessia" that are significant, but the geometrical sign for infinity. It is apparent that the final decision that the "diabo não existe" is the conclusion to his existential struggle, but, again, the symbol for infinity forces the work into a state of perpetuity. By closing with his judgment on the nonexistence of the devil, Riobaldo has returned full circle to the initial question of his narrative. The uncertainty of

death remains with Riobaldo and in spite of his affirmation that the devil does not exist, he recognizes that he cannot control or understand life or death and therefore returns the novel to its beginning. The final death of the narrative is the death of the innocent reader, for once we learn Diadorim's true identity, any return to the beginning (an act encouraged by the geometrical sign for infinity) takes us to an entirely different narrative portrait, because the revelation strips away all gender confusion and without that mystery, the only debate left is the status of Riobaldo's soul, and by extension, the human condition.

Conclusion

Death and the New Reader in Modern Latin American Literature

Throughout this study, I have focused on the way in which death appears in select first-person narratives written by Machado de Assis, María Luisa Bombal, Juan Rulfo, and João Guimarães Rosa. In each case, I have tried to demonstrate the way in which death functions as a trope to engage and empower the reader. I consider all of the works included in this study to be excellent examples of what Roland Barthes calls “writerly” texts because the language, form, and structure of each work, disallows a passive reader. Death not only occurs in the traditional sense as the end of a physical existence in these narratives, but also appears as the death of some characters’ souls or humanity as in the case of Bento Santiago, whose death is marked by his becoming Dom Casmurro, and Ana María’s son, Alberto, whose jealousy (like Casmurro’s) destroys him. Because life in the works continues beyond the death of the narrators and other significant characters, each appearance of death in the works can be regarded as an entrance into the narrative.

My decision to include six novels by four authors, written in three different languages, and published over the span of nearly eighty years naturally excludes far more authors and works than it includes. In no way do I pretend that this study is exhaustive of the trope of death in Latin American narrative, but I hope that this study presents the reader with some cogent arguments and examples of the way in which death appears in modern Latin American narrative as more than merely a thematic element. It is my intention to introduce the reader to a new way of considering death in narrative; as a trope

that opens, rather than closes a text. With each narrated death in these works, the active, engaged reader can explore the margins of the societies presented in the narratives by circumventing established hierarchies and social structures.

In Chapter One, I present Joaquim María Machado de Assis's Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas and Dom Casmurro as experiments in which the narratives utilize death to interrupt literary realism and alert the reader to inconsistencies within the hegemonic discourse of the society in which the novels unfold. Brás Cubas, the deceased narrator, beguiles the reader with humorous tales of his life and death, but while he ingratiates himself to the reader, he reminds us that we are reading a narrative. He calls attention to the subject matter, but then discusses his willingness (or unwillingness) to write chapters about sad or questionable events. The Memórias Póstumas actively creates a new, engaged reader by pointing out the gaps that exist within the narrative, most of them conveniently located between chapters, and inviting the reader to hypothesize on and even create the dialogue that occurs between the characters of the tale. Dom Casmurro is not as coy with the reader, but it too invites the reader to seek out the lacunae within the story and fill them in based on the information that the narrator provides from his impeccable memory. Death in both novels not only separates the narrator from the rest of society, but it also represents the gap that each narrator so carefully tries to fill. In a sense, the narrative exists within the gap between life and death and acts as a bridge connecting them.

In Chapter Two, I focus on how death functions in La amortajada and The Shrouded Woman to liberate women from the strictures of a patriarchal society. As Ana María progresses from the death of the living to the death of the dead, she is allowed to

review the roles she fulfilled during her life, that of lover, wife, and mother, all roles defined by their relationship to men. Ana María struggles with her shortcomings as she tried and failed at each of these roles, because she was limited by her physical body. As she is liberated from the restraints of her physical body, she gains a deeper insight into the role of women in her society. The reader is privy to her deepest thoughts and frustrations, guided by an omniscient *narradora*, who possesses the voice that the living Ana María did not. In The Shrouded Woman, the novel presents additional female characters who have rejected the roles assigned them by patriarchy, and praises them for their independence and strength of character. Death allows the narrator/protagonist to recognize the social structure to which she was bound and comprehend it from a vantage point inaccessible by the living. The death of the woman in the novel represents the death of the passive, subservient woman, and the rebirth of a liberated, independent Woman.

In Chapter Three, I turn to Roberto González Echevarría's Myth and Archive to explore death as "the gap of gaps, the mastergap of the Archive, both its opening and closing cipher" (183). Juan Rulfo has created an alternate reality, a Comala that is populated by only spirits. Pedro Páramo expands the concept of the literary lacuna by situating the entire narrative in death. Comala is a prime example of González Echevarría's Archive because it

is not so much an accumulation of texts as the process whereby texts are written [...] This fictional archive, of course, is a turning inside out of the Archive in its political manifestation, a turn that unveils the inner workings of the accumulation of power; accumulation and power are a rhetorical effect in this archive of archives. This is the reason why the previous mediations through which Latin Americans narrated are contained in the Archive as voided presences. They are both erased and, at the same time, a memory of their own demise. They are keys to filing systems now abandoned, but they retain their archival quality, their power to differentiate, to space. (24)

Comala and its inhabitants are the victims of Pedro Páramo's accumulation of power in the society. Rulfo's Comala exists as an island, surrounded by the seas of early Twentieth-century Mexico. Situated figuratively at the mouth of hell, its only inhabitants are the echoes of the souls that "andan penando" for the sins of the society they upheld. The reader's journey into Rulfo's Comala resembles Dante's journey into Purgatory, only Rulfo's Virgil abandons the reader midway through the journey. There is no escape for the souls who inhabit or enter Comala, and the reader's voice joins the innumerable voices that murmur in the town.

The final chapter of this thesis expands González Echevarría's archive to include one of the most inhospitable regions in Latin America, the Brazilian *sertão*. Death functions in Grande Sertão: Veredas as a revelatory tool, focusing the entire work on the death of the narrator/protagonist's dearest friend, Diadorim. Riobaldo acts as the keeper of the archive, the solitary bearer of the truth of Diadorim's existence and identity. The inaccessibility of the *sertão* and the incomprehensibility of much of Riobaldo's language resemble the Sanskrit of Melquíades's writings in Cien años de soledad. These works are part of the Jungian collective unconscious that makes up Latin American narrative. To expand upon González Echevarría's theory, I point to the many lacunae that exist in the texts that I have examined in this dissertation. González Echevarría writes:

But in the writing of the novel a clearing has been reached, a metafictional space, a razing that becomes a starting point for the new Latin American narrative; the clearing for the building of Comala, Macondo, Coronel Vallejos, for the founding of the imaginary city containing all previous forms of Latin American narrative as well as the origins of the novel; a space for the archive. (17)

The clearing of space for the narrative occurs through death in each of the works included in this study, as is evidenced by Brás Cubas's posthumous memoirs, made possible by the

abundance of time he has once he is liberated from human existence. Each of these works returns the reader to the Archive in order to enable us as we seek to create our own addition to the myth of Latin American narrative. González Echevarría continues:

Our own anagnorisis as readers is saved for the last page, when the novel concludes and we close the book to cease being as readers, to be, as it were, slain in that role. We are placed back at the beginning, a beginning that is also already the end, a discontinuous, independent instant where everything commingles without any possibility of extending insight, an intimation of death. (28)

González Echevarría is discussing Gabriel García Márquez's Cien años de soledad and comparing Aureliano to the reader, but a similar moment of death occurs to the reader in each of these works as well. The moment in which the reader “dies” within each of these narratives is not at the end, for none of the works possesses an apocalyptic ending like Cien años, but the point in which the reader comes to realize that he or she is alone within the work and thereby responsible for the outcome of the work. Machado's invitation to the reader of Memórias Póstumas and Casmurro to “fill in the missing gaps” in the narratives provides the reader with the opportunity to cease being a reader at the beginning of the work, rather than at the end. In other words, “our reading—each reading—of the text is the text, that is to say, yet another version added to the Archive. Each of these readings corrects the others, and each is unrepeatable insofar as it is a distinct act caught in the reader's own temporality” (González Echevarría, 26).

By examining death as an entrance into literature rather than merely an event to be narrated, we significantly alter our perception of death in the Latin American narrative of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Death then becomes a lacuna through which to enter a text, and the deaths of the narrators, protagonists, and even authors of the novels

are propitiatory for the reader as these sacrifices allow us to perceive our existence from a broader perspective. As Wolfgang Iser explains:

Fictional texts [...] cannot have the total determinacy of real objects, and, indeed, it is the elements of indeterminacy that enable the text to 'communicate' with the reader, in the sense that they induce him to participate both in the production and the comprehension of the work's intention. (24)

This can only be done, however, through the willing sacrifice of the passive reader and the acceptance of the more demanding role of active reader.

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