

“Ecumenical omelette”: shamanism and umbanda in “My uncle, the jaguar”, by Guimarães Rosa

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Abstract

This work is based on an approach of possible clues and indications that, through a stylistic analysis, lead us to identify and draw an analogy between the work “Meu tio o Iauaretê” (My uncle, the jaguar), by Guimarães Rosa, and the ideology and beliefs of Shamanism and Umbanda, within the field of spirituality and incorporation, with the purpose of bringing together the possible rituals of both in the language used by the author and represented by the main character. This study also aims to interpret the work and guide future researchers of the author to an understanding of the most varied implicit aspects based on research in the semantic and lexical field, with a mixture of trajectories experienced by Guimarães Rosa in his professional and personal career, with implicit clues that, intentionally or not, were left in a life with unique experiences in order to promote an interaction with his readership, making them a key point for an interpretative and multiple conclusion of the story.

Keywords: Beliefs, Language, Ritual, Umbanda, Shamanism

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“Omelete ecuménico”: chamanismo y umbandismo en “Mi tío el Iauaretê”, de Guimarães Rosa

Resumen

Este trabajo tiene como premisa un enfoque de posibles pistas e indicios que, a través de un análisis estilístico, nos lleve a identificar y hacer una analogía entre la obra *Mi tío el Iauaretê*, de Guimarães Rosa con la ideología y creencias del dentro del campo de la espiritualidad e incorporación con el propósito de aproximación entre los posibles rituales de ambas en el lenguaje utilizado por el autor y representado por el personaje principal. Este estudio también tiene el propósito de interpretar la obra y dirigir futuros investigadores del autor a una comprensión de las más variadas vertientes implícitas a partir de un trabajo de investigación en el campo semántico y léxico con una mezcla de trayectorias vividas por Guimarães Rosa en su carrera profesional y personal con consejos implícitos que, intencionadamente o no, fueron dejadas en una vida con experiencias únicas a fin de promover una interacción con su público lector, convirtiéndolas en punto clave para una conclusión interpretativa y múltiple del cuento.

Palabras clave: Creencias, Lenguaje, Ritual, Umbanda, Chamanismo.

“Omelete ecumênico”: xamanismo e umbandismo em “Meu tio o Iauaretê”, de Guimarães Rosa.

Resumo

Este trabalho tem como pressuposto uma abordagem de possíveis pistas e indícios que, através de uma análise estilística, nos leve a identificar e fazer uma analogia entre a obra *Meu tio o Iauaretê*, de Guimarães Rosa com a ideologia e crenças do Xamanismo e a Umbanda, dentro do campo da espiritualidade e incorporação com o propósito de aproximação entre os possíveis rituais de ambas na linguagem utilizada pelo autor e representada pela personagem principal. Este estudo também tem o propósito de interpretar a obra e direcionar futuros pesquisadores do autor a um entendimento das mais variadas vertentes implícitas a partir de um trabalho de pesquisa no campo semântico e lexical com um misto de trajetórias vivenciadas por Guimarães Rosa em sua carreira profissional e pessoal com dicas implícitas que, propositalmente ou não, foram deixadas numa vida com experiências ímpares a fim de promover uma interação com seu público leitor, tornando-os ponto chave para uma conclusão interpretativa e múltipla do conto.

Palavras-chave: Crenças, Linguagem, Ritual, Umbanda, Xamanismo.

Introduction

Guimarães Rosa was a Brazilian writer and poet, identified with the third generation of modernism in Brazil. He was always ahead of his time, giving the reader a broad and versatile view of language in his works. In the short story “Meu tio o Iauaretê” (My Uncle the Jaguar), first published in 1961 in the defunct magazine *Senhor*, and republished in the posthumous work *Estas Estórias* (These Stories) in 1969, he creates a jaguar hunter character, named Bacuriquirepa, or Breó, Beró by his mother (an indigenous woman), and Tônico, Antonio do Eiesus, by his father (a white man). The character narrates his journey through a dialogue full of unspoken interruptions from a possible interlocutor, interpreted by some as a monologue, since the speech of this supporting character is not explicitly present in the narrative but is implied.

The first hints of a religious mix are already evident in the formation of the narrator-character, who presents his mother as an indigenous woman and his father as a white man. Thus, there are several gaps to be filled in this dialogue, of which the readers are key pieces to completing, making the story a mix of back-and-forth semantic shifts, promoting interactivity with its audience. The story continues with the narrator-character hinting, in one passage of the plot, at a possible transformation, in which he ceases to be a jaguar hunter and becomes one of them, even mentioning them as part of his family and demonstrating certain affection beyond reality for a female jaguar (Maria-Maria).

In the sequence of the story, a probable link emerges between the transformation and a ritual of incorporation, which can be associated with some religious cultures, since beliefs such as Shamanism and Umbanda work with these activities of spiritual incorporation. In the former, animals can assume various forms of contact with the spiritual plane, this contact having to do with a connection between power and the force of instinct. In Shamanism, the calling of one's power animal or Totem may be associated with situations of skill or development in personal life, in which “The characteristics of an animal and animals are seen as archetypes, symbols of energies that exist and that we can find and manifest within ourselves” (Molina, 2022). In Umbanda, according to Cumino (2011), we can associate the jaguar Maria-Maria with the Virgin Mary as being identified with “Oxum” and “Mother Mary,” and may also be identified with Iemanjá, in which the saint/orixá relationship varies according to different points of view.

Therefore, the proposal presented here aims to find evidence that links the story to Shamanic or Umbanda beliefs, based on a stylistic analysis focused on underlying semantics, as well as taking advantage of lexical clues about some ritualistic mysticism, left as gaps by Guimarães Rosa so that each reader, at the end of their reading, can infer their own interpretations of the analyzed work. In this context, one can understand an analogy to the “ecumenical omelette,” which the writer himself utters and which is recalled by Haroldo de Campos (2011) in a statement to Bia Lessa for the inauguration of the Museum of the Portuguese Language in 2006, and revisited in his work “The World of Guimarães Rosa.”

Thus, this article adopts a qualitative approach, of a bibliographical and analytical-interpretative nature, situated within the field of literary studies, with interdisciplinary dialogue with symbolic anthropology and religious studies. The methodology consists of a semantic-stylistic analysis of selected excerpts from the short story “*Meu tio o Iauaretê*” (My Uncle the Jaguar), focusing on lexical fields, narrative strategies, and symbolic clues related to transformation, incorporation, and religious hybridity. The interpretation is based on a theoretical framework concerning the work of Guimarães Rosa, shamanism, and Umbanda, seeking to identify symbolic approximations without establishing dogmatic correspondences, preserving the interpretative openness characteristic of Rosa's narrative.

“Ecumenical Omelette”: A Critical Overview

“People say I'm making a scene from the interior of Minas Gerais, and I'm making an ecumenical omelette” (Rosa as quoted in Campos, 2011, p. 55). This statement is taken up by journalist Gustavo Castro Silva and translator, photographer, and researcher Marcelo Marinho in an article that identifies the presence of spirituality in the work ‘*O Recado do Morro*’ (1956). Based on a study of the vocabulary, images, and aesthetics of Umbanda, the authors analyze the work of Guimarães Rosa, as can be seen in the following excerpt:

Through the path of inclusive syncretism, Umbanda, a genuinely Brazilian spiritual practice, conceives itself as a utopian ecumenical proposal for the social inclusion of popular religiosity. In its complexity, it urgently demands an understanding of each of its unique manifestations. Could Guimarães Rosa have the power to illuminate this interpretative path of Brazilian culture? Perhaps so, if we take seriously his humorous gastronomic-spiritual statement made to Haroldo de Campos: “people say I'm staging a scene in the interior of Minas Gerais, and I'm making an ecumenical omelet” (ROSA apud CAMPOS, 2011, p. 55). Hamlet ecum? (Silva & Marinho, 2021, p. 39)



In this quote from Guimarães Rosa, we already get our first indications that, in his works, a religious “mix” can be part of the plot of his narratives. “Beyond ‘belief’ in fiction, it is a ‘mixture,’ let’s say, not necessarily prepared in an orderly, ‘conscious’ way. A mixture that is fabricated in writing, but not framed within the full clarity of a recipe that was followed” (Patrício, 2017). Thus, when we start with the word “*omelette*,” whose meaning, according to the Houaiss dictionary, is a word that has its origin in Latin, “*lamella*”, passing into French as “*omelette*”, which means a blade, something sharp, that divides and shares. In Brazilian cuisine, it appears as a fritter of beaten eggs, to which seasonings (parsley, onion, etc.) and other ingredients can be added (Houaiss and Villar, 2008). The word “ecumenical” is related to ecumenism; which brings together people of different faiths or ideologies; which unites diverse perspectives, different points of view, and varied origins, among others (Houaiss and Villar, 2008). Therefore, based on these inferences, an expectation is created for what the text may bring to the study in question and, furthermore, starting from the meaning of both words, which may direct the reading of the story towards a mixture of two or more religions present in its plot. We continue with more definitions of the faiths that instigated this work, to associate them with an intentionality that João Guimarães Rosa subtly reveals in his story, where Shamanism and Umbanda remain in the subtext of possible interpretations.

Houaiss and Villar (2008) understand and conceptualize the term Shamanism as follows: “A phenomenon of a magical-religious nature, characteristic of the Siberian peoples of northern Asia, defined by supernatural aptitudes and capacities” or “a set of manifestations, rites and practices present in numerous human societies and centered on the figure of the shaman, in his role as intermediary between the profane reality of the shaman, and the supernatural dimension, in his mystical trances and in the magical and healing powers attributed to him.” (Houaiss & Villar, 2008, entry Shamanism)

From an anthropological perspective, we can translate shamanism as a set of ancestral practices that seek healing, self-knowledge, and understanding of the manifestations of nature. According to Edward MacRae (1992), the origin of the name comes from the Tung tribe in Siberia, derived from the name *samân* (one inspired by spirits). The figure of the shaman would be that of a spiritual guide, one who assumes a profound relationship of knowledge and learning with the mythical and supernatural universe. In Brazil, however, shamanism is often replaced by the word *pajelança*, becoming synonymous with each other. Thus, we can also replace the word shaman with the word *pajé*. According to Bittencourt (2016), “The model of the shamanic subject is the ‘wounded healer,’ reflecting the being who has healed himself and, having followed the ‘path of healing,’ is able to perform, advise, or guide it in other subjects through various techniques.” In the short story “My Uncle the Jaguar,” the character, after killing many jaguars, claims to be related to them, suggesting an interpretation of someone who has found themselves, healed, and discovered their true path.

Umbanda, on the other hand, is the “art of healing through natural or supernatural medicine” (Houaiss and Villar, 2008). It emerged in the early 20th century in Rio de Janeiro. Today it is segmented, having diverse influences such as indigenous, Catholic, and esoteric. According to Altair Pinto (2007), its origin is African, derived from the name Quimbanda, which means “Magician, Healer, Head of Terreiro”; it “is the great and true cult that incarnate human spirits on Earth offer to Obatalá, through the Orixás” (Pinto, 2007). The main purpose of its cult is service to incarnate or disincarnate human spirits, whether through indoctrination or spiritual assistance. Etymologically, Lopes (2011) explains it as follows:

The word *umbanda* occurs in Umbundu and Kimbundu meaning ‘art of healing’, ‘medical science’, ‘medicine’. In Umbundu, the term that designates the healer, the traditional doctor, is *mbanda*, and its plural (one of the forms) is *imbanda*. In Kimbundu, the singular is *kimbanda* and its plural is also *imbanda*. Traditional African medicine is ritualistic; hence the *mbanda* or *kimbanda* is commonly confused with the sorcerer, which is incorrect, since the roles are quite distinct: the *mbanda* heals; the sorcerer (ndoki in Kikongo) perpetrates malefices (p. 1421).

Thus, we can direct our reading skills and competencies toward an understanding that relates the story to Umbanda, with proximity to nature being one of them, and some lexical forms such as “horse”, “black”, “Maria”, “*cachaça*”, etc., which are present in the daily rites and cults of Umbanda.

Therefore, despite distinct religious origins, we can identify certain similarities between Umbanda and Shamanism, as both of them work with the incorporation of spirits in order to assist and help everyone. They are animistic, using plants and roots to promote healing, whether spiritual or physical, in their mystical rituals, valuing the connection with nature. Furthermore, some of their main spirits of incorporation are of very similar origins, such as indigenous peoples and Caboclos who see nature as a source of resources to develop their ritualistic work in a trance process.

Shamanism, Ayahuasca, and Umbanda: Points of Convergence

From a stylistic reading of the lexicons presented in the work “My Uncle the Jaguar”, it is perceived that there is a tenuous connection with some forms that refer to shamanic culture. Following this line, it is noted that the presence of the transformation experienced by the narrator-character — when he believes he assumes the form of a jaguar — allows the reader to infer a relationship with the beliefs of peoples of shamanic tradition, who understand the animal of power

as a mediator of internal processes of self-knowledge and overcoming. In this sense, “seeking the animal of healing and power is to encounter oneself, to unveil who I am, my genes, my cognition, personality in tune with superconsciousness” (Araújo, 2022, p. 104), what is close to the symbolic experience of the character, when assuming animal form as a strategy to face conflicts and dangerous situations. In Umbanda, we also have the process of spirit incorporation, which can be considered perfect or complete when the medium loses all consciousness of what is happening to them. Thus, the narrative in its course has a possible harmonious congruence between these two religious sources.

Situations that reveal a possible cure are mentioned in the story, in the first paragraphs, on the very first pages, identified with the use of plants and roots, which are similar to the healing powers used by shamans when they are in a trance state and when they consume teas made from plants and roots, as is the case with some entheogenic plants. In Umbanda, mediums consume cachaça, which is a way to relax the body and enter a trance state during their work, providing assistance to those present. Cachaça may have a possible link with the preparation and effects of “*ayahuasca*,” “a hallucinogenic drink prepared with the stem of Caapi (*Banisteriopsis caapi*) and leaves of Chacrona (*Psychotria viridis*)” (Houaiss & Villar, 2008), originating from the Amazon region. To complement this, Camargo (2014) argues that, in Afro-Brazilian religions, the effectiveness of plants in inducing altered states of consciousness derives not only from their intrinsic properties, but, above all, from the incorporation of sacred supernatural forces that occurs in specific ritualistic moments. Thus, an entheogen is a consciousness-altering substance that induces a shamanic or ecstatic state, a result similar to that of *cachaça* ingested by mediumistic entities in Umbanda, since its origin is also from a “herbaceous and tufted plant (*Saccharum officinarum*) of the grass family” (Houaiss & Villar, 2008) in which, despite being different, both perform a paradigmatic function in the ritualistic context. Later we will make another association of these drinks, in another passage of the story, with the purpose of an interpretative approach to insert the presence of Umbanda and Shamanism into this plot.

In another passage of the story, we find the presence of tobacco, “Do you have tobacco too? Yes, tobacco for chewing, for smoking.” (Rosa, 2020, p. 140), in which the narrator-character asks his interlocutor, culminating in an analogy that brings the plot closer to a shamanic ritual, since smoking (which could be tobacco, an ancestral plant very important to the indigenous people) is a way of invoking the spiritual plane, this being an action of carrying prayers to the Universe (HEAVEN OF UNALOME), but it can be interpreted by laypeople as a simple desire to smoke, which is linked to Umbanda, and “smoking” can be understood as a term once given by the old black people to the pipe, the cigar, and the cigarette, widely used in incorporation sessions. Both rituals can use the pipe as an instrument, being used by shamans, Old Black People, or Caboclos.

Returning to the opening lines of the story, “- Hmm? EH-EH... Yes. SIR. Uh-huh, if you want to come in, you can come in...” (Rosa, 2020 p. 139), one can observe speech in a possible state of trance or possession by the character, seeing that she receives an unexpected visit, dialoguing with her and using words that, when we seek their broader meanings, we can direct towards an interpretation in the mystical field of spiritual beliefs, since throughout the context of this story we only observe the speech of a single character and words like “Nhor” which is a suppressed form of the word *senhor*, this being a masculine noun according to Houaiss and Villar (2008), used by African peoples in the colonial period that lasted until the end of slavery. In a more aphaeresis form, this word also appears as “*Nho*”, being defined as a “Bantuization” of the Portuguese “*senhor*” (Lopes, 2011). Where does all this fit in? Black people brought Umbanda to Brazil, a religion of African origin that works with healing and spirit possession processes, resembling shamanic ritualistic practices. Another point is that both religions involve Caboclos (Indians) in the incorporation process, people who were largely enslaved and excluded by society. In another passage, the protagonist reveals that he is the son of an Indian woman and a white man “...my father was a white man, white as can be...” (Rosa, 2020 p. 152) and “My mother, my indigenous woman, good, good to me...” (Rosa, 2020 p. 161), reaffirming his origin as that of a Caboclo. The writer Ulisses Medeiros Júnior (2011), in his article, explains the Caboclos as excellent beings in the art of healing and performing spiritual cleansing, being profound connoisseurs of medicinal herbs and their spiritual properties, as well as their therapeutic use in treating various ailments. Following the same line of reasoning, Nascimento, Matias and Vieira (2025) concluded that:

In Umbanda, it is evident that the plants used in rituals are predominantly those that were introduced to Brazil and cultivated over time. These herbs, adapted to Brazilian territory, are part of an ancestral knowledge that always seeks harmony between the spiritual and the material. Umbanda incorporates healing rituals into its practices that involve prayers, blessings, spiritual passes, cleansing baths, and other techniques. In all these procedures, herbs play a fundamental role. In harmony with nature, the Guides use these plants to heal and dissipate negative influences that hinder the lives of the faithful and clients, and provide essential guidance and protection (p. 11).

From this statement, we can identify another point of agreement between Shamanism and Umbanda, since shamans also possess these same mystical powers.



It is also noticeable in the passage “Ã-hã, wants to come in, you can come in... Hum, hum” (Rosa, 2020, p. 139) a phrase with expressions very commonly used in incorporation sessions, in which mediums, shamans, and medicine men go through a process that allows them to be incorporated by entities (spirits).

The presence of verbs and interjections suggests a desire to do something, or the intention to (want to come in) which culminates in acceptance (being able to come in). Both verbal phrases express an indication of action. This passage ends with the character speaking using the interjection (Hum, hum) which may indicate an acceptance fraught with suspicion upon receiving such a visit. The figure of the horse also appears in the sequence, defined by Lopes (2011) and Pinto (2007) as a Medium of the Guides in Umbanda, one who is always ready to receive the protector or Guide. The dictionary defines it as a perissodactyl mammal of the equine family, found throughout the world as a domestic animal; or also as a violent individual; a coarse, rude individual; an animal, a mount, a stupid animal (Houaiss and Villar, 2008). But here, following a line more within the beliefs, the meaning that most closely approximates the story is the definition of a person who is a son or daughter of a saint, since a congruent line with the lineage of spiritual beliefs is perceived from subliminal indications in the text.

“*Axi*” is an interjection that appears frequently in the text, and in the first part of the story it is understood as a synonym for “*atitê*”, taking on a meaning that can sound like “disdain or mockery” (Houaiss & Villar, 2008), an expression used in the Amazon that originates from the Tupi language. In the passage “The horse is lame, watery. It’s no good anymore. *Axi*...” one can infer a possible unease of the entity with its Horse (narrator-character), describing it as a lame horse that is no longer useful. Apparently, what is seen in this passage is a rupture between spirit and horse, with the former wanting to leave the latter. This dialogue continues with a play on words that gives another interpretation, where the horse tries to make its Guide or Spirit remain with it, expressing the following phrase, “You come in, you can stay here” (Rosa, 2020, p. 139). The following combination also refers us to spiritual beliefs based on the statements “...I am a resident... Eh, I am not a resident either.” and “Me – everywhere. I’m here, when I want I change.” (Rosa, 2020 p. 139) showing a coming and going of the entity or spirit, that incorporates and disincorporates, when it wants or needs to. If we were to make an analogy, we could also understand the word “*axi*,” again taking it up as a variant of the oral tradition of a greeting in Umbanda that can be represented by the word “*axé*,” which means “the sacred force of each orixá, which is reinvigorated, in Candomblé, with the offerings of the faithful and the ritual sacrifices” (Houaiss & Villar, 2008), or even a term of Yoruba origin that, in its philosophical sense, means the force that allows the realization of life, that ensures dynamic existence, that enables events and transformations. For Lopes (2011):

Among the Yoruba (*àwé*), means law, command, order – the power as the capacity to accomplish something or to act upon a thing or person – and is used in contrast to *agbara*, physical power, the subordination of one individual to another by legitimate or illegitimate means (p. 162).

Continuing in the field of spirituality, we have in the word “*axé*” “the magical force that sustains the *terreiros* of Candomblé, or even an invisible force present in the divinities, in every living being and in everything. It is a kind of magical fluid that gives life to all” (Brito, 2020). Thus, it is understood that “*axé*” will only be strengthened from a consecrated, prepared body, so that a harmony can be established between body, *orixá*, community, religiosity and ancestors in a possible form of incorporation and dominion.

The word “horse,” “Medium of the guides in Umbanda. As in all spiritual currents, this term means the same as instrument, that is, any medium who is always ready to receive the protector or Guide” (Pinto, 2007), appears with some frequency in the story, as in “Is this your only horse? Wow! The horse is lame; watery.” or “Hum, hum, horse in the woods.” (Rosa, 2020 p. 139) and, according to the definition cited above, we can understand that the character may be referring to the person responsible for embodying a Guide and/or entity, the person who serves as support for the orixá. In Shamanism, animals appear as a connection between humans and animal archetypes, as they are seen as ancestral forces that help us awaken gifts and virtues that inhabit our instinctive psyche, helping us to find the divine nature within ourselves. Thus, Rocha (2023) explains the meaning of the horse in shamanic culture:

In the open fields of the vast plains, the Earth trembles with the steady gallop of the Horse. On the horizon, the Animal Spirit emerges in rare majesty, elegance, strength, and power. The Horse represents the very flame of freedom and, for the Shamans; it symbolizes the bridge to the spiritual world, the journeys towards the mysteries of the invisible. The Horse announces the beginning of our long journey through the vast fields of consciousness. (The Power of Animals, 2023)

So, the horse brings the symbolic representation of this culture in the story, exposing the presence of power and the imposing presence that the character needs to reclaim when assuming his trance state, in which a long journey throughout his narrative is exposed with various repulsions and transformations.

At another point in the story, we return to the presence of the use of alcohol, in which we have the indication of *cachaça*, very common in Umbanda rituals, but it can also take on a different form, being associated with ayahuasca, a drink used in shamanic rituals in the Amazon, since our character also claims to have indigenous ancestry. We highlight here another focus related to these two drinks used by these religions in their rites, as both have a very similar preparation process, despite being composed of different natural substances. From harvesting, through grinding, boiling, filtering, and reduction, the interpretation of these two beverages is similar. However, *cachaça* undergoes a fermentation and aging process, which ayahuasca does not. Ayahuasca, however, finishes its cooking process in a second stage called reduction, known as purification. Another point in common between the beverages is that both originate from nature and are present in rituals. Their consequences also follow a similar path, leaving shamans and mediums in a state of ecstasy during the work and healing process, a healing that appears in the previously mentioned story. While *cachaça* comes from sugarcane, ayahuasca originates from entheogenic plants, but both have the same ultimate purpose in their respective rituals: to promote the well-being of all.

The jaguar is already an important part of this story, and can be defined as a generic name given to some large Brazilian felines, especially the painted-jaguar, or figuratively as someone enraged, or even originally as a large feline. On the other hand, it also appears as “an old unit of weight measurement in several countries, with values ranging between 24 g and 33 g, or an old weight measurement equivalent to one-sixteenth of the *arrâtel* (28.69 g)” (Houaiss & Villar, 2008). In shamanism, the strength of the jaguar represents the protection of space. It is an animal that, while frightening us due to its feline instinct, also inspires immense respect, carrying with it characteristics such as intelligence, agility, and cunning. It is also energetically used by shamans in spiritual healing work. According to Dan Holanda (2022):

Jaguar - The jaguar is a deliberately solitary animal. It is cunning, observing the movements of its prey before attacking. It possesses the ability to learn and coexist with itself and not depend on others to achieve its goals. It teaches the conquest of our space, caution, and knowing how to act. It is intelligent, agile, and energetically assists shamans in healing. The jaguar brings the energy of courage, sensuality, and power. It symbolizes the conquest of space, caution, knowing how to act, skill, and agility (Power Animal Message, 2022).

The jaguar also appears in the story representing the feminine side when mentioned by the jaguar hunter, the narrator-character, in “Onça Maria-Maria”: “If I wanted to, I could kill it. I didn’t want to. How could I kill Maria-Maria?” (Rosa, 2020, p.139). This name is very important in Christianity, as it represents the Mother and principal disciple of Jesus Christ. In Umbanda, it appears in various forms, with “Maria, Oxum, and Yemanjá merging, no longer existing as one and the other; Maria is Oxum and also Yemanjá” (Cumino, 2011). Animals are highly respected in Umbanda, as stated by *Babalaô* and president of the Umbanda Federation of Greater ABC (São Paulo), Ronaldo Linares, in an interview with the channel “*E aí Bicho?*” (2021) “Animals, although different from human beings, have souls. For this reason, we respect animals so much... Umbanda does not sacrifice its animals, as it has the utmost respect...” Thus, we are getting closer and closer to the objective of this work, and the presence of the jaguar, Maria-Maria, and the uncle *Iauaretê* (iaua = jaguar; + retê = true), may contain strong indications of a possible congruence between Umbanda and Shamanism, since for both, animals are very important beings and full of meaning. Thus, in this story by J. Guimarães Rosa, we can identify what he had already stated in previous interviews, that he was making an “ecumenical omelet” in his works, but not everyone manages to reach this perspective, remaining only with the understanding that all this is just the description of a scene from the interior of Minas Gerais.

In another passage, the narrator expresses himself with the following statement: “No, sir. I drink herbal tea. Plant roots. I know how to find it, my mother taught me, and I know it myself. I’m never sick.” (Rosa, 2020, p.140). What is perceived in this passage is the implicit connection between the healing powers that the narrator acquires from the knowledge transmitted by his mother, who could be Mother Earth. Shamanism, then, comes to be understood as a spiritual/religious belief that seeks inner strength and the reconnection of this with the teachings of nature. The connection between the two words “tea” and “root” allows for a new association between how the narrator promotes his healing and how shamans also sought, and still seek, to perform this same process in nature. Tea is a word that refers to Indian culture, being defined as Indian tea; Indian tea leaf; infusion of these leaves; the infusion prepared with other types of herbs, among others (Houaiss and Villar, 2008). The word root appears as “base or lower part of something; plant organ; fixed to the soil, from where it draws nutrients, etc...” (Houaiss & Villar, 2008). Thus, in this passage, the healing power of natural herbs that the narrator acquires and transmits to his interlocutor when questioned about becoming ill (interlocutor’s speech is implied) is evident.



My uncle the jaguar: animistic spirituality?

Umbanda is a Brazilian religion rooted in the fusion of African, Indigenous, and Spiritist beliefs. It involves communication with and worship of spiritual entities, such as spirit guides, ancestors, and nature spirits. Umbanda practitioners believe in a direct connection between the spiritual and physical worlds, and often participate in rituals in which they embody these spiritual entities to receive guidance, healing, and direction.

Shamanism is a spiritual practice that originated in various Indigenous cultures around the world, including the traditions of Native American, Siberian, African, and Aboriginal peoples. Shamanism involves communication with nature spirits, ancestors, and other spiritual beings through rituals, chants, dances, and visionary journeys. Shamans, the spiritual leaders of these traditions, are considered intermediaries between the spiritual and material worlds, seeking spiritual guidance, healing, and balance.

Animistic spiritualities are those that believe in the presence and direct influence of spirits or spiritual energies in daily life. Both Umbanda and Shamanism fit this definition, as both traditions involve interaction and communication with spiritual entities. The word “spirituality” is defined as “the quality of being spiritual” or “characteristics or quality of what has or reveals intense religious or mystical activity; religiosity, mysticism” (Houaiss & Villar, 2008). The word “animic” means “related to or belonging to the soul” (Houaiss & Villar, 2008), referring to the spirit, the soul, or the spirit. Therefore, it is believed that these elements play an active role in human experiences and interaction with the world.

However, it is important to note that Umbanda and Shamanism have different cultural roots and have developed distinct practices and beliefs over time. Although they share animistic characteristics, their specific approaches, rituals, and beliefs

Conclusions

can vary considerably. On the other hand, the short story “My Uncle the Jaguar,” based on the studies presented here, draws a parallel between these two religious perspectives, revealing much more than mere coincidences, to the point of uniting perspectives that connect the spiritual world, mystical knowledge, reliance on nature (plants and roots) for healing and rituals, as well as belief in and respect for natural beings (animals) whose instincts we assume at some point in our lives.

- The symbolic references to the orishas and shamanic practices demonstrate Guimarães Rosa’s mastery of different religious systems. Works such as the short story “My Uncle the Jaguar” transcend a simple regionalist bias, confirming that the author consistently surpasses a reading limited to regionalism, focused on the representation of rural or backwoods life. In the story, vocabulary and constructions are identified that go beyond their literal meanings and, when analyzed from a broader lexical-semantic perspective, allow the reader to access latent layers of meaning linked to mystical and religious dimensions.
- In the light of the analysis carried out, consistent evidence of religious hybridity and an animistic spirituality is identified. The lexical elements examined — the polysemy of the term “horse,” which articulates the animal and mediumistic dimensions, the symbolic analogy between cachaça and entheogenic substances, as well as the syncretism condensed in the figure of Maria-Maria — contributes to the configuration of the character Bacuriquirepa, in the designation of indigenous origin, or Tónico, linked to the Catholic tradition. These results demonstrate symbolic convergences with practices associated with Shamanism and Umbanda, confirming the hypothesis that guided the investigation.
- Even so, by prioritizing the reading of the story in the light of what Guimarães Rosa himself called an “ecumenical omelette,” this work outlines interpretative clues that refer to the confluence of distinct religious cultures, historically situated, but close in their conceptions of belief, ritual, and relationship with the sacred. Finally, the need remains open for future investigations that expand this analysis to other stories in the book “*Essas Estórias*” (2020) or delve deeper into the reception of these mystical elements in specific religious contexts, contributing to a consolidated understanding of the spiritual aspects implicit in the work of this exceptional writer of vast knowledge.

