

◆ Introduction

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Richard Spruce, one of many British naturalists to undertake a journey to the Amazon in the mid-nineteenth century, described it as the “largest river in the world” running through “the largest forest” (cited in Hemming 325). Although the ranking of its length and volume has been debated over the years, the Amazon is indisputably one of the world’s greatest river systems and its basin the largest at over 2.7 million square miles, stretching from Mount Roraima in the north to the Bolivian Andes in the south, from the Peruvian Andes in the west to the Atlantic Ocean (Hemming 328–29). Its many tributaries include the Madeira, the Marañón, the Putumayo, the Ucayali, and the Río Negro, and its territory extends into Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guiana, Guyana, Peru, Suriname, and Venezuela. And despite the frequent encoding of the Amazon as wild nature, Amazonia has, since at least 1980, been predominantly urbanized (Browder and Godfrey 1), with major cities including Manaus and Belém in Brazil, Iquitos in Peru, and Leticia in Colombia. The Amazon is thus a truly transnational space (Rodriguez 36; Pizarro 71), and pan-Amazonian cultural manifestations as well as initiatives from highways to conservation movements have flourished over the years.¹

Yet only quite recently has the literature of this vast and varied region begun to attract scholarly attention. Just over a decade ago, in *Literary Cultures of Latin America*, Emmanuel Lézy pronounced that “[b]etween the tenth degree north and south latitudes on the maps of South American literary production lies a vast zone of emptiness” (56), invoking the colonial adage of the Amazon as a “land without men” in his presentation of the region as a land without writers. And this perceived lack of literary culture—indeed, of any kind of culture at all—has been replicated on a national level all across Amazonia, with, for example, the Bolivian city of Santa Cruz described as being “sin expresión cultural alguna” (without any cultural expression) as late as 1974.² In her 2012 book *Ecological Imaginations in*

Latin American Fiction, Laura Barbas-Rhoden seems to compound this perception of “literary muteness” (Lézy 56) by her decision to include the work of just one Amazonian-born author in a chapter on the Amazon because of the “few published novelists” (61): “Aspiring writers from the Amazon must overcome huge socio-political obstacles, including isolation and prejudices in the arts scene, before they see their works in print” (62). Although writers from the Amazon do face more challenges than those based in Latin America’s capital cities, their literary production is by no means as limited as Lézy and Barbas-Rhoden suggest. Indeed, over the past decade or so a number of articles and books on Amazonian literature indicate that the region’s critical fortunes are in the process of changing (for example, Ayarza Uyaco, Maligo, Marcone, Sá, Slater, Wylie). The Center for Amazonian Literature and Culture (CALC) established at Smith College and directed by Nicomedes Suárez-Araúz and Charles Cutler, as well as its regrettably short-lived publications—*Amazonian Literary Review* and *Pan-Amazonia*—have also been pioneering the recognition of a pan-Amazonian literary culture. Suárez-Araúz’s landmark *Literary Amazonia* (2004), which made available for the first time in English translation a selection of poetry and prose from the region, marked an important step in the recognition of “Amazonian” literary identity. Soon after, the Brazilian novelists Milton Hatoum and Márcio Souza were interviewed about their position as “Amazonian” authors in an article in the *New York Times* entitled “Amazon Books, but Not What You Think.” And just recently, an annual literary convention, El Coloquio Internacional de Literaturas Amazónicas (International Colloquium on Amazonian Literature), has been established in the Peruvian Amazon.

Indeed, despite the relative paucity of critical studies on literature of the Amazon, in the words of Roberto González Echevarría, “there is writing everywhere in the jungle” (2). From its first inception in the minds of European colonists and travelers such as Fray Gaspar de Carvajal and Cristóbal de Acuña in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, through to literary engagements by native Amazonians in the twentieth and twenty-first, the Amazon has generated a multiplicity of texts: as Slater remarks, the Amazon is “both a geographic entity and province of the imagination” (“Amazonia as Edenic Narrative” 115). Neil L. Whitehead quite rightly regards Carvajal’s account of the Amazon (“vast, incomprehensible, filled with wonder, and rich in life and culture”) as setting the tone for many future texts on the region (125)—a discourse of the marvelous that, as Stephen Greenblatt argues, helped early modern travelers to the Americas cope with “the unfamiliar, the alien, the terrible, the desirable, and the hateful” (23). Later, in the Romantic accounts of travelers such as Alexander von Humboldt, this tone of wonder was modulated by recourse to the sublime, both of which helped bridge the gap in European knowledge of the Amazon. In *Views of Nature*, Humboldt characterized the area between the Amazon

and the Orinoco as “a drear and savage wilderness”: “Forests, the growth of thousands of years, in one impenetrable thicket. . . . Huge masses of lead-coloured granite contract the beds of foaming rivers. Mountains and forests re-echo with the thunder of rushing waters, the roar of the tiger-like jaguar, and the dull rain-foreboding howl of the bearded ape” (19–20).

Humboldt not only, to paraphrase Mary Louise Pratt, “reinvented” the Amazon as wild nature, but he also encouraged generations of nineteenth-century European naturalists to travel there, resulting in a boom of natural histories by British scientists such as Charles Waterton, Henry Walter Bates, Alfred Russel Wallace, and Spruce, united in their amazement before Amazonia’s “marvellous diversity and richness of trees, foliage, and flowers” (Bates 180). In the nineteenth-century naturalist tradition, as throughout much travel writing on the Amazon, the trope of superabundance predominates, with the accompanying rhetorical strategies of “the negative list, the trope of multiplication, the insistence that only seeing is believing, [and] the impossibility of full enumeration” (Campbell 179). Nevertheless, even by the mid-nineteenth century the perception of tropical superabundance was already shifting, or “darkening,” as Nancy Stepan puts it (48), as part of a wider reconfiguration of tropical nature “as altogether other—climatically, geographically and morally” (Driver and Yeoh 1).³ In the first half of the twentieth century, European and North American writing on the Amazon tended to be dominated by accounts of tropical degeneration and clichés of the cannibal or headhunter (see Nugent). A chapter index of Thomas Whiffen’s tellingly entitled *The North-West Amazons: Notes of Some Months Spent among Cannibal Tribes* (“Insect pests—Reptiles—Silence in the forest—Travelling in the bush—Depressing effects of the forest—Lost in the forest—Starvation the crowning horror” [ix]) is indicative of the pessimistic bent of much twentieth-century travel writing on the Amazon. Another more famous traveler to the region—Roger Casement, who undertook a humanitarian mission to the rubber stations of the Putumayo in 1910 and again in 1911—shares this gloomy view of the Amazon as “depressing in the extreme—a morbid, dense and gloomy forest, inhabited by wildbeasts, serpents, and insects” (325). Such pessimistic discourses persist in recent works such as George Monbiot’s *Amazon Watershed*, though they emanate from a different source as environmental determinism is replaced by environmentalism and a growing preoccupation with the toxicity of the Amazon’s waterways and widespread deforestation.

Over the past century, Latin Americans themselves have increasingly engaged with the idea of the Amazon, not only as a way to consolidate national borders but as a source of literary and cultural identity. As Lúcia Sá has shown, after independence, South American writers “became increasingly drawn to the idea of rainforest literature, to songs, speeches and narratives original to their part of the world” (*Rain Forest Literatures* xiv). These Latin American accounts of the Amazon, though often evocative of

the colonial *relación* or nineteenth-century European travel writing, were more attentive to indigenous source texts and less confident about finding a language suitable for this vast region at all. Euclides da Cunha's account of the Amazon, drawn largely from observations made firsthand when he traveled to Acre as part of an expedition to settle the border between Brazil and Peru, eschews Humboldt's designations of wild and gigantic nature in his presentation of a land that frustrates not only all attempts at human settlement and civilization but also conventional ways of knowing nature (see Anderson in this volume). For da Cunha, this is a region that is oxymoronically the "mais perlustrada . . . é a menos conhecida" (*Obra* 224) ("most studied and . . . least known" [*Amazon* 5]):

Destarte a natureza é portentosa, mas incompleta. É uma construção estupenda a que falta toda a decoração interior. . . .

Tem tudo e falta-lhe tudo, porque lhe falta êsse encadeamento de fenômenos desdobrados num ritmo vigoroso, de onde ressaltam, nítidas, as verdades da arte e da ciência—e que é como que a grande lógica inconsciente das cousas. (*Obra* 224)

(nature portentous but at the same time incomplete. It is a stupendous construct lacking in internal coherence. . . .)

It contains everything and at the same time lacks everything, because it lacks that linking-together of phenomena developed within a rigorous process that produces the well-defined truths of art and of science—and which bespeaks the grand unconscious logic of things.) (*Amazon* 5)

Nevertheless, despite the acknowledged difficulties of inscribing Amazonia (and in contradistinction to the misleading title of da Cunha's essays on the Amazon, *A Margem da História* [Land without History]), da Cunha does not opt to present the Amazon as uninhabited. As Susanna Hecht notes, his Amazon "is never empty," but "swarming with mythologies, histories and evolving societies" (46). In this way, da Cunha's essays on the Amazon are ripe for the kind of ecocritical reading that Nielson offers in this volume, with their interest lying in the "expression of the interdependence of human experience in the Amazon and ecology" (Nielson 22).

One of the recurrent figures of da Cunha's Amazon is the *seringueiro* (rubber worker; *cauchero* in Spanish), who, as Arantza Mayo notes in this volume, is also an important symbol of exploitation for the Bolivian poet Pedro Shimose, especially in poems such as "Moxitania" or "Santa Cruz de la Sierra: Desbordando lluvias." This nomadic being, whom da Cunha likens to Sisyphus, "a rolar em vez de um bloco o seu próprio corpo" (*Obra* 250)

(“pushing his own body instead of a boulder” [*Amazon* 39]), is also central to a number of novels on the Amazon in the 1920s and 1930s, including *La vorágine* (1924; *The Vortex*) by Colombian José Eustasio Rivera (like da Cunha, a member of a binational border expedition), *A Selva* (1930; *The Jungle*) by Portugal’s José María Ferreira de Castro, and *Toá* (1933) by Colombia’s César Uribe Piedrahita. Characterized as *novelas de la selva*, these books mark an important step in the development of a homegrown tradition of nature writing in Latin America and the beginnings of an interest in native cosmologies that would become a staple of *indigenista* (indigenist) literature (see Wylie, *Colonial Tropes*). Although these novels are often regarded as social-realist, they show an abiding concern with the difficulty of finding a language commensurate to the scale and complexity of the Amazon jungle—a region that in these texts is shown to confound not only the commonplace categories of European aesthetics (the sublime, the picturesque, the beautiful) but the senses on every level. For Arturo Cova, the protagonist of *La vorágine*, the jungle becomes a site of synesthesia where “el ojo siente, la espalda ve, la nariz explora” (297) (the eye feels, the back sees, the nose explores). And for the protagonist of Alejo Carpentier’s 1953 *novela de la selva*, *Los pasos perdidos* (*The Lost Steps*):

[I]a selva era el mundo de la mentira, de la trampa y del falso semblante. Allí todo era disfraz, estratagema, juego de apariencias, metamorfosis. Mundo del lagarto-cohombro, la castaña-erizo, la crisálida-ciempiés . . . (*Pasos* 169)

(The jungle was the world of deceit, subterfuge, duplicity; everything there is disguise, stratagem, artifice, metamorphosis. The world of the lizard-cucumber, the chestnut-hedgehog, the cocoon-centipede . . .) (*Lost* 149)

Far from simply replaying the colonial dynamics of western travel writing that aimed to present the environment and its people as fully classifiable, the *novela de la selva* often drew attention to the gulf between stereotypes of the Amazon and the overwhelming nature to be discovered in the region, exemplified by Cova’s frustrated exclamation in *La vorágine*:

¿Cuál es aquí la poesía de los retiros, dónde están las mariposas que parecen flores traslúcidas, los pájaros mágicos, el arroyo cantor? ¡Pobre fantasía de los poetas que solo conocen las soledades domesticadas!
Nada de ruiseñores enamoradas, nada de jardín versallesco. (296)

(Where is the poetry of the retreats? Where are the butterflies that seem like translucent flowers? The magical birds? The babbling brook? Misplaced fantasy of poets who know only domesticated solitudes! Forget besotted nightingales, forget Versaillian garden.)

As Mark Anderson notes in his essay in this volume, this statement “underscores the failure of representation to account for either perception or experience” (75)—a failure that, as he shows, is common to the writings of a number of nonnative Amazonian authors in the first decades of the twentieth century, including da Cunha and fellow Brazilian Alberto Rangel.⁴

Despite the geographical focus of the *novela de la selva*, as Nicomedes Suárez-Araúz insists, its authors should not be classified as “Amazonian” (2). In the 1960s, José Carlos Mariátegui made a similar point when he said that the nonindigenous authors of *indigenismo* could not provide “una versión rigurosamente verista del indio” (292) (a rigorously true version of the Indian). While one might not dispute Suárez-Araúz’s contention that to “claim ‘Amazonian citizenship’ for foreign writers such as H. M. Tomlinson [British author of *The Sea and the Jungle* (1912)] would be equivalent to labelling Joseph Conrad an African writer, or E. M. Forster an Indian author” (2), one could not with such ease dismiss the case of writers such as Uribe Piedrahita or, more recently, Mario Vargas Llosa, who spent much of their careers studying and writing about the region. The *novela de la selva* often represents a profound engagement with the culture of the Amazon region, including indigenous myths and the experience of hallucinogens such as *ayahusaca*.

Therefore, although there is a strong case for including the *novela de la selva* under the auspices of “Amazonian” literature, much of this volume will focus not on this earlier period but on the comparatively understudied texts and oral literature originating in the Amazon itself and created by Amazonians. The recognition of the existence of an “Amazonian” literature varies from country to country within the basin but can largely be traced to the middle of the twentieth century. In the case of Brazil, the country with the largest Amazonian territory, it was not until 1940 that the term was adopted as a useful way of classifying writing from the region (Suárez-Araúz 7), yet Márcio Souza, himself a great Amazonian author, traces the tradition further back to figures such as Bento de Figueiredo Tenreiro Aranha, born in 1769 in the capital of the Rio Negro Captaincy and the “first native Amazonian writer and poet of the Portuguese language” (5), as well as Herculano Marcos Inglês de Souza, author of the renowned naturalistic novel *O Missionário* (1888; *The Missionary*). In the twentieth century, Souza himself has been a leading writer and thinker of the Amazon, best known for his satirical accounts of the period of the rubber boom in *Galvez: Imperador do Acre* (1977; *The Emperor of the Amazon*) and *Mad Maria: Romance* (1980) but also a significant playwright and theorist of Amazonian

identity in works such as *A expressão amazonense: do colonialismo ao neocolonialismo* (*Amazonian Expression: From Colonialism to Neocolonialism*). Another significant figure is the poet Thiago de Mello, a writer of the “Generation of ’45” and member of the innovative Amazonian literary group, the Clube da Madrugada, alongside other celebrated poets such as Astrid Cabral, Elson Farias, and Jorge Tufic. De Mello’s widely translated masterpiece, *Os Estatutos do Homem* (1977; *The Statutes of Man*), brought international recognition to the region, although, as Pedro Maligo concedes, this fame might partially result from his well-known political persecution rather than from “literary merit alone” (164). More recently, the short-story writer and novelist Milton Hatoum has explored Amazonian identity in novels such as *Cinzas do Norte* (2005; *Ashes of the Amazon*) and the 2008 novella *Órfãos do Eldorado* (*Orphans of Eldorado*), which is explored by Candace Slater in this volume. And today, as Bruce Dean Willis’s essay in this collection shows, the Amazon is at the forefront of theatrical production in Brazil, with Manaus generating an ever-growing repertoire of experimental theater.

Sá has said that “[p]erhaps no region in Amazonia has fueled literary imagination more than ‘Guayana,’ the rugged land where the borders of Guyana, Venezuela and Brazil converge” (“Guayana” 185), a transnational space akin to the Amazon itself. In addition to being the point of origin for locally produced and situated texts such as the Pemon creation story “Wazaká” or *Watunna*, the cosmogony of the Yekuana (both of which, as Sá notes, center around Roraima), Guayana has attracted writers as diverse as Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, W. H. Hudson, Alejo Carpentier, Rómulo Gallegos, and Wilson Harris, although many of these, according to Suárez-Araúz’s definition, would not qualify as “Amazonian” (Hudson, for one, hadn’t even been to the Amazon when he wrote his tropical novel *Green Mansions* [1904]).

In the case of Peru, the recognition of the existence of “Amazonian” literature, or at least a literature of the Peruvian Amazon, is fairly longstanding. The Centro de Estudios Teológicos de la Amazonía (CETA), based in Iquitos under the directorship of Joaquín García Sánchez, and until recently its corresponding Biblioteca Amázonica (sadly closed because of financial difficulties at the time of writing) have been energetic in their support of local authors and events related to Amazonian literature across Peru and beyond. So too has the Universidad Nacional de la Amazonia Peruana, also based in Iquitos, which annually publishes *Juegos florales* (edited by the well-known Amazonian poet Ana Varela Tafur), a collection that combines literary criticism and original contributions of poetry and prose, often from the Peruvian Amazon. In his useful anthology *Poesía hispánica de la Amazonía peruana (1880–2000)*, Armando Ayarza Uyaco traces the poetry of the Peruvian Amazon to the first years of the rubber boom, although the search for an Amazonian literary identity only began in

earnest in the twentieth century, when successive collectives of Iquitos-based writers and artists—Trocha, Bubinzana (see Wylie in this volume), Urcututu—sought to formulate a style that would correspond to their local environment. The Peruvian poet and critic Róger Rumrill has called this aesthetic “la sensibilidad de lo mágico” (66) (a magical sensibility), a term that resonates not only with the work of local authors such as César Calvo, who wrote the 1981 novel *Las tres mitades de Ino Moxo*, partly based on the visions of a real-life Amazonian shaman, but also with that of writers across the Amazon basin.

In countries with smaller or less urbanized Amazonian territories, writers have tended to be more marginalized. In the case of Bolivia, literary histories of the country well into the 1980s largely failed to acknowledge literary production from the Amazon region (known locally as *el Oriente* or *el trópico Boliviano*), despite the national and international renown of poets such as Pedro Shimose from Riberalta, the focus of Mayo’s essay in this volume, or Nicomedes Suárez-Araúz, a leading theorist of “Amazonian” literature, discussed in this introduction, who forwarded the Amazonian aesthetic category of “Amnesia” (Suárez-Araúz 187). A 2004 collection of short stories and extracts from longer works by writers “del trópico Boliviano,” edited by Keith John Richards, has helped partially reverse the neglect of these writers, although as Suárez-Araúz has noted elsewhere, the appellation of the region as *tropical* continues to appeal to a climatologic or ecological imperative, whereas “*Amazonian* denotes a specific geo-cultural identification and a historical destiny” (7). Likewise, in the case of Colombia, it is only recently through the efforts of figures such as the Caquetá-born poet Juan Carlos Galeano that the idea of an “Amazonian literature” has begun to take root.

Despite the vastness of the territory, one of the remarkable features of literature from the Amazon is its common concern with nature. In response to the groundbreaking work of literary critics such as Lawrence Buell and Cheryll Glotfelty in the 1990s, there has been a recent surge of interest in the ecocritical dimensions of Latin American texts (Barbas-Rhoden, Handley, Taylor Kane). Barbas-Rhoden ties the preoccupation with natural spaces in Spanish American literature to a critique of neoliberalism, while DeLoughrey and Handley see the turn to ecopoetics in non-Western texts more generally as being connected to legacies of colonialism and globalization. In her *Ecocritical Reader*, Glotfelty notes that “most ecocritical work shares a common motivation: the troubling awareness that we have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet’s basic life support systems” (xviii–xx). A preoccupation with environmental destruction can be seen to span literature of the Amazon. As previously noted, in this volume Nielson explores the “environmental imagination” of the Amazonian writings of Euclides da Cunha, and Mark Anderson concludes his essay on

the “natural baroque” by showing how such discourses heralded “the emergence of an ecological framework for approaching Amazonia” (79). One of the driving concerns of *La vorágine*, for instance, is not only the human cost of the Amazonian rubber boom—the thousands of enslaved and abused rubber workers—but the trees themselves, bleeding “sangre blanca” (287) (white blood), whose destruction leads to “el fraude de las generaciones del porvenir” (298) (the swindle of future generations). This animate view of the forest not only mirrors native Amazonian beliefs but also anticipates modern environmental consciousness in Amazonian authors such as the Peruvian Javier Dávila Durand, who in a 2008 collection of poetry, *La jungla de oro*, included a poem that, according to Jeremy Larochelle, “combines contemporary ecological discourse . . . with Amazonian thought”:

Whoever tears a tree from the earth,
 whoever rips it away from the wholeness of other trees,
 whoever strikes it from the landscape,
 razing its sap-filled entrails,
 whoever destroys it
 and turns it into firewood
 and the smoke fatal to the organism of the Cosmos,
 well, we already know what must be done:
 hang a tree from that arboricidal man’s neck! (cited in Larochelle 201)

Much recent writing from across the Amazon is concerned with environmental degradation, and many authors, such as Rumrill, have also been outspoken on environmental issues.⁵ While the legacy of the rubber boom continues to resonate in the work of contemporary writers such as the Colombian poet Gonzalo Estrada Ortiz in his *Noches Igaraparanaicas* (1999; Nights of the Igaraparaná)⁶ or the Brazilian dramatist and activist Jorge Bandeira (see Willis in this volume), recent Amazonian fiction also laments the cost of more recent forms of exploitation in the region such as the cocaine trade and sex tourism. The 2006 novel *El último guerrero de’ Aruwa: Misterio en las selvas del Putumayo*, by the young author and filmmaker Sandro Meneses Potosí, born in Orito in the Colombian Amazon, is set during the years of the Cali and Medellín cartels and provides a harrowing view of the impact of the cocaine industry in the Amazon. Partly dedicated to the forests of the Putumayo, “pulmón del planeta y esperanza de vida para todos” (Potosí 5) (lungs of the planet and hope of life for everyone), the book prefigures the ecological devastation of the U.S.-sponsored coca-eradication campaign, Plan Colombia, in the Putumayo in the first years of the twenty-first century in its depiction of a river poisoned by Tiodan, an insecticide commonly used by coca farmers in the Amazon:

ningún ser viviente en estas selvas puede resistirse al efecto del mortal Tiodan.

Miles de serpientes grandes y pequeñas, sambicas, chorrosas, mojarras, sábalos, bocachicos, sabaletas, doradas, entre otras especies, fueron aniquiladas impensadamente en tan sólo 100 metros de la cañada en aquel cuarto hora, sin contar los millares y millares de seres vivientes que habitan, beben y dependen de esta quebrada de ahí para abajo. (70)

(no living thing in these jungles can resist the effect of deadly Tiodan.

Thousands of snakes large and small, *sambicas*, *chorrosas*, *mojarras*, *sábalos*, *bocachicos*, *sabaletas*, *doradas*, among other species of fishes, were inadvertently wiped out in just 100 meters of the stream in a quarter of an hour, not to mention the thousands upon thousands of living things that inhabit, drink from, and depend upon the lower portions of this stream.)

This “toxic consciousness” (see Deitering 197) extends to urban Amazonian works set in the seedy underworlds of cities such as Leticia or Iquitos. In the short story collections *La noche de los mashos* (1997; *Night of the Mashos*) and *Hostal Amor* (2006; *Love Hotel*) by the Iquiteño authors Juan Soregui Vargas and Cayo Vásquez, respectively, or the autobiographical novel *Noches de calor húmedo* (2004; *Nights of Humid Heat*) by Gustavo Navias from Leticia, the reader is confronted not with the natural superabundance characteristic of much Amazonian writing but with urban misery as Amazonian people cope with the legacies of long-term exploitation and resource extraction.

One of the persistent questions of Amazonian texts—and of several of the essays in this volume—pertains to the relationship between the human and the nonhuman. In the *novela de la selva*—a genre that, as noted earlier, is nonnative to the Amazon—much consideration is given to the relationship between man and nature. Although the protagonists of this early twentieth-century tradition spend much of their time struggling to make their way through impenetrable undergrowth, rare moments of respite are afforded, as Anderson notes in this volume, when they arrive in clearings where they can reflect on what it means to be human in the Amazonian environment. And what they discover, to their horror, is the collapse of the human/nature dichotomy underpinning categories such as the sublime, which was for so long an aesthetic staple for approaching the Amazon. As Jonathan Tittler notes in his ecocritical reading of *La vorágine*, “Cova’s attempts to save his life by escaping from the jungle are tantamount to his trying to escape from nature itself. This separation—always illusory since despite culture’s achievements it is always subject to the laws of nature—is doomed to failure” (22).

Animism, the theory through which “certain characteristics of personhood can be attributed to artefacts” (Brightman, Grotti, and Ulturgasheva 17), underpins much indigenous Amazonian thought and is present in literature from across the region, leading to a blurring of boundaries between the human and the nonhuman. In the indigenous cosmologies of the Canelos Quichua of eastern Ecuador, Jonathan D. Hill has noted descriptions of “an un-differentiated world that existed prior to the separation of humans and animals into distinct categories of being” (61). And in Amazonian texts of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the boundaries between the human and the nonhuman remain fluid, as Michael Uzendoski notes of the work of the Colombian poet Juan Carlos Galeano: “The complexity of this worldview derives from the fact that animals consider themselves as humans. . . . There are moments when the boundary between this world and other worlds cracks, and people can see animals in their true human form” (x). A concern with the shape-shifting of animals into humans (and vice versa) is a feature of Galeano’s entire oeuvre. In his *Cuentos amazónicos* (2007; *Folktales of the Amazon*), he includes stories of a host of composite figures from across the Amazon basin, including the *Yara* or fish-woman. In *Amazonia*, he includes a number of poems on the well-known *encantado*, the *boto* (freshwater dolphin), to which Slater has dedicated an important study, *Dance of the Dolphin*. In “Pink Dolphins” and “Antiguos,” dolphins are figured as “gringos” engaging in hedonistic behaviour onshore:

Por las noches se transformaban en hombres guapos
y entraban en las fiestas que celebrábamos cerca del río . . .

Vestían elegantes, con cadenas de oro y una boa
delegadita les servía de correa.

Nos decían que esa misma noche había estado de
opera en Manaus y bailando vals en Iquitos. Pero les
gustaba beber nuestro masato y venir a nuestras fiestas. (Galeano,
“Antiguos,” *Amazonia* 59)

(At night they turned into handsome men /And came to the *fiestas* we
held by the river . . . // They were dressed elegantly, with gold chains
and a slim little boa / for a belt // They told us that on that very night
they had been / at the opera in Manaus and dancing waltzes in Iquitos.
But / they liked drinking our *masato* [an alcoholic beverage made from
manioc root] and coming to our *fiestas*.)

Another poem features the Curupira, a spirit protector of game characterized by “un pie mirando adelante y el otro para atrás” (Galeano, “Curupira”

Amazonia 55) (one foot facing forward and the other backwards). Although, as Charles Wagley notes, legends of the presence of such spirits have helped to check the overexploitation of fish and game in the Amazon (234), these figures can also be related to the general breakdown of boundaries in Amazonian society (Uzendoski x).

In this collection Slater draws on Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's notion of "multi-naturalism" in her definition of the term *Encante* (a colloquial form of the noun *encanto* meaning "enchantment" and "enchanted realm") as "both a material location and a cosmology rooted largely in Amerindian visions of the universe as composed of different sorts of natures, as opposed to multiple human cultures" (see Slater in this volume 144). This move away from anthropocentrism is also a feature of two Napo Runa songs from the Ecuadorian Amazon explored by Uzendoski here, which weave together "human and nonhuman relations involving birds, plants, and insects into a shared ontological frame" (see Uzendoski this volume 125). According to Willis's essay in this volume, a number of works by the contemporary Brazilian playwright Jorge Bandeira, including his *A fabulosa loja dos bichos* (The Fabulous Store of the Animals; published 2003, produced 2004 in the Teatro Amazonas), also promote an "ambiguity between animals and humans" through the inclusion of such lines as "É verdade, gente, quer dizer, bichos" (37) (It's true, folks, I mean, fauna)—anthropomorphism that, in this case, allows for the identification of the spectator with the characters against foreign exploitation (Willis 109–10). My own essay in this volume also discusses the reconfiguration of human and nonhuman relations in the Amazon, specifically through the mythical dimensions of a 1986 novel, *Río Putumayo*, by Peruvian author Jaime Vásquez Izquierdo.

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The present collection of essays, from scholars working across Lusophone, Hispanic, and indigenous Amazonian literatures, aims to add weight to the idea of an "Amazonian literature," with common themes and concerns that should be studied apart from national or continental literatures. Over the years, Amazonian texts have returned time and again to the question of how to write about the region's prodigious nature—a question characteristically lampooned in Souza's *Imperador do acre* when the mock-heroic protagonist finds himself marooned on an Amazonian beach, reflecting on the difficulties such a landscape poses for literature. In this collection, the challenge of how to write about nature—and the question of man's relationship to it—remains central to Amazonian literature. Yet the essays also pose new questions relating to contemporary ecological crises or to the negotiation between folk beliefs and modern technology. Far from being a

“vast zone of emptiness” (Lézy 56), this collection confirms that Amazonian literature is, in the first years of the twenty-first century, at the forefront of a mythology-infused ecopoetics that has at its center one of the richest natural environments in the world.

Notes

1. The conservation movement I have in mind is the Pan-Amazon Protected Areas by the World Wildlife Fund. See, for example, its website: www.wwf.org.uk/what_we_do/safeguarding_the_natural_world/forests/forest_work/amazon/pan_amazon_protected_areas.cfm
2. Statement by Eduardo Cortez, cited in Richards’s anthology of literature from the Bolivian Amazon (29).
3. Alongside Stepan, see also Arnold, *The Problem of Nature*, for a discussion of changing views of tropical nature (in this case in India) from paradisiacal to pestilential (8).
4. Kressner makes a similar argument about the conquistadors in William Ospina’s *Ursúa* and *El país de la canela*, whose experience of the Amazon “def[ies] any simplistic belief in a transparent linguistic code to capture and communicate their experience” (181).
5. He has written a number of articles and books on environmental matters in the Amazon, such as his *Reportaje a la Amazonía*, and was former adviser to the Peruvian Environment Ministry.
6. Estrada Ortiz was born in Cali but moved to the Amazon in 1962 and has since been dedicated to the culture and education of the indigenous peoples of the region.

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