

Amazonian Eco-poetics: Paes Loureiro's Shamanic Zoophytography¹

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Abstract

In this article I discuss the notion of Amazonian eco-poetry. Given that poetry from the Amazon expresses Amazonian culture and that culture from the region is marked by an indistinction between nature and culture, between human and non-human cultures and societies, I argue that Amazonian poetry is necessarily an eco-poetry. I subsequently reflect upon the concept of Amazonian perspectivism, developed, among others, by anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, as an entry-point into the interpretation of the multiple metamorphoses that characterize Amazonian literature, broadly understood to include folktales, legends, and so on. I draw a comparison between the Indigenous, shamanic goal of translating between non-human and human perspectives, and Amazonian eco-poetics that allows plants and animals to articulate themselves within human literature. In the final section of the essay, I analyze the writings of Amazonian-born poet João de Jesus Paes Loureiro as an example of Amazonian shamanic eco-poetry. In his texts, legendary and actual Amazonian entities speak in the first person to express the convergences as well as the equivocations that punctuate the myriad interaction between human and non-human beings.

Keywords: Amazonian writing; eco-poetry; perspectivism; João de Jesus Paes Loureiro

Amazonian Eco-poetry as Zoophytography

It is a tall order to discuss Amazonian eco-poetry, given the heterogeneity of the region's cultural production, with its multiple layers of Indigenous cosmologies, riverine and peasant traditions and present-day urban reality spanning nine South American countries.² To add to that complexity, a variety of non-Amazonian authors have penned writings on the area, starting with early colonizers, through eighteenth and nineteenth-century natural scientists, all the way to more contemporary anthropologists and other travelers. Given this palimpsest of superimposed oral and written texts, one is faced with the question: What is Amazonian literature and, by extension, Amazonian poetry? Should we define it broadly as the body of writing *about* the Amazon, independent from the origin of the authors? Or should it refer only to texts by those born in the territory, no matter the content? In his anthology of Amazonian literature, Nicomedes Suárez-Araúz concentrates on poetry and prose by Amazonian-born authors and labels his selection as "writing from the region" (2004, 16). Suárez-Araúz's focus on emplacement as the principal marker of Amazonian textuality testifies to the powerful impact of the natural world on the cultural make-up of the territory. In his view, one needs to *be from* and *be in* the Amazon to be able fully to express its multifarious meanings. It is as if the rainforest leaves an indelible imprint upon Amazonians, whose texts necessarily bear a sign of their origins.

While recognizing lived experience in the area as key to Amazonian writing, I place the emphasis on the engagement with the diverse cultural heritage of the region as the defining trait of Amazonian literature. Amazonian poetry would thus refer to any poetic text that is steeped in the culture of Amazonia, reflects upon and interacts with it. But this seemingly straightforward definition raises another fundamental issue, namely, the understanding of Amazonian culture, which cannot be divorced from the natural environment of the rainforest.

Several anthropologists have underlined the artificiality inherent in the strict divide between nature and culture undergirding Western conceptions of the world, which have been the basis for the implementation of developmentalist projects in the Amazon. The notion that humans are the masters of a natural environment separated from them has justified the unbridled exploitation of Amazonian land as a mere source of natural resources that lay in wait to be appropriated by outsiders. Large-scale logging, mining and monoculture agribusiness ventures are all based upon such conceptions of a nature separated from and understood as a resource for humanity. In an attempt to circumvent this limited view of the natural environment, Bruno Latour suggested the term “nature-culture” (1993, *passim*) to describe the collectives formed by humans and non-humans in our everyday lives, a term that was then adopted by several other thinkers. Donna Haraway, for instance, refers to “natureculture” without a hyphen to highlight the interconnectedness of the two concepts that form the composite (2003, *passim*). In the context of Amazonian anthropology, scholars such as Philippe Descola draw attention to the fact that local populations extend social life and culture to the realm of plants and animals, and thus argue that an understanding of those communities needs to go “beyond nature and culture” (2013, xix-xx). Amazonian culture should then be regarded as the culture *of* the rainforest, that is to say, the culture of the area’s natural world—of its non-human inhabitants—, as much as that of the human beings who call the region home. We thus seem to come full circle back to Suárez-Araúz’s insight that emplacement is central to determining what Amazonian literature and poetry are. But place here is not only the area of human habitation but also the site where non-human and non-living beings interact with one another and with humans.

In light of these reflections, Amazonian literature is best described as a form of writing that thematizes the imbrication of nature and culture in the region to the point where both concepts become indistinguishable. Amazonian poetry is therefore necessarily an ecopoetry, in the sense that it gives pride of place to the interconnectedness of non-humans and humans. The term ecopoetry is a contested one that has been defined in different ways by various scholars. David Gilcrest, for example, does not refer to ecopoetry but discusses “environmental poetry” as a kind of text distinguished from traditional nature poetry in that it presents “the view that all beings, including humans, exist in complex relationship to their surroundings and are implicated in comprehensive physical and physiological processes” (2002, 3). For Gilcrest, the main innovation of environmental poetry lies in its engagement with environmental degradation and the ecological crisis (2002, 4; 21).³ Scott Bryson, in turn, sees ecopoetry as “a subset of nature poetry that [...] takes on distinctly contemporary problems and issues” (2002, 5) and considers that such poems have three main characteristics: “an ecological and biocentric perspective recognizing the interdependent nature of the world; a deep humility with regard to our relationships with human and nonhuman nature; and an intense skepticism toward hyperrationality” (2005, 2). The latter feature, according to Bryson, “usually leads to condemnation of an overtechnologized modern world and a warning concerning the very real potential for ecological catastrophe” (2005, 2).

Beyond the thematization of the natural world, which was already a feature of nature poetry by the writers of Romanticism, among others, a common trait of ecopoetry that emerges from these definitions is a keen awareness of the human embeddedness in the natural environment. Far from being the masters of nature, humans are recognized as being thoroughly dependent on other living and non-living forms of existence that determine all aspects of their lives. In the West, this realization arose out

of the rapid destruction of nature that made writers more conscious of the links between non-human habit loss or devastation and species extinction, on the one hand, and a deterioration of human life on the planet, on the other. This is most likely the reason why scholars tend to associate ecopoetry to the current ecological crisis.

For the peoples of the Amazon River Basin, however, the fact that humans and non-humans form an ecological, social, political and even spiritual whole has always been a given. I define Amazonian ecopoetry, then, not so much as a writing that has the current ecological catastrophe as a thematic background—though many ecopoems from the region do address the topic of ecocide— but, rather, as poetry in which non-humans are active participants in cultural life, together with humans. More specifically, living and non-living beings in Amazonian ecopoetry are active partners in the writing of texts, becoming co-creators of poems. I call this form of writing zoophytography, that is to say, a textuality that is not just about animals and plants—and, one might add, fungi, rivers, and other living and non-living existents—but also *by* animals and plants.

I have described the notions of phytography and of zoophytography at length elsewhere, so I will not go in depth into the genealogy of these terms here (2015; 2018, 70-75). In a nutshell, I understand zoophytography as the inscription of animal and plant modes of expression in human texts, thus integrating the specific forms of existence and of articulation of non-humans into human culture. I see zoophytography as an interspecies writing that opens literary texts to non-human languages and modes of being in the world that write themselves into human texts. True, zoophytography runs the risk of merely ventriloquizing non-humans, exerting violence over flora and fauna by superimposing anthropocentric conceptions of plants and animals onto their radical otherness. At its most audacious, however, zoophytography succeeds in bridging the divide between different forms of existence and in revealing what Amazonian peoples have known all along, namely, that plants and animals have lives and aspirations not so different from our own.

If Amazonian poetry expresses Amazonian culture *and* if the hallmark of Amazonian culture lies on the indistinction between nature and culture, between human and non-human cultures and societies, then Amazonian poetry is always an ecopoetry. The (eco)poetry of the Amazon is thus not a writing *from* the region but a writing *by* the region, that is to say, a writing by all non-humans and humans that call Amazonia their home, that is to say, a zoophytography.

Ecopoetic Shamanism

Renowned anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro has famously written about Amazonian peoples that “if there is a virtually universal Amerindian notion, it is that of an original state of undifferentiation between humans and animals” (1998, 471). Present-day Amazonian culture bears traces of this early communion of life characterized by “beings whose form, name and behavior inextricably mix human and animal attributes in a common context of intercommunicability” (1998, 471). As Javier Uriarte and Felipe Martínez-Pinzón point out, Amazonian stories “often reveal a fluid and constant preoccupation with a sense of merger—between and amongst human and more than human communities” (2019, 6). While beings have now acquired definitive shapes, plants, animals and humans retain a memory of their former state of indistinction portrayed in myths and legends and are therefore able to transform into one another. Metamorphosis of humans into non-humans and vice-versa is therefore a prominent feature of the Amazonian imaginary.

The sense of cross-species fluidity in Amazonian thought and cultural life can be traced back to an ontology that differs radically from the Western one. Castro has described the Amazonian, Amerindian view of the world and of interspecies relations as

“perspectivism.” There is a copious literature on this concept both within the field of anthropology and, more broadly, in environmental humanities scholarship. For the purposes of this article, I will summarize it as a notion that presupposes a spiritual unity of all living beings, who share the same cultural background, the difference between humans and non-humans lying in their bodies. As Castro puts it, “[f]or Amazonian peoples, the original common condition of both humans and animals is not animality but, rather, humanity. The great separation reveals not so much culture distinguishing itself from nature as nature distancing itself from culture [...]. Animals are ex-humans (rather than humans, ex-animals)” (2004, 465). Unlike the Western worldview, which is multicultural—all beings share bodies that abide by the same natural laws and are differentiated by culture—Amerindian thought is multinatural, in other words, the culture of all forms of existence is the same, beings differing from one another due to corporeal diversity (Castro 1998, 470).

The corollary to Castro’s perspectivism is that plants and animals are, at bottom, also “people,” with their own points of view and social lives: “Having been people, animals and other species continue to be people behind their everyday appearance. [...] the different sorts of persons—human and nonhuman (animals, spirits, the dead, denizens of other cosmic layers, plants, occasionally even objects and artifacts)—apprehend reality from distinct points of view” (Castro 2004, 466). If non-humans are “conceived as people—as kinds of humans,” then “relations between the human species and most of what we would call ‘nature’ take on the quality of what we would term ‘social relations’” (Castro 2004, 465). To sum up, in perspectivism, non-humans have “the capacities of conscious intentionality and social agency that define the position of the subject” (Castro 2004, 467) and they are therefore capable of thinking, communicating, making decisions and many other activities that in the dominant Western worldview tend to be attributed almost exclusively to humans.

How do Castro’s reflections on Amerindian ontology intersect with the inter-species metamorphoses that permeate Amazonian cultural life? And how is perspectivism relevant for a discussion of Amazonian ecopoetry and of zoophytography? For Amazonian Amerindian peoples, assuming a plant’s or an animal’s perspective through metamorphosis—by assuming their shape and therefore, by virtue of this embodiment, by taking on their point of view—is a perilous affair. What if a human’s soul is captured by the perspective of another entity and becomes unable to return to itself?⁴ In order to avoid such danger, the willful adoption of another being’s perspective is left to individuals trained to undertake these transformations and then return safe and sound to the human realm, enriched by what they have learned while they became “other.” In Amerindian societies the name of such practice is shamanism, “the capacity evinced by some individuals to cross ontological boundaries deliberately and adopt the perspective of nonhuman subjectivities in order to administer the relations between humans and nonhumans” (Castro 2004, 268).

Shamans metamorphose into non-humans, allowing plant and animal points of view to resound in human ones. Anthropologist Manuela Carneiro da Cunha sees shamans as the ultimate translators that strive to “transpose real contradictions into different languages” (1998, 13), all the while being fully aware of the “difficulties and traps inherent in these passages between languages that are never fully equivalent” (1998, 14).⁵ Drawing on Walter Benjamin’s reflections on the task of the translator, Cunha regards shamans as skilled practitioners of translation that are “capable of apprehending the points of resonance and of making the *intentio* of one language reverberate in another one” (1998, 13). There is an obvious difference between the Benjaminian translator and the shaman, though: the former is working across human

languages, while the latter translates non-human forms of articulation and points of view into human modes of expression. It is perhaps for this reason that, in shamanic rituals, there is a “suspension of ordinary language,” which conveys the “consciousness of relativity, of the ‘truth of relativity (and not the relativity of truth)’” (Cunha 1998, 13). Ordinary human language is not capacious enough to accommodate the difference of non-humans, which can only be glimpsed by resorting to a figurative, truncated idiom, true to the radical alterity of those points of view. The work of the shamans-translators is precisely to “build meaning, establish relations and find intimate connections” (Cunha 1998, 14) between forms of existence that do not share the same language. Like diplomats, shamans mediate between irreducible points of view in an attempt, that always risks failure, to find common ground.

Akin to the shamanic goal of translating between non-human and human perspectives, in Amazonian ecopoetry plants and animals express themselves in a zoophytography that allows for non-human forms of articulation to emerge within human literature. Rather than subsuming non-human points of view into human language, ecopoetic texts stage an encounter between the two. Fully aware of the fact that complete and adequate translation is an impossibility, Amazonian ecopoetry allows for the foreignness of the non-human to linger in the poems. It is perhaps for this reason that, as in shamanic ritual, zoophytographic poetic language often appears as alien or unfamiliar, in its effort to do justice to flora and fauna’s distinctive modes of existence.

In the final section of this article, I will turn to an example of Amazonian shamanic ecopoetry. I will analyze two groups of poems from the book *Enchantments of the World (Encantarias da Palavra, 2017)* by Brazilian poet João de Jesus Paes Loureiro, namely “Myths See Man” (“Os Mitos Vêm os Homem”) and “Nature Sees Man” (“A Natureza Vê o Homem”). In these zoophytographic texts, legendary and actual Amazonian entities speak in the first person to express the convergences as well as the equivocations that punctuate the myriad interaction between human and non-human beings.

João de Jesus Paes Loureiro’s Poetry of Non-Human Voices

Born in the Brazilian Amazon state of Pará, in a small city on the banks of the Tocantins River, which forms part of the large fluvial network of the Amazon River Basin, João de Jesus Paes Loureiro’s texts are indelibly marked by the flora and fauna of his homeland. In his reflections on the specificities of Amazonian culture, he mentions that, in the region, “humans have not yet separated from nature”⁶ (1995, 16). He explains the connections between plants, animals and humans in the territory by referring to the Italian Renaissance painting technique of *sfumato* that softened the transition between colors and shapes, so that they would gradually meld into one another. *Sfumato* creates a zone of undifferentiation between the various figures on a canvas and between those and their surroundings akin to the indistinction between human and non-human lives and cultures in Amazonia that often metamorphose into other forms (Loureiro 1995, 37-8; 2012, 19-20). Given the ongoing exchanges between different beings in the rainforest, Loureiro believes one needs to “wander through the rivers, grope in the dark nights of the forest and look for traces and lost signs in the plains”⁷ (1995, 16) in order to engage meaningfully, creatively and poetically with Amazonia.

Many of Loureiro’s poems have a strong activist slant and he condemns the “coveting of the riches of the [Amazonian] land, which became worse in the past decades” and the “conflicts that result in the extermination or decimation of [Indigenous] tribes [...], pollution of the rivers [...], and large extensions of forests irretrievably burned”⁸ (1995, 16). In his trilogy on the Amazon—including the poetry

books *Oar (Amazonian Poems) (Porantim [Poemas Amazônicos], 1978)*, *Deslendario (Book of Nonlegends, 1991)* and *Altar in Flames (Altar em Chamas, 1983)*, but especially in the first two—, among other texts, Loureiro uses his poetry as a means to denounce the rampant deforestation that plagues the territory and that leads to the dissolution of traditional non-human and human communities expelled from their ancestral lands.

In their strong environmentalist stance, Loureiro's writings fall under the term "ecopoetry" as defined by scholars like Bryson or Gilcrest. Many of his poems can be read as a response to the human-induced environmental degradation of the rainforest undertaken under the banner of "progress" and "development," which those scholars identify as a central to ecopoetry. Significant as Loureiro's condemnation of Amazonian environmental destruction certainly is, my focus here will be on his zoophytographic ecopoetry that brings together a critique of Western-style, extractivist modes of relating to nature and a desire to articulate non-human points of view. How do plants and animals express themselves in his texts? And to what extent can Loureiro's writings be read as shamanic ecopoetry?

In a poem titled "Poetics" ("Poética"), where he mentions some of the central tenets of his writing praxis, Loureiro refers to the "taste of mud of my verses," the "taste of slime / glued to the teeth of the syllables"⁹ (1993, 37) in a clear allusion to the riverine landscape that he returns to time and again in his texts. In the same poem, he writes about "the liana vines enmeshed in consonants / the plentiful migration of schools of fish in the metaphors" that he "collects in the fishing nets / of sound and meaning"¹⁰ (1993, 37). Loureiro's ecopoetry intermingles plants and animals in human language and this non-human presence enlivens consonants and metaphors that maintain a close connection to existence in the Amazon. Flora and fauna are collected—not caught—in his poetic universe through the use of a traditional fishing net ("tarrafa") akin to the ones employed by Amazonian peoples, allowing non-humans to dwell in his texts and make their voices—"sound and meaning"—heard.

Loureiro's zoophytographic ecopoems are thus a gathering place of sorts, open to the presence of all beings that inhabit the Amazon. In a text on literary language, he traces the origins of the Amazonian imaginary, populated by plants and animals, that comes through in his writings to an attitude towards existence that he calls "dibubuismo." The origin of this neologism is the expression "vir de bubuia," or "to come floating," which refers to a particular mode of transportation used by Amazonian peoples to navigate the many waterways in the region. When going downriver in their canoes, Amazonian inhabitants often tie their vessels to small islands of fallen land, trees and shrubs that move with the current and, instead of rowing, steadily go downstream together with those patches of soil and greenery (Loureiro 2012, 15). For Loureiro, the "functional relation between humans and nature"¹¹ (2012, 15) typified by those who "come floating" releases people from arduous physical work and allows them to contemplate their surroundings, to "think about life"¹² and to reflect upon their place within the larger biome of the Amazon rainforest (2012, 16). Loureiro sees in the balanced relation with the rainforest typified by "dibubuismo," whereby humans work with, instead of against, the natural world, the roots of Amazonian existence he portrays in his texts. His collection of poems *Enchantments of the Word* foregrounds both "dibubuismo" and a "sfumato" interpenetration of plant, animal and human lives.

Enchantments highlights the intermingling of what, in a Western frame of thought, is defined as fact and fiction, real and imaginary events, which, in Amazonian cultures, are often indistinguishable. The section of the book titled "Myths See Man" is composed of a series of poems about legendary Amazonian figures such as the river

dolphin, who transforms into a man to seduce young women,¹³ the *curupira*, a human-like guardian of the forest whose feet are turned backwards to deceive hunters, or the *uiara*, a mermaid who inhabits local rivers and is known as the “mother of the waters.” Displaying human and animal traits, these beings embody salient features of the Amazonian biosphere and stand for an environmental ethics of sorts. The ongoing commerce between humans and non-humans can take the form of a love affair—as in the case of the river dolphin or of the *uiara*—but it may also result in the punishment by the *curupira* of humans who violate the unwritten rules of non-human and human coexistence.

Created by human imagination, these mythological beings are no less real and, in this section of *Enchantments*, speak in their own voices, presenting their points of view as they observe humanity. This shift in perspective is not fortuitous. Usually regarded as objects of Western aesthetic contemplation, ethnographic literature or scientific research, plants, animals and the legends of Amazonian peoples, turn that relation of power around in these texts and are the ones who observe humans, commenting upon what they see. The dolphin, for instance, asks rhetorically, “What have you made of me? / An insatiable phallus”¹⁴ (Loureiro 2017, 133), alluding to the sexualized behavior attributed to the animal. And the *curupira* mentions that he prefers to have crooked feet from “so much walking / and guarding the forest,” rather than having perfect feet but no “paths of leaves / upon which to walk”¹⁵ (Loureiro 2017, 142), in an indirect reference to the destruction of the rainforest he seeks to guard. These figures with creaturely traits, a testimony to the inscription of animal life into the human imaginary, speak their mind through Loureiro’s poetry and interpellate readers with their critical takes on human actions. The poems translate the voices of animal-inspired mythical beings, themselves already a translation and a metamorphosis of animals into the mythological creations that are the subjects of this zoographic ecopoetry.

The poems from “Nature Sees Man,” another section of *Enchantments*, also give voice to non-human beings, focusing in this case on the vegetal life of the Amazon. In “Victoria” (“Vitória-Régia”), the renowned waterlily (*Victoria amazonica*) complains that, while being “celebrated / the most beautiful / of floating flowers”¹⁶ (2017, 151), those who watch it bloom only see “what I am not / Only see my appearance” and not “the essence of what I am”¹⁷ (2017, 151). The poem evokes the familiar dualism of appearance and essence that has been central to Western philosophical thought at least since Plato but, in a daring move, applies it to a plant. Traditionally regarded as a being without (or almost without) a soul and, consequently, devoid of interiority—soul and interiority conceived of based upon the model of human existence (see, for instance, Marder 2013, 25-41)—its entire body exposed to the elements, the plant reclaims here the right to be considered in its essence that differs from its appearance. *Victoria amazonica* says that it cannot be reduced to its flowering, thus implying that there is much more to this and to other plants than meets the human eye.

To be sure, we might read the plant’s complaint as just another example of anthropomorphic projection of human thoughts and aspirations onto vegetal life, especially given the fact that plants cannot really see humans. While devoid of eyes, though, plants do recognize different forms of light, including parts of the light spectrum humans cannot perceive (Nansen 2017). But, beyond the plant’s empirical ability to “see,” the poem shows that it has its own perspective on reality and on its relation to humans. The text resorts to tired philosophical tropes questioning their validity when applied to plants and prompting a rethinking of the place of flora within human structures of thought. It points out that the beauty of flowers—the main driver in

the human relation to many plants—can obfuscate the bewildering complexity of vegetal life.

In another poem from the same section, “Jasmin Sees the Poet” (“O Jasmineiro Vê o Poeta”) a jasmine tree also juxtaposes the way in which it is usually regarded and represented by humans to its actual existence. It decries its highly stylized and metaphorical depiction in verse, where its whiteness is sometimes compared to the color of the habit worn by praying nuns and its flowers to hair adorned with bits of moonlight (Loureiro 2017, 154). In both of these portrayals, human beings, their attributes and activities are the standards against which vegetal life is measured. By contrast, the plant “sees itself” as “just a tree with thin branches / that has jasmin flowers, thorns and scent. / And that is happy in being only what it is”¹⁸ (Loureiro 2017, 154). Similar to victoria, the jasmin tree reclaims its own voice and worldview, independent from the human superimposition of species stereotypes upon it. It highlights that “what it is,” happy in its being, differs from human literary tropes and value judgments.

Going back to victoria, giving it, among all Amazonian flowering flora, a voice that enables it to protest against human (mis)appropriation, is a particularly significant gesture. The trajectory of this plant fuses with the broader colonial history of the Amazon River Basin and evokes the place the region still occupies in the Western imagination today as a potential source of natural wonders. It was named after Queen Victoria of England in 1837,¹⁹ after different European botanists brought specimens of the plant to the Old Continent. Having thrived in the Amazon for millennia, victoria was brought half way across the world and given the name of a monarch who never saw it in the wild, a name by which it is still known today. The plant’s fame outside the Amazon—it became known as the largest waterlily in the world, the size of its leaves reaching up to 3 meters in diameter, and gardeners in Europe and North America saw it as a prized possession—came at the cost of severing its connection to its immediate surroundings, other plants, animals and humans from its native region. Its foreign success robbed it of its local identity, which is perhaps what the poem hints at when it mentions that those who see it flower contemplate only an illusory appearance. Crucially, *Victoria amazonica* does not say what its essence actually is. Is the plant in the poem referring to its underwater life that humans cannot perceive? Is it hinting at its family history and relations to other living and non-living beings that are part of the larger Amazonian biome? Readers of these phytophagic ecopoems are left to speculate and find out for themselves.

Given the polyphonic nature of Loureiro’s texts, the expression “Loureiro’s Amazonian poetry” is a misnomer. The poems examined above result from a series of metamorphoses and translations between non-human and human forms of articulation and perspectives, turning the texts into interspecies creations that express a variety of modes of being in the world. This sociability of plant, animal and human cultures within the poems is made possible by the use of a zoophytographic language that shamanically conjures up non-human existence into the ecopoetry of the Amazon.

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Notes

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² As Uriarte and Martínez-Pinzón point out, “[a]t the beginning of this century, more than twenty-three million people lived in the Amazon region. Today, hundreds of languages—indigenous and European, some of the former threatened with extinction—are spoken there” (2019, 1).

³ As Gilcrest puts it, “[n]o other attribute better distinguishes ecological poetry than its presumption of environmental fragility and looming disintegration” (2002, 21).

⁴ In this respect, see, for instance, Lima, 1996, 35-37.

⁵ These and all other quotes from a Portuguese original are rendered in my translation. The page numbers refer to books in the original listed in the Works Cited. In the case of primary sources, the quotes in the original are reproduced in the Notes.

⁶ “os homens ainda não se separaram da natureza”

⁷ “errar pelos rios, tatear no escuro das noites da floresta, procurar os vestígios e os sinais perdidos pela várzea”

⁸ “cobiças da riqueza da terra, agravada nas últimas décadas;” “conflitos resultantes no extermínio ou dizimação de tribos, [...] poluição dos rios, [...] grandes extensões de florestas irremediavelmente queimadas.”

⁹ “gosto de barro de meus versos;” “gosto de limo / entre os dentes das sílabas grudado”

¹⁰ “o cipoal entranhado em consoantes / a farta piracema das metáforas;” “recolho nas tarrafas / de som e de sentido”

¹¹ “relação funcional entre o homem e a natureza”

¹² “pensar na vida”

¹³ For a detailed analysis of myths surrounding river dolphins in the Amazon, see Slater 1994.

¹⁴ “O que fizeram de mim? / Um fálus insaciável”

¹⁵ “de tanto caminhar / e guardar a floresta;” “caminhos de folhas / por onde caminhar.”

¹⁶ “celebrada / a mais bela / das flores flutuantes”

¹⁷ “aquilo que não sou. / Só vê minha aparência;” “a essência do que sou”

¹⁸ “eu me vejo;” “apenas uma árvore de finos galhos / que tem jasmims, espinhos e perfume. / E é feliz em ser somente o que é.”

¹⁹ The plant was initially called *Victoria regia*, whence its Brazilian common name originated, and it was only in the twentieth century that the scientific name *Victoria amazonica* became widely used.

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