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Jaramillo, Camilo

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Amazonia: A Laboratory for Fiction

by

Camilo Jaramillo

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

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in the

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of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Natalia Brizuela, Chair

Professor Candace Slater

Professor Ivone del Valle

Professor Kent Pucket

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Abstract

Amazonia: A Laboratory for Fiction

by

Camilo Jaramillo

Doctor of Philosophy in Hispanic Languages and Literatures

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Natalia Brizuela, Chair

*Amazonia: A Laboratory for Fiction*, analyzes the process and the forms through which Amazonia became a literary topic in the twentieth century. This dissertation proposes that the emergence of modern literature about the region articulates a distrust of the discourses and practices of imperial and neo-colonial territorial apprehension. It proposes the study of a regional tradition, looking at Hispanic and Brazilian texts in dialogue, and it focuses on the self-referential practices of this tradition. By doing so, this dissertation claims that Amazonia has served as a laboratory of representation and fiction that has contributed to the transformation and evolution of the Latin American novel. Ultimately, what is at stake in this research is the emergence of modern literature as a means to destabilize the imageries and practices that have forced Amazonia's integration into processes of modernization. To this extent, this dissertation is an inquiry into the relationship between aesthetics, science, and politics, and constitutes a critique of History. It intervenes in debates on theory of the novel, postcolonial studies, and eco-criticism. The first chapter shows how Euclides da Cunha's *À margem da história* (1909) forges a new national language informed by science and poetics that ultimately creates a new imagery of the region as an inapprehensible space. Da Cunha's essays inaugurate a literary tradition that the "novelas de la selva" further develop by continuing to challenge the modes through which it has been portrayed. To this extent, the second chapter focuses on how José Eustasio Rivera's *La vorágine* (1924) questions the domestication of nature rendered by the aesthetic of *modernismo* and stages a crisis of representation from which Amazonia surfaces as a disorienting and unconquerable site. The creation of the novel *La vorágine* itself is the outcome. Rivera's novel consolidates the modern literature of the region as a self-referencing tradition that underscores its own aesthetic practices, becoming a site that debates and questions the discursive constructs through which the Amazon has been imagined. Following this, the third chapter studies how Alejo Carpentier's *Los pasos perdidos* (1953) constructs the "selva" as an artifice through a mechanism of quotation of previous texts like *La vorágine*, thus generating a critical gap between the text and the "real" geographical referent. The fourth chapter analyzes Milton Hatoum's *Órfãos do Eldorado* (2008) as a critique of the inscription of Amazonia into western "civilizing" discourses of History through the idea of memory as a means to reconstruct the ruins of the present left by modernization.

Para mim, a Amazônia é o mapa de um labirinto infinito.  
*Cidade Ilhada.* Hatoum

Orientarme por la selva de la lengua  
*El entenado.* Saer

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## Introduction: Amazonia, a Laboratory for Fiction

In his 1935 novel *Canaima*, Venezuelan writer Rómulo Gallegos delivers some of the most astonishing images of the Latin American “selva” [jungle]. Much more than a background or even a character, the “selva” appears as an overwhelming and powerful force.

¡Árboles, árboles, árboles! Una sola bóveda verde sobre miríadas de columnas afelpadas de musgos, tiñosas de líquenes, cubiertas de parásitas y trepadoras, trenzadas y estranguladas por bejucos tan gruesos como troncos de árboles. ¡Barreras de árboles, murallas de árboles, macizos de árboles! Siglos perennes de la raíz hasta los copos, fuerzas descomunales en la absoluta inmovilidad aparente, torrente de sabia corriendo en silencio. Verdes abismos callados... Bejucos, marañas... ¡Árboles! ¡Árboles! (119)<sup>1</sup>

The image, excessive, repetitive, and even exasperating, forces us to experience the “selva” as an act of language: we are forced to replicate the recurrence of the trees through the repetition of the word *árboles*, and to entangle our tongues with the words *trepadoras*, *trenzadas*, and *estranguladas*. It also invites us to imagine the location: trees, everywhere, filling the space, claiming it their own, forming a vault held by wooden columns covered in lichens and strangled by other vegetation, forming an impenetrable and hostile barrier of green. Through its perennial and colossal interconnected system, albeit seeming still and quiet, a “torrente de sabia” circulates within. It is like the currents of the sea or like the winds in the atmosphere; forces that alienate humanity in the size of their power and the mystery of its existence. It is sublime, both astonishing and exasperating. It numbs human understanding: “¡Árboles! ¡Árboles! ¡Árboles!... La exasperante monotonía de la variedad infinita, lo abrumador de lo múltiple y uno hasta el embrutecimiento” (119).<sup>2</sup>

Added to this, there is the irrational attraction in beholding it and being part of it:

La obsesión de contemplarla a toda hora, de no poder apartar la mirada del monótono espectáculo de un árbol y otro y otro, ¡todos iguales, todos erguidos, todos inmóviles, todos callados!... La obsesión de internarse por ellos, errante como un duende, despacio, en silencio, como quien crece... De marcharse totalmente, de entre los hombres y fuera de sí mismo, hasta perder la memoria de que alguna vez fue hombre y quedarse parado bajo el chorro de sol del calvero donde hierve la vida que ha de remplazar el gigante derribado, todo insensible y mudo por dentro, la mitad hacia abajo, oscuro, creciendo en raíces, la mitad hacia arriba, despacio, porque habría cien años para asomarse por encima de las copas más altas y otros cientos para estarse allí, quieto, oyendo el rumor del viento que nunca termina de pasar. (136-137)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Trees, trees, trees! A single green canopy over myriad columns velvet with moss, scabby with lichens, covered with parasites and climbers, braided and choked by lianas as thick as the trunk of trees. Barriers of trees, walls of trees, great masses of trees! Endless centuries between root and crown, extraordinary forces beneath the apparent absolute immobility, torrents of sap running in silence. Green silent abysses.... Lianas, thickets... Trees, trees! (173). All English translations of *Canaima* are by Will Kirkland (1996).

<sup>2</sup> “Trees! Trees! Trees!... The irritating monotony of infinite variety; the overwhelming manifestation of multiplicity and singularity to a point of stupefaction” (173).

<sup>3</sup> “The obsession to contemplate it constantly, not to be able to take his eyes of one tree after another after another, monotonous, all of them the same, all of them erect, all of them unmoving, all of them silent! The obsession with disappearing into them, of wandering like a spirit of the jungle, slowly and silently, like something growing... Of leaving completely, of getting away from all men, and from himself, until losing the memory of having once been a man and coming to a stop in the shaft of light in the clearing where the life that will replace the fallen giant is swarming, everything inside him mute and without feeling, one half spreading downward, dark, growing roots, the other half upward, slowly, because it would take one hundred years to climb above the highest crowns and another hundred to be there, quiet, listening to the noise of the wind that never stopped blowing” (198).

The contemplation of the “selva” becomes an obsession; more than that, becoming part of it turns into an urgency: a mystic return to nature. Within its trees, man loses his dimension and his time; he smoothly and quietly detaches from his humanity and transcends into some other kind of existence. He experiences the limits of the intelligibility of the world that surrounds him, encountering like this a form of transcendence. Not only is he in a place out of time, but he is also in a place of silence, where language seems to expire. No wonder, then, that the protagonist of *Canaima* constantly echoes Hamlet by asking “Se es o no se es?”<sup>4</sup> as if understanding the limits and threats of his existence. And at times there is also the “selva” pushing him away, defending itself from the intruder, violently marking the limits between the human who dares to wander and the reign of the woods. When no one is watching, it dusts off its immobility and exercises its own power: “Negros árboles hostiles que por momentos parecen ponerse en marcha sigilosa para cerrar aquel hueco que abrieron los hombres intrusos, a fin de que todo amanezca selva tupida otra vez” (121).<sup>5</sup>

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So there it is. The “selva” as a force, as a metaphysical frontier, as the reign outside human time and place, bigger than man’s humanity. The “selva” as an uncontrollable entity that pushes humans away. The “selva” as a repetition, as a vault, as a barrier, as an impenetrable web, as a torrent that circulates. The “selva” as an abysm, as silence, as darkness, as an insensible entity bigger than life, at the limits of human cognition and language. And of course, the “selva” as language: both as a space and as aesthetics, a dimension of words and of imagination. And one has to stop and wonder: where do all these images come from? Where do they form? What do they respond to? Where, how, and why did the “selva” become a matter of these forms of representation? When did the idea of a “selva” form? To what extent is the word “selva” a creation of the literary endeavor? Rómulo Gallego’s *Canaima* is just one example, only one of the planets orbiting in a literary solar system that imagines the “selva” in this way: other texts, before and after, have extended, repeated, and re-invented these kind of images and imaginaries. This dissertation is about this “selva,” these texts, and tries to answer these questions.

But first I want to start by complicating the word “selva” and defining what I mean when I use it. In a colloquial use the word “selva” is, in Spanish and Portuguese, a term interchangeable with rain forest. This colloquial use of the term derives, however, from a very specific imaginary of what a “selva” is: a site of wild and lush vegetation and animal life. At the same time that it signals actual rain forests, the word “selva” also refers to a trope, in part created by the discourses that this dissertation studies. When speaking of the “selva” one could be making a reference to an indistinct conglomeration of tropical nature, for example the Central American “selva,” or the north Argentinean “selva,” or the Brazilian Atlantic “selva,” just to name a few. However, because of its size or perhaps because of its historical importance, the quintessential “selva” of the Latin American continent is the South American Amazonian region. In this sense, the “selva” to which I refer in this dissertation conjures the trope of Amazonia. As

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<sup>4</sup> Translated by Kirkland as “Are you or aren’t you?” Other possibilities could be “One is, or one is not?” or “to be or not to be?” (my translation).

<sup>5</sup> “Black hostile trees that seem at any moment ready to begin a silent march to fill in the void opened by the intruding men so that dawn will find the jungle close and thick again” (176).



all the other *distinct* geographies that make up our world –the African savannah, the extreme white poles, the northern forests of Europe, or the dry dunes of the Sahara- Amazonia has always already been a construction of language and imagination, inseparable from the human desires and fears that behold it.

Originally derived from the word *silva*, which meant forest or woods, the word has transformed throughout time attaching to its semantic domain a variety of connotations. According to the *Diccionario de la Real Academia*, “selva” refers to an “terreno extenso, inculto y muy poblado de árboles,” an “abundancia desordenada de algo,” or a “confusion [o] cuestión intrincada.”<sup>6</sup> The connotation of “selva” as that which is disorganized, confusing, and intricate points to a very particular understanding of nature as something that has to be organized, cleared up, and systematized. The idea of the “selva” as wilderness or as something that needs to be organized and put into a form is, most certainly, one of the biggest preoccupations of this dissertation. For example, how one gives form to the “selva” in the *form* of the novel is a big concern of this study. Nonetheless, I want to start by calling attention and awareness of the word itself. “Selva” refers to the idea of nature as something that opposes the order that modernity and “civilization” offer. To this extent, the word “selva” is similar to the English word “jungle.” As to avoid the ideological implications of the word “selva,” one could refer to it as a “rain forest,” but this would only trade one problem for another. “Rain forest” implies the use of the semantic domain of the sciences and the perspective of the region through its biological and environmental traits, a choice that is not extent from political and ideological complications.<sup>7</sup>

Throughout this dissertation, however, I will use the words *Amazonia* and *region* to speak of the area of study, but also the words *selva* and *jungle*, which I will stop using under quotations. There is a clear distinction between the two sets of terms: the latter two refer to the *trope* while the former have geographical, political, and environmental implications –that is, they refer to the *real* Amazonia. It must be said, however, that the literary trope is an imaginary creation of the real geographical area and, at least in the literary study that you are about to read, they overlap constantly. This is not to say, though, that I do not make a distinction. If I use the words *selva* and *jungle* I do so aware of the complications they carry. This dissertation is, ultimately, less about Amazonia and more about the *literary creation of Amazonia*. To this extent the words *selva* and *jungle* are not only the words used in the literary texts I study, but they are also re-signified. As I will show throughout the chapters, the idea of the *selva* as that which is disordered and uncontained will be embraced in modern narratives about Amazonia.

This dissertation studies the emergence and development of modern literature about Amazonia. Although I will discuss the term *modern* later on, it is important to clarify now that I am particularly referring to literature produced after the 1900s. It studies how this geographical region became a matter of literary representation, and how it became a matter of fiction. It examines when, how, and why the region became a matter of a distinct linguistic aesthetic representation, and the way in which such representations expanded into the literary field generating intertextual relationships, echoes, repetitions, and systems, ultimately consolidating a literary subgenre in the greater Latin American literary tradition. It examines the emergence and

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<sup>6</sup> “extended and uncultured terrain, very populated by trees; unorganized abundance of something; intricate or confusing thing” (my translation).

<sup>7</sup> See Candace Slater’s *Entangled Edens. Visions of the Amazon* pgs. 137-138.

consolidation of the “novelas de la selva,” but also other texts –essays, short stories, and sometimes poems- that orbit around these novels. In this sense, this dissertation explores the notion that the idea of Amazonia has ignited very particular literary products that have unique ways of understanding the practice of literature, allowing to think and propose Amazonia as a laboratory for fiction.

By highlighting a process of transition of Amazonia and Amazonia’s discourses into the realm of literary and fictional representations, this dissertation is focused on providing a history of the subgenre and an exploration into how these novels think and speak of their own nature as literary objects. In other words, this dissertation provides a (new) historiography of the genre, and it provides an analysis of ways in which these texts reflect on their literary form –their language, aesthetic, images, and genre.<sup>8</sup> In this sense, the essays and novels studied in this dissertation present a *literary version* of Amazonia, and, at the same time, they constitute meta-reflections of the act of translating reality into a literary fiction. Understood like this, the emergence of modern literature and fiction of which I am talking is both a translation of a geography into a literary code –the creation of an imaginary geography-, and, most importantly, the emergence and consolidation of a discourse that asks and answers, at the same time, the following question: *how to write about Amazonia?* In all the following chapters, thus, the prevailing question is the following: given its history, given its nature, given its size, given the voices that claim it and the voices that have remained silent, *how can this region be written, described, summoned, or represented?*

The chapters of this dissertation develop in the chronological order in which the novels it studies were produced. This route illustrates the different stages of the development of modern literature about Amazonia. From a myriad of texts and authors, it chooses only four as its main focus: Euclides da Cunha, José Eustasio Rivera, Alejo Carpentier, and Milton Hatoum. However, these writers are interconnected to many other that appear with different degrees of significance throughout the following pages, like Alberto Rangel, Mario de Andrade, Rómulo Gallegos, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Mario Vargas Llosa, among others. The main texts and writers included have been selected because they exemplify the most important modes through which the selva has been imagined in the literary field, but also, and above all, because they reflect on the act of literary representation itself.

Each chapter deals with a specific set of questions and a specific context making this dissertation a centrifugal work that expands onto varied literary traditions, different political and national contexts, and diverse moments in Latin American history. Although in some chapters the topic of the nation and Amazonia’s inscription or isolation from it will be pivotal, my main approach is to focus less on issues of nationalism and point to the problem of the creation of a literary region –or a region for literature- through texts that are connected and in a deep intertextual dialogue. In this sense, the authors and texts of this dissertation have also been selected because they are intimately related to each other in a literary conversation. This means, as well, that I am proposing a dialogue between the Spanish speaking and the Portuguese speaking America, two literary traditions that have remained, for the most part, isolated. An

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<sup>8</sup> Although most of the Latin American criticism that speaks about the “novelas de la selva” comment on their origin, strictly speaking the only historiography of the genre so far is Lydia de León Hazera’s *La novela de la selva hispanoamericana: nacimiento, desarrollo y transformación*, published in 1971.

example of this is seen in the fact that da Cunha's representation of the Brazilian Amazonia informs Rivera's writing of the Colombian "novela de la selva;" in a similar way, the Cuban born writer Carpentier depicts the Venezuelan selva highly influenced by Rivera's book. Following this, Hatoum's novel reinterprets da Cunha's essays, and makes references to the other writers of the tradition. This dissertation tries to draw an arch –and in many ways a cycle– that starts in 1909 with Euclides da Cunha, and that ends in 2009 with Milton Hatoum. As texts that speak to each other, they draw together an evolution of, and consolidate, the literary imagery of Amazonia for the twentieth century.

Besides the fact that these texts and authors are interconnected and in dialogue, and aside from the fact that they all reflect on the act of literary representation, there is one more feature that binds them together: one way or another they all question, destabilize, and critique the imaginaries and practices that have forced Amazonia's integration into processes of modernization and into the narrative of History. To this extent, the four cases that I study share an ideological position against the longstanding history of Amazonia as a site of colonial desire, a topic that I will touch later on. In this sense, against a tradition of imperial discourses that has depicted and invented Amazonia as a site of conquerable and consumable wealth, these texts stand as examples of post-colonial literary discourses.

This dissertation brings together the particularities of studying Amazonia as a cultural geography, and creates a dialogue with the fields of literary criticism such as theories of the novel, post-colonial studies, eco-criticism, and criticism of the development of Latin American literature. It claims that Amazonia is a real geographical space, but also a discursive construction. Within these discourses, modern and contemporary literature hold a particular place: what makes them different is the fact that they see and build the region through the means of fiction and aesthetic, and this grants them an ideological and formal freedom that re-articulates the way we understand Amazonia. Modern literature (and by modern I mean a kind of literature that underlines form above political praxis), emerged and developed as a field, as a practice, and through an aesthetic that constantly calls attention onto itself, continuously reflecting on the act of literary representation, in what could be called as a continual meta-reflective drive. This drive points to a reflection on literary form in itself and to the inquiry of the appropriate literary form through which Amazonia and the selva could and should be represented. Like rivers that converge into one amorphous sea, most of the reflections on representation and form converge here into the *form of forms*, the novel. The recurrent apparition of the novel as the genre that is able to contain that which is amorphous and confused –the dictionary, we recall, calls the selva a disorganized confusion– speaks of an unwillingness of modern literature to impose a rigid form onto the idea of the selva –to free it from a structure. The constant reflection on representation and the drive to find a form (albeit formless) to contain the selva (although ultimately uncontained), points to the idea of Amazonia as a laboratory for literature. The literature that emerges destabilizes and mines the discourses and practices that forced Amazonia's inscription into modernity and, like this, these novels become an aesthetic paradigm of postcolonial literature. This is, in a nutshell, what this dissertation is about.

### **Amazonia as a Diverse Region**

Amazonia is a geographical region that accounts for a vast portion of the South American territory. It is located in the tropical temperate regions around the equatorial line, and its extension is roughly that of 6.7 million km<sup>2</sup>, and its shared by Bolivia, Colombia, Venezuela,

Ecuador, Guyana, Surinam, Peru and Brazil, the latter two containing the majority of the territory. Strictly speaking, Amazonia refers to the Amazon River basin, the main and biggest river of the area, including its many tributaries. However, because of the many general similarities with the neighboring Orinoco and Surinam regions, it is often implied that they are part of Amazonia as well. One of the most common ways to define this vast region has been through its natural characteristics: Amazonia is a tropical rain forest –the biggest one there is– defined by its temperate climates, its humidity and precipitation levels, its abundant water systems, and, above all, its incredible biodiversity.<sup>9</sup>

Although Amazonia is truly all of the above, it is still much more. From an ecological perspective Amazonia is not only a vast ecosystem of tropical rain forests, but also an area that includes high and low prairies, savannas, and dryer and less dense areas that add up to many different ecosystems within the entire region. In this sense, referring to Amazonia as a unity defined by shared climatic, geographical, hydrographical, and biological similarities is nothing more than a convention. In a similar way, Amazonia is far from being *one* in terms of its cultural, social, and political realities. Behind the famous “tropical rain forest” label, the region is a conglomeration of multiple, different, and unique sub-regions. It is a space shared by complex social and political systems that include indigenous societies of varying social conformations and distributions, local farming societies, towns and cities of different levels of development, and all interconnected by multiple economies, political systems, diverse cultural identities, and many nationalities.

Yet, in our imagination Amazonia is unmistakably and strongly defined. In spite of all the natural, cultural, and social diversity that defines it, Amazonia is recurrently depicted as a green spot on the South American map. This is due, in part, because the region has been defined and delimited mostly by its nature, even though its natural systems are varied. Its predominant vision as a *region of nature* is absolutely inseparable from the way foreign imperial discourses have constructed the area from as early as the conquest of the American continent. In this sense, although today Amazonia refers to a defined geographical area, it is also the result of the many discourses, representations, and depictions that foreigners and locals have delivered and reproduced. As much as it is a real geographical area, it is also a construction that has been defined in the last five centuries. In spite of its diversity and complexity, the cultural imaginations of Amazonia have been so strong that they have become interchangeable with the real geographical area, generating problematic perspectives of the region.

As a stereotypical “green spot” on the South American map, Amazonia is one vast region that knows no political frontiers. However, imaginary lines break up the region into territories of eight different nations (although these lines have always been blurry and unstable, generating some of the region’s most noticeable disputes).<sup>10</sup> Each one of these nations has a unique culture, language, and history and, above all, a unique way of imagining, representing, integrating, and governing, the Amazon. The different fractions into which the region has been divided respond to different political centers, such as Lima, Bogota, La Paz, Rio de Janeiro or Brasilia. This

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<sup>9</sup> John Hemming’s 2009 *Tree of Rivers: The Story of the Amazon* offers a useful introduction to Amazonia as a geographical, biological, and cultural region.

<sup>10</sup> Paul E. Little’s 2001 *Amazonia: Territorial Struggles on Perennial Frontiers* offers an example of the ways in which frontiers within Amazonian nations have long histories of conflict.

fragmentation into different national centers contributes to the centrifugal character of the region and has important consequences. To almost all the Amazonian nations, the region has been a peripheral territory far from the centers of governance and economy. In this sense, although the region is right at the heart of the continent, it is ironically composed of multiple “far away” and “frontier” territories, often politically isolated from the centers to which they respond, and hard to reach from its capitals.

A consequence of this peripheral placement is the way in which each nation has integrated the region according to its own history. For example, the way Colombia conceived its Amazonian territories in the beginning of the twentieth century is inseparable to the anxiousness generated by the country’s loss of the Panama territories in 1903. Afraid of loosing more portions of its map, Colombia’s political gaze paid close attention to its southern forests and the possibility they offered in the advancement of national modernization projects. This will be further explained in Chapter Two, in the analysis of José Eustasio Rivera’s *La vorágine* [The Vortex]. In a similar way, Brazil’s understanding of Amazonia is highly connected to the nation’s definition as a Republic, and to the War of Canudos in 1897. The integration of Amazonia into a national imaginary was highly influenced by Euclides da Cunha’s masterpiece about the war, *Os sertões* (1902), and the new questions about a Brazilian identity that the book posed. This will be seen with further detail in Chapter One, in the study of Euclides da Cunha’s *A margem da história* [At the Margins of History]. This dissertation’s intention is not to elaborate on the particularities of each nation’s relationship with their Amazon territories, but to remark that the presence and relationships that Amazonia has had in each nation is varied and specific. This work does highlight, though, the pivotal role of literature in the creation of a form of visibility in each nation’s cultural imaginary.<sup>11</sup>

Discourses about Amazonia as a *whole* or as a *unity* must be taken with a grain of salt, both environmentally and politically. The predominant conception of Amazonia as *one* defined area responds to the problematic yet recurrent depiction of it being a territory of *nature*. This dissertation’s approach to Amazonia as a place where international and interregional connections are possible responds less to environmental and political concerns, and more to an inherent desire of its literature to generate a common imaginary of that which is otherwise diverse, varied, and distinct –that is, literature’s tendency to make Amazonia the trope of the selva. As it was already mentioned, this dissertation is less about Amazonia than it is about the literature about Amazonia, a pivotal distinction that defines the frame through which I study the region.

Because Amazonia has been often defined by foreign voices, talking about literature about the region urges a clarification. This dissertation focuses on literature *about* the region and not *from* the region. In this sense, the texts and authors that this dissertation studies belong, mostly, to non-Amazonian centers, and their author’s relationship to the region has been defined by their travels. This is especially true for Euclides da Cunha, José Eustasio Rivera, and Alejo Carpentier. However, as it will be seen on Chapter Four, Milton Hatoum’s relationship to Amazonia, and the possibility of describing him as a local writer, will complicate this. In spite of the distant relationship of these writers from the *ciudad letrada* to Amazonia, this does not

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<sup>11</sup> Margarita Serje’s book *El revés de la nación: Territorios salvajes, fronteras y tierras de nadie* (2005), from a sociological and anthropological perspective, offers an example analysis of the role Amazonia has had in the construction of the Colombian identity and politics.

necessarily mean that the *foreign traveler voices* have been impermeable to the *local voices*. Often, modern travel narratives of Amazonia as the ones studied here are complex polyphonic representations of the region. In addition to this, Amazonia has never been isolated from the rest of the world and, from the nineteenth century on, it has been a space open to different types of migrations. The *foreign* construction of the region –Amazonia as nature- has proven to be so overwhelmingly powerful that it would be naïve to think that *foreign* and *local* visions of the region are not somewhat interconnected and in dialogue. This will also be seen in Chapter Four, in the analysis of Milton Hatoum’s novel *Órfãos do Eldorado* [Orphans of Eldorado].<sup>12</sup>

The predominant construction of Amazonia as a region of nature has often made invisible the complex demography of the area. The most common human presences associated with the region are its indigenous societies. However, Amazonia hosts today approximately 30 million people including, for example, isolated and integrated indigenous groups, agricultural farmers, and international corporate executives working in highly industrialized cities like Manaus, among many others. It is a place inhabited by diverse groups of people of multiple nationalities, ethnicities, and backgrounds. In the essays and novels that this dissertation studies the predominant voices are those of travelers, *colonos* [migrants who have settled in Amazonia], or local workers. That is to say that they are the voices of those who experience Amazonia as the crossing path of national and international economies, and they bring into their experience of the region a foreign perspective, or are highly influenced by it. Indigenous voices and traditions, although influential in many of the texts and authors that I study, do not have a strong presence in this dissertation. This responds to the fact that the literature that I have been focused on is influenced by a Western idea of literature and culture. Further complicating this is a necessary counterpoint for this project. This will be done in the future, for example, by exploring the dialogue between Western literature and indigenous traditions in *indigenista* novels like César Calvo’s *Las tres mitades de Ino Moxo* [The Three Halves of Ino Moxo] (1981), and on the debate on *indigenista* literature developed in Mario Vargas Llosa’s *El hablador* [The Storyteller] (1989).

Amazonia is, thus, diverse and multifaceted. More than a unique geographical, natural, and cultural region, it is a constructive convention that names a centrifugal system of systems. A region made up of kaleidoscopic realities, one could say. The literature that this dissertation studies is just a fraction of its complexity and diversity. Nonetheless, literature and popular images of the region, albeit simplistic, have informed the way we think and see Amazonia. In this sense, studying, deconstructing, and revealing the why’s and how’s of “the green spot on the map” is more than a necessary endeavor.

### **Amazonia as an Imperial Desire**

As much as Amazonia is a real and complex geographical area, it is also a *written discursive creation*, crafted throughout the centuries since the discovery and conquest of America, and often done by foreign voices. Ana Pizarro summarizes this well by saying that:

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<sup>12</sup> Lúcia Sá’s book *Amazonian Literatures: Amazonian Texts and Latin American Culture* (2004) offers an analysis of the indigenous influences in westernized Latin American literary works. All of Candace Slater’s works noted on the bibliography offer ample analyses and comparisons of visions of Amazonia by foreigners and locals.

La Amazonía es una región cuyo rasgo más general es el haber sido construida por un pensamiento externo a ella. Ella ha sido pensada, a nivel internacional, a través de las imágenes transmitidas por el ideario occidental, europeo, sobre lo que él ha considerado su naturaleza, es decir, sobre el papel que ha ocupado la Amazonía en su experiencia, y esta imagen ha sido consignada en diversos escritos: crónicas, relatos de viaje, informes de científicos, relatos de misioneros... La Amazonía es, pues, tal como la percibimos desde su descubrimiento por los ojos del hombre occidental, la historia de los discursos que la han construido, en diferentes momentos históricos y de los cuales hemos recibido parte de la información, la que permite fundamentalmente identificar el discurso de los europeos sobre ella. La Amazonía es, entonces, una construcción discursiva. (28)<sup>13</sup>

Throughout this dissertation I claim that 20<sup>th</sup>-century literary discourses of Amazonia question, critique, and destabilize previous imperial representations of the region. They do so by depicting it in a very different way than the imperial narratives did, yet maintaining a close dialogue with them. They are, one could say, forms of re-writing and re-articulating previous representations. The texts and authors that this dissertation studies are conscious of the fact that Amazonia has been, as Pizarro states, a foreign discourse with the power of determining how we see and relate to the region.

The point of departure for this study is the identification and analysis of European discourses and their creation of Amazonia as a site of imperial desire. In the following paragraphs I will focus on two particular examples that demonstrate the representations, imageries, and projects through which the region was inaugurated in Western traditions. At large, imperial discourses depicted Amazonia as a territory that ought to be conquered, possessed, and consumed. They presented the land as a space that needed to be included and comprehended within the territorial confines of the imperial expansion. Amazonia appeared through a set of information and knowledge that informed and secured the growth and accumulation that sustained and defined colonialism. The writings through which this information was transmitted served as a practice that *inscribed* Amazonia into the values, projects, and worldviews of the West—that is, they *wrote Amazonia into* Europe’s project of the expansion of “civilization,” and they helped defining the way in which Amazonia was going to be later on inscribed into processes of modernization. In other words, they *inscribed* the region, its nature, and its societies into the teleology of capitalism, and ultimately into the western narrative of History—a narrative that conceived the expansion of a secular capitalist system as a promise of freedom and redemption of human “backwardness” and nature’s “wilderness.” These texts inaugurate a way of thinking and depicting Amazonia as *the* sight of consumable nature, but above all, they establish an essential aspect in the construction of the region that will be pivotal for this dissertation: the importance of *writing* as a practice that configures how we understand the region.

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<sup>13</sup> The most general characteristic of Amazonia as a region is that it has been constructed by a foreign thought and voice. It has been thought, at an international level, through images that have been transmitted through the Western European imagery, about that which Europe thinks is its nature. That is, it has been thought according to the role Amazonia has occupied in its imagination. This has been consigned in diverse writings: chronicles, travel narratives, scientific and missionary reports... Amazonia is, thus, as we perceive it since its discovery by the Western man, the history of the discourses that have built it, from where we have received part of the information, which fundamentally lets us identify what Europeans think of it. Amazonia is, thus, a discursive construction (my translation).

The first European chronicle of Amazonia was written by Gaspar de Carvajal in 1542, a Dominican missionary that traveled in Francisco de Orellana's expedition, the first one to navigate the Amazon River all the way from the near east of the Andes to its delta into the Atlantic Ocean. Many of the founding myths associated to the region were inaugurated in this chronicle, like the legend of the golden city of El dorado, or the legend of the warrior women, the Amazonas, that explains the name with which the region has been known since. As critics have already explained (Pizarro, Maligo, Slater) these myths projected many of the illusions, fears, and desires through which Europeans related to the land. El dorado conjured the idea of Amazonia as a land of wealth that was there for Europe's recollection. The feared Amazonas conjured the idea of fertility and abundance through the image of women that needed to be tamed and penetrated. Their aggressiveness and readiness to attack –as they appear in Carvajal's account- could be interpreted as a symbol of the fears and challenges that the newly discovered territory posed to the eyes and projects of the *conquistadors*. These founding images, as Candace Slater has explained (9), have been so powerful and, in a way, so (problematically) useful for the empire and for capitalism, that even though they have disguised and transformed throughout the centuries, they have persisted and endured.

Cristóbal de Acuña's chronicle *Nuevo descubrimiento del Gran Rio de las Amazonas* [New Discovery of the Great River of the Amazons] from 1641 offers a vivid example of the first types of writings about the region. Acuña traveled as an accompanying reporter on the second incursion of Pedro Texeira. Presented as a paradoxical *nuevo descubrimiento* –a re-discovery- Acuña's text highlights, perhaps better than Carvajal's, the association between representation and the empire's colonial ambition. The text was pivotal in informing what portions of the Amazon territories were going to belong to the Spanish or the Portuguese crowns. To this extent, Acuña's text is not only a narrative of (re)discovery and conquest, but it is also informed by the competing desires of territorial possession between the two Iberian powers.<sup>14</sup>

Right from the start, *Nuevo descubrimiento* represents Amazonia as a fertile, abundant, and gentle *locus amoenus*. “Del río de las Amazonas se puede afirmar” –states Acuña- “que sus orillas son en la fertilidad paraísos, y si el arte ayuda en la fecundidad del suelo, será todo él unos apacibles jardines” (2).<sup>15</sup> He goes on to explain that in this amenable garden “el río es abundante de pesca, los montes de caza, los aires de aves, los árboles de frutas, los campos de mieses, la tierra de minas, y los naturales que le habitan de grandes habilidades” (3).<sup>16</sup> He concludes, thus, that the territory “se pudiera llamar a boca llena un dilatado Paraíso” (24).<sup>17</sup> Acuña's representation focuses on nature and its productive potential as the primordial element that defines the region, and highlights its abundance as a resource that would be easy to obtain. The reference to the Biblical Paradise implies a vision of the territory as pristine and untouched, not only providing the possibility of an amenable and effortless consumption, but also a space that welcomes and awaits the involvement of “civilized” men through their agricultural intervention.

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<sup>14</sup> For more on this, see Anthony Smith's *Explorers of the Amazon* (1994).

<sup>15</sup> “Of the Amazon River one can say that because of their fertility its shores are paradises, and if art aids in the fecundity of the soles, they will be peaceful gardens” (my translation).

<sup>16</sup> “the river is abundant for fishing, the hills for hunting, the skies of birds, the trees of fruits, the fields for cereals, the earth for minerals, and the natives that inhabit them of great abilities” (my translation).

<sup>17</sup> “It could be truly called an extended Paradise” (my translation).



The indigenous population, although a strong presence in the chronicle, is represented as an added element that, as nature, will not oppose to the advantages the land offers.

Within this paradisiacal environment, the text highlights nature as a commodity, specialty pointing to wood –“están las maderas a pedir de boca” (27)<sup>18</sup>-, cacao, and tobacco as the main products of the land. Acuña points that there are many other products that would contribute to “el aumento de la Corona Real,” such as “el algodón que se coge en abundancia, el urucú, que es con lo que tienen perfecto colorado..., la cañafistula, la zarzaparrilla, los aceites que compiten con los mejores bálsamos en el efecto de curar heridas, las gomas y resinas olorosas, [y] la pita del que se saca el más estimado hilo” (30).<sup>19</sup> Acuña’s chronicle not only represents Amazonia as a consumable garden that would *augment the Crown*, but also codifies and abstracts nature through its uses and values. Together with this, the chronicler states that this Amazonian garden has the most abundant and rich “minas de oro y plata” that should be “más ricas que todas las del Perú” (31).<sup>20</sup>

At large, the territory is described as having “apacibilidad de temples” of immense beauty and freshness. “Y aunque en lo común es tierra baja,” explains Acuña, “tiene también altos bien proporcionados, campiñas desembarazadas de arboledas y cubiertas de flores; valles que siempre conservan la humedad, y en lo más retirado, cerros tales que pueden pasar con el nombre de cordilleras” (25).<sup>21</sup> Anticipating the landscapes of the nineteenth century, Acuña’s depiction represents Amazonia not only as an abundant garden, but also as a country apt and desirable, where an Empire could extend itself. Who wouldn’t desire to possess and expand on these well-proportioned terrains, with flowering valleys and hospitable hills? In other words, “aquí” [here] – that is, Amazonia- is the place to conquer and inhabit. It is a place that would even provide the material sources for the empire’s expansion: the wood and people in its forests could serve to build ships and vessels. In a celebratory list that repeats the adverb “aquí” Acuña lists some of these benefits (and it is interesting to keep in mind that in 1924 Rivera’s *La vorágine* will re-write this same list using the adverb “aquí” to describe a very different kind of nature):

Aquí, como digo, están las maderas a pedir de boca; aquí la jarcia tan fuerte como la de cáñamo... aquí la pez y brea tan perfecta como la arábica; aquí el aceite, así de árboles como de pescados... Aquí el algodón para el velamen... y aquí, finalmente, está la multitud de gente... con que no falta nada para fabricar cuantos galeones se quisieren poner en un astillero. (27)<sup>22</sup>

The natural conclusion to which Acuña arrives is, thus, the following: “En este gran río está todo encerrado: aquí el lago dorado, y aquí los ricos omaguas... Y aquí está finalmente

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<sup>18</sup> “woods are upon request” (my translation).

<sup>19</sup> “the augmentation of the Royal Crown; the cotton that is picked up with abundance, the *urucú* with which they elaborate a perfect red ink, the cassia tree, the wild berries, the oils that could compete with the best ones in curing wounds, the rubber and the fragrant glues, and the laze from which an esteemed thread could be obtained” (my translation).

<sup>20</sup> “gold and silver mines; richer than all of the ones in Peru” (my translation).

<sup>21</sup> “peaceful climates; and although it is a low and flat land, it also has well proportioned hills, lands without trees and covered with flowers, and valleys that are always humid, and mountains that could pass as mountain ranges” (my translation).

<sup>22</sup> “Here, as I said, wood is upon request, here, rigging as strong as a fiber, here tar and oils as perfect as the ones from Arabia, here the oils from trees and from fish... Here, cotton to thread sails, and here, finally, the multitudes of people, with which nothing lacks to build galleons” (my translation).

depositado el inmenso tesoro que la majestad de Dios tiene guardado para enriquecer con él la de nuestro gran rey y señor Felipe IV” (33).<sup>23</sup> Amazonia as a paradisiacal, amenable, abundant, and consumable garden was, as the last quote indicates, destined to be conquered, possessed, and used by the European empire.

The arrival of the European conquistadors is also the arrival of a purpose and a destiny for this nature: to be integrated into the empire’s gaze. More than that, the act of writing and describing Amazonia as a conquerable space of nature *authorizes* its consumption: the written word ignites, builds, and justifies a project of expansion and possession. At the same time that it is being depicted, Amazonia is integrated into the narrative of Western expansion and accumulation, and thus into the narrative of Europe’s History. Amazonia’s nature and land are, in other words, the fuels with which, and upon which, the History of the West will continue. No wonder, then, that the first sentence of Acuña’s text is the following: “Es el famoso río de las Amazonas, que corre y baña las más ricas, fértiles y pobladas tierras de todo el imperio del Perú; el que de hoy en adelante podemos, sin usar de hipótesis, calificar por el mayor y más célebre del orbe” (1).<sup>24</sup> “De hoy en adelante” [from now on], part of the first words of the text, are also, symbolically, the *temporal* inauguration and integration of Amazonia into the times of History. This implies that History is something very particular to the Western economic and political expansion project, and implies, as well, that Amazonia supposedly ‘did not have a history’ before its encounter with Europe. (Amazonia’s integration or isolation from the narratives of History will be discussed at large at the end of the introduction). In other words, writing translates (invents) Amazonia into the categories of space and time that supported and defined Western imperialism. It is no coincidence, as it will be seen throughout this dissertation, that twentieth century literature about the region will focus on destabilizing precisely these two categories, space and time.

Representations such as the ones from *Nuevo descubrimiento* reveal the tight connection between the representation (and invention) of Amazonia and imperialism. The region is both the empire’s representation seen through their ideological, cultural, and social lenses, but also, and most importantly, the creation of the region as a commodity. In other words, imperial representations perform a dual role: they depict through a desire that ultimately creates the desired object. As Stephen Greenblatt explains,

any given representation is not only the reflection or product of social relations but that it is itself a social relation, linked to the group understandings, status hierarchies, resistances, and conflicts that exist in other spheres of the culture in which it circulates. This means that *representations are not only products but producers, capable of decisively altering the very forces that brought them into being.* (My emphasis 6)

In this sense, Amazonia is a representation/invention that points to what Greenblatt calls the “connection between mimesis and capitalism” (6). The act of representation reflects the desire that ultimately constitutes the economic demand. The act of representation is informed by and consolidates capitalism.

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<sup>23</sup> “This great river has it all enclosed: here the golden lake, here the *omaguas*... And here, finally, all the treasures that God his majesty has kept to enrich our great lord and Sir Philip IV” (my translation).

<sup>24</sup> “This is the famous River of the Amazonas, that runs through, and bathes, the richest, most fertile and populated lands of all Peru; from now on, we could call it, without hyperbole, the biggest and most famous of the earth” (my translation).

Acuña's representation of Amazonia is exemplary of the type of imperial desire that structured the way the region was represented in the first centuries of the colony (from 1492 to 1700 approximately). Chronicles like this constitute a colonial embryonic form of capitalism defined by expansion, possession, consumption, and appropriation. In the following years, by the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, the imperial writings about Amazonia changed in their discursive texture. The imperial desire seemed less interested in possession and settlement (by then Amazonia was indisputably Spanish and Portuguese), and more concerned with the benefits brought by the study and commerce of its products. The deep change in the economy responded, in part, to the Industrial Revolution and the way it veered the empire's attention to a focus on products for the development of trading international economies (wood, minerals, rubber). In addition to this, the development of science was pivotal in transforming the discursive nature of the writings about Amazonia. Texts like the one written by Charles Marie de la Condamine, *Relation abrégée d'un voyage fait dans l'intérieur del'Amérique méridionale* (1759) show the decline of the mythical imagery (that of golden cities and warrior virgins) and the emergence of the production of practical knowledge: Amazonia started to be not only described, but also measured, studied, catalogued, and collected.

The production of knowledge reinforced the idea of Amazonia as a desired and collectible land of natural wealth. This is the moment when naturalist travelers enter the scene, and when their scientific writings inscribe Amazonia into another fraction of the narrative of History: modernity. Similarly as to when the region was inscribed in the colonial expansion of Europe, science inscribed Amazonia into modern times; the region had to be included in processes of modernization, and it would, at the same time, provide the primary source to its development. Science was the epistemological framework through which nature was described, understood and, ultimately, symbolically owned by imperial powers. As Mary Louise Pratt explains, scientific discourse "called upon human intervention (intellectual, mainly) to compose an order" out of nature (31). This ordering gaze selected, organized, compartmentalized, studied, named, collected, and appropriated nature to the benefit and use of Europe's capitalist and industrial projects. As she explains, the accumulation of knowledge (and the literal accumulation of specimens) signaled the scientific practice as a form of accumulation of capital that "at the same time [modeled] the extractive, transformative character of industrial capitalism, and the ordering mechanisms that were beginning to shape mass society in Europe under bourgeois hegemony" (Pratt 36). Modern scientific thought offered, "the picture of the planet appropriated and redeployed from a unified, European perspective" (Pratt 36).

Henry Walter Bates' 1863 *The Naturalist on the River Amazons* is an exemplary case of a naturalist narrative about Amazonia. It is situated at the peak of English imperial expansion, and highly informed by the emergence of science as a form of power through knowledge. Bates' depiction of Amazonia is not simple, offering the possibility of many interpretations. Bates embodies a perfect model of the scientific imperial writer, but his sensibility and awareness of the contradictions of his time make his text complex and layered. Nonetheless, Amazonia appears as a clear object of study whose comprehension is pivotal for the modernization process of the empire.

The first element to consider is the appearance of Amazonia as a territory represented through landscape conventions. In the following quote, the region appears under the traveler's

gaze (the European male vision used as a tool of power), whose eyesight apprehends “the totality” of the land stretching far into the horizon:

westward, stretching towards the mouth of the river, we could see through the captain’s glass a long line of forest, rising apparently out of the water; a densely-packed mass of tall trees, broken into groups, and finally into single trees, as it dwindled away in the distance. This was the frontier, in this direction, of the great primaevial forest characteristic of this region, which contains so many wonders in its recesses, and clothes the whole surface of the country for two thousand miles from this point to the foot of the Andes. (11)

This landscape represents Amazonia as an extension of water and trees that, extending into unreachable distances, contains lush, fertile, and abundant “wonders.” The simplicity with which the space is defined implies a cognitive control of the land, as well as it transforms the land into a territory, that is, a land subjected to power. The captain’s looking-glass through which Amazonia is seen highlights the “I/eye” –both as a gaze and as a subjectivity- that beholds and controls the territory, while it also symbols science and technology as a form of apprehension of the horizon. It depicts the region as a conquerable natural extension where the subject appropriates the object, and in which the representation itself –the form of the landscape- acts as a form of control and apprehension. Further than that, a landscape such as this, described as a “frontier” that waits with “wonders,” speaks of a specific form of horizon-as-time, understood, as W. J. T. Mitchell explains, as “an inevitable progressive development in history, an expansion of ‘culture’ and ‘civilization’ into a ‘natural’ space in a progress that is itself narrated as ‘natural’” (17). In other words, this landscape aids in the integration of Amazonia into a modern narrative of History-as-progress by integrating its nature into the machinery of capitalism. In other words, it is the integration of space into the category of History, an act that makes the space itself a site where the development of History can and should take place.

Bates also delivers a vision of Amazonia from within, at what we could call an eye leveled gaze:

But amidst all, and compensating every defect, rose the overpowering beauty of the vegetation. The massive dark crowns of shady mangos were seen everywhere amongst the dwellings, amidst fragrant blossoming orange, lemon, and many other tropical fruit trees, some in flower, other in fruit, at varying stages of ripeness. Here and there, shooting above the more dome-like and somber trees, were the smooth columnar stems of palm trees, bearing aloft their magnificent crowns of finely-cut fronds. Amongst the latter the slim assai-palm was specially noticeable, growing in groups of four and five; its smooth, gently-curving stem, twenty to thirty feet high, terminating in a head of feathery foliage, inexpressively light and elegant in outline. On the boughs of the taller and more ordinary-looking trees sat tufts of curiously-leaved parasites. Slender, woody lianas hung in festoons from the branches, or were suspended in the form of cords and ribbons; whilst luxuriant creeping plants overrun alike tree-trunks, roofs and walls, or toppled over palings in a copious profusion of foliage. (13)

Vegetation appears here as paradisiacal, both beautiful and soothing. It is a lush and exuberant garden, full of ripe fruits ready to be taken, and filled with interesting and playful creatures. In this sense, the extended landscape seen through the looking-glass is composed of a gentle, productive, and highly discernible nature. The empire’s gaze and cognition is thus capable of beholding the extension and the depth of Amazonia. Nature is described through an architectural metaphor with the mention of domes and columns as an enjoyable structure. Within this space, things are “noticeable,” even in the distance, as the assai-palm, with its “light and elegant outline.” This is a garden where forms and textures are clear and decipherable. The “slender, woody lianas hung in festoons from the branches,” appear if they were completing the

decorative aspects of a garden. This second landscape completes the vision of Amazonia as nature: in tandem, they deliver a message of extension and quantity.

Europe's imperial construction of the region can be summarized in the following sentence: Amazonia is a vast conquerable and *knowledgeable* territory, the absolute reign of consumable nature that ought to be both the source and the objective of the modern project. To be "modern" or to ascribe into modernity is to conceive nature as that which limits or serves as a frontier to the "civilized." Nature appears as the condition *sine qua non* there is no modernity: one becomes modern as one differentiates (is apart from) and integrates (tames) and uses (consumes) nature. To this extent, not only Amazonia, but also the category of *nature* is a cultural construction that informs and is informed by the economic and political systems in which it is interlocked. Later on, when I delve onto the ecological preoccupations of this dissertation, I will go back to the idea of nature as a category that is always under negotiation. For now, however, it will suffice to say that the representation and inscription of the natural world by European centers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was more than a projection of an imperial desire; it was also the definition of nature as a category through which, and upon which, modernity established itself.

The discursive representation of Amazonia as a site of consumable wealth materialized in an unprecedented way by the end of the nineteenth century with the extraction of latex. In the mid eighteenth century, led by the French naturalist explorer Charles Marie de la Condamine, Europe's attention was drawn into the sticky and milky juice extracted out of the bark of certain trees in Amazonia. The varied uses of the coagulated latex juice from these trees became rapidly visible to the European industrial minds. One of its many uses would be to serve as a *rubbing* gum that would erase the marks of pencils, from where the name "rubber" came. From this point on, rubber became one of the most wanted Amazonian natural products used in varied industries that range from the automobile business to diverse industrial uses. Although the region offered a variety of "goods" for European commercialization, from gold to animal skins, none of them generated the social, cultural, and commercial impact that the extraction of rubber created. Europe's demand for rubber grew in tandem with its industrial and modern growth, rapidly positioning Amazonia as an unprecedented supply of material resources. The rubber boom opened and integrated the region into the modern flow of capital, attracted migration from all over the world, changed the social landscape of the region, and created an industry that would make of Amazonia one of the epicenters of modernity in the turn of the century. The rubber boom, together with the extraction of gold and wood, rapidly became one of the first systematic forms of extraction that made the idea of "El dorado" a tangible reality; Amazonia was there to be consumed and extracted. However, the environmental impact was not the only effect of the rubber boom: its system of extraction relied on a detrimental, cruel, and inhumane labor regimen, similar to slavery, and it generated one of the most fearful humanitarian landscapes of Latin American history.<sup>25</sup>

Rubber changed Amazonia and discourses about it in many ways. This period coincided with a moment in which Latin American nations were highly invested in constructing national

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<sup>25</sup> For more about the emergence of the rubber industry and its economic, social, and cultural consequences, see Barbara Weinstein's *The Amazon Rubber Boom 1850-1920* (1983).

identities independent from their colonial past, which included the consolidation of an autonomous economy. The rubber boom, mostly anchored in foreign European markets, was a threat to the constitution of national sovereignties since it was an economy controlled by foreign powers, such as North America's and London's car industry. At the same time, literary discourses were starting to be consolidated as one of the forms in which nations highlighted their autonomous character. The coincidental encounter of these two factors (the autonomization of literary discourses that celebrated a national sovereignty, and the foreign rubber industry) transformed representations of Amazonia. The economic machinery of the rubber industry became one of the models against which a discourse of national sovereignty was articulated. If the region had been represented throughout imperial narratives as the absolute reign of nature to be possessed and consumed, the rubber industry produced a narrative where the idea of Amazonia as an imperial desire was to be challenged and deconstructed.

The essays and novels studied in the following chapters of this dissertation respond to the idea of Amazonia as an imperial desire, and most of them address the rubber extraction economy specifically. They challenge the depiction of Amazonian space and nature as a conquerable expansion of discernible, apprehensible, consumable nature and, most importantly, they re-articulate the idea of the region as a discursive creation –as a space *inscribed* into modern History. If Amazonia had been constructed as an imperial desire, modern literary discourses will aim to depict the region outside and against the narrative of modernity and History.

### **Amazonia: A Laboratory for Fiction**

Taking into consideration that Amazonia has been represented as a conquerable and consumable reign of nature, and that such representations have symbolically and materially enabled and allowed the actual colonization and consumption of the region, it is possible to say that *writing* has been the practice and media that has authorized the imperial appropriation of the selvas. As a corpus of discourses that reacts against the imperial writings, twentieth century literature constantly returns to images of *writing* as mechanisms in which the very act or representation is complicated and denaturalized. This awareness of the act of representation works, I propose, as a form of interruption of the authorizational continuation between discourse and reality, the kind of authorization that has allowed the inclusion of Amazonia into the empire's project. Further than this, these reflections –and interruptions- about the act of representation do not stand alone: they are intrinsically associated with a question of *how to represent Amazonia*, or even more, *how to represent Amazonia against its imperial discursive history*. To this extent, these questions about the very act of representation call for innovation, transformation, or to the very least, shifts in the representational strategies of depicting the region. They are, in this sense, the point of departure of fictionalization and they are the center that dictates the form into which the representation appears.

Before moving onto the ways in which Amazonia as an imperial desire is challenged – that is, the creation of a post-colonial Amazonia-, I want to focus on the ways in which twentieth century literature reflects about itself, an element that constitutes the basis for the creation of a post-colonial discourse. I want to focus on the meta-reflexiveness of the texts that this dissertation studies and the implications this has at a literary level. The main idea that I will expand is that Amazonia has served as a laboratory for fiction that has radically destabilized the imperial imageries of the region, and that has also contributed to shaping the form of the Latin

American novel as a genre in general. My reflection touches on how the chosen texts think about writing, and also on the genres of the essay and the novel as forms that give shape to the literary and ideological elements that define modern literature about Amazonia. In the following paragraphs, then, I will reflect on what I mean by modern literature and I will expand on the importance of the essay and the novel as the forms through which this literature emerges. In doing so, I will provide preliminary descriptions of the four chapters of this dissertation, specifically highlighting how the writers and texts that I study think and write about representation itself.

The starting point is defining what I understand by modern literature. To the extent that this dissertation is, among others, a reorganization of the corpus and a proposition of a new historiography, *modern literature* implies a cut and a selection of texts that is, as it can not be any other way, problematic and debatable. Nonetheless, it serves to propose a model and a problem that has the potential for being extendable onto other literature. All the texts studied in this dissertation were published in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, contributing to the idea that what I call modern literature, at least in the case of literature about Amazonia, starts and develops after the nineteenth century, mainly after the publication in 1909 of Euclides da Cunha's *À margem da história*. Although texts like Lourenço da Silva Araujo Amazonas' *Simá: Romance histórico do Alto Amazonas* [Sima, a Historical Novel of High Amazonia] (1857), Inglês de Sousa's *Contos Amazônicos* [Amazonian Shortstories] (1892), and José Veríssimo's *Cenas de vida Amazônica* [Scenes From Life in the Amazon] (1899), probably among others, appeared prior to da Cunha's text (at least in the Portuguese tradition), these literary representations don't form part of my scope. The reasons for which I do not include them in my selection are that they are texts heavily influenced by the romantic and naturalist movements that were relevant in the Latin American nineteenth century traditions (themselves influenced by those same movements in Europe), and because they lack, in my opinion, a critical distance to, precisely, those aesthetic traditions. This does not cancel their complexity and richness, but they do set them apart from a self-awareness of the act of literary representation that I find pivotal in the re-articulation of an imagery of Amazonia.

The starting paradigm that describes *modern literature* is the idea of literature as a discourse that presents itself not only as information about the world, or as an interpretation of the world, but above all, as an aesthetic object in itself. The chronicles of the conquest and the narratives of the naturalist explorers have an undeniable aesthetic value, but their main intention was the production of knowledge about Amazonia. What I call *modern* is, thus, a condition in which literature is able to signal itself as a literary aesthetic artifact that has value not because of its relationship to the world, but precisely because of its autonomy from it. This in no way cancels its potential to comment, critique, or destabilize the world in which it is grounded; it actually book *Biographical and Critical Study* (1955), Bataille explains that it was Manet who made the transition into a form of painting concerned with "pure painting" (50), rejecting any other values that were not the values of painting itself: "what had to be found, above and beyond conventional majestic forms, was some supreme, unimpeachable reality capable of withstanding the immense pressure of a utilitarian tradition" (57). What makes Manet the inaugurator of modernity in the arts is, according to Bataille, the emergence of a form of artistic representation whose value resides not in the relationship object/reality, but with itself as an artistic form. The "utilitarian" purpose of art is left behind. This, in itself, is an epistemological change in the realm of representation: the world is not depicted outside the purpose of the depiction itself. I believe Bataille's analysis helps to understand what starts to occur in da Cunha's literary representation

of Amazonia, and that is echoed and fully developed in the novels that came afterwards: for the first time the region appears depicted not as knowledge, information, or through the means of a discourse of political praxis, but as a depiction that highlights, ultimately, itself. The institutional intentionality of the text is diluted, and its official purpose starts lacking practical power and its form gains aesthetic value.

It is not a coincidence that this occurs in the first years of the twentieth century. The consolidation of a capitalist and industrial economy in the first decades of the 1900s generated deep changes in the systems that ruled nation-building processes. In the early nineteenth century literature and political praxis were intimately interwoven. Literature was one of the discourses that helped building the national imaginaries through the voice and power of the *letrados*. At the consolidation of a modern productive system, politics, economy and culture started to find their own place within the national establishment. This occurred, in part, driven by the demand of professionalization that the new productive economy pushed forward. This division of the fields of power and of the production of knowledge helped to locate literature in its own particular position: the writer was not anymore or necessarily part of the machinery of political production.

As a result of the writer's displacement from the arena of political praxis, "literature [emerges] as a discourse that seeks autonomization or the specification of its field of social authority" (Ramos xi). In opposition to the figure of the *letrado* (*letrado* describes the intellectual caught in between the cultural and political praxis), "to be a writer [thus was] to be displaced from the paternal institution – to be an exile from the polis (from the state)" (Ramos xxxviii). As an autonomous discourse from the state and from the political endeavor, "the authority of modern literature was rooted precisely in its resistance to the deterritorialized flows rampant in capitalist modernization" (Ramos xxxix). In other words, the autonomy from the state granted literary discourses the freedom and capability of being observant of the process of modernization from a critical distance, free of partisan commitments, and thus constituted literature as the site where modernization was to be questioned, debated, and contested. To this extent, if *modern literature* is characterized by the emphasis of its aesthetic form, and if this aesthetic form has the autonomy to critically address the political context in which it is immersed, modern literature is underscored by the politics of its form.

Described as an apparatus that has full autonomy from the world, literature's value and ideological potential resides in itself as an artistic form. It is form, precisely, one of the elements that this dissertation wants to highlight. The translation of the world into language necessarily implies its apparition into a form: that is, a defined structure that contains the content and that, ultimately, determines it. The chronicles and the travel narratives of the imperial agents that first wrote about Amazonia contained a specific form, that of the travel narrative. Although not unique or unchangeable, the travel narrative subjugates content to a series of formal strategies such as the depiction of space through the temporality of travel, the organization of the world through the separation of the observing object and the world, and the prevalence of a mode of discovery and acquisition of knowledge. It is a form in which the dominating aspect is the codification and production of information and, as such, a practice of power over the space. The form that emerges in the modern literature that I am speaking of is not the form destined to contain closed and absolute knowledge, but the form of and for openness, inconclusion, and a form that resists the monolithic truth. To this extent, it is the form that opposes the rigidity of science or the monotheism of the categories of accuracy and power. It is, in opposition, the form



of doubt and destabilization, and it conveys its own politics: inclusion, democracy, plurality, uncontainment and resistance to a norm. These forms are the essay and the novel.

If modern literature about Amazonia is defined by its desire to act against imperialism, it is no coincidence that it emerges through a form defined by its openness and flexibility. The essay (in the case of da Cunha) and the novel (in the cases of Rivera, Carpentier, and Hatoum) exist as forms that resist a defining structure set by the rules of truth or power. A form is a *form* and as such it has limits, but the forms of the essay and the novel are defined, precisely, by the lack of definition of the limits and frontiers that restrict their forms. They are, one could say, the amoebas of literature. They are the proper spaces where the selva (and lets remember the definition of selva as that which needs to be organized) can exist freely, without the imperious demand to be domesticated and to be organized, to be contained and to be defined, to be known and to be controlled.

Above all, the essay is a genre characterized by the flexibility of its structure, an element that grants it some of its essential characteristics: the inconclusiveness and inexhaustibility of that of which it speaks. Not concerned with the idea of completeness, it thrives in subjectivity, doubt, and suspension. It does not seek knowledge, but performs the circularity and waviness of thought. Its finality is not more important than its own style and language. As Adorno puts it, the essay “gets rid of the traditional idea of truth” and “suspends the traditional concept of method” (159). It is the anti-scientific practice. It is, thus, contingent: concepts “gain their precision only through their relation to one another” (Adorno 160). As he goes on to explain, “the essay begins with such meanings and, itself being essentially language, forces this meanings on farther; it wants to help language, in its relation to concepts, to grasp these concepts reflectively in the way that they are already unconsciously names in language” (Adorno 160). The essay, reminiscent of *essayer*, presents itself as an attempt that seeks no more than the attempt. Ultimately, lacking a triumphant conclusion, the essay is “reminiscent of freedom” and “it provokes resistance” (152).

Euclides da Cunha’s essays *À margem da história* (1909), which are the topic of Chapter One, very well fit and make use of the genre. Anticipating some of the reflections of my analysis, I want to highlight here the ways in which da Cunha’s work stands at the origin of what I have called a laboratory for fiction. Not quite yet fiction, though, these essays do anticipate the radical freedom that characterizes the modern literary tradition of Amazonia, a freedom rooted in the politics of its form.

Da Cunha’s essays are all but uniform. Not only because they follow the freedom and inconclusiveness of the essay as a form, but also because they are, quite literally, unfinished. What we call *À margem da história* is a collection of essays (they could be also called reports or notes) that were published soon after the author’s death in 1909 and that contain various writings on varied topics (from things related to Amazonia to studies of the history of the Brazilian Republic), but of which the first seven essays, reunited under the title “Terra sem história” [Land Without History], have come to stand as the most notorious and exemplary writings of Amazonia by the author (da Cunha wrote other two books on Amazonia, *Contrastes y confrontos* and *Perú versus Bolivia*, both in 1907). To this extent, unless it is otherwise specified, *À margem da história* usually refers to the seven essays about Amazonia.

As the only pieces left behind before his death, these essays are all we have: they have no unity in their form, content, tone, or ideological position. Some of them are highly influenced by

a scientific perspective and others seem to develop either a poetical or even an anthropological voice. What we do know, however, is that they were writings that anticipate a future book project that never came to exist, and that was going to be called *Um paraíso perdido* (da Cunha was killed before he could write it). In a letter to the Brazilian writer Coelho Neto in March 10 1905 da Cunha describes this future book as a project that would articulate a *vengeful* justice against the previous discourses that represented the region (da Cunha, *Correspondência*, n.p). After a careful interpretation of the essays, one is able to understand that da Cunha experiences an immense frustration and discomfort with the writings that have, up to his point, represented Amazonia. He finds them shortsighted and all together incapable to depicting the complexity and enormity of the territory. As the title of the future book indicates, there is a certain nostalgia, but also a criticism, for a “paradise” that was lost to the forces of modernity and imperialism. Da Cunha, perhaps as a remarkable trait of a moment of transition, has an ambiguous voice that oscillates between a desire to integrate Amazonia into the capitalist forces of modern Brazil, and a need to either protect it from a further modernization or to grieve its inevitable integration.

In a letter to Artur Lemos, also from 1905, da Cunha describes *Um paraíso perdido* as a project “whose amplitude frees me from a precise definition of the facets of a land that, to be well understood, requires the unremitting efforts of a lifetime” (qtd. in Hecht 225). The idea of avoiding a “precise definition” prematurely describes the openness and complexity of the literary project that *À margem da história* points to, and echoes on the “vengeful” character that he envisions for his book. It is a calling for a form that frees him, as a writer, an Amazonia, as an object, of a “precise definition.” Da Cunha’s search for the right form is a preoccupation that comes from far behind. A man of science but a critical essayist by vocation, da Cunha’s writings trace the search for a form and a language that would deliver the appropriate tone that would express his knowledge, ideological position, and sensibility. This is seen in a reply to a review that José Veríssimo wrote after the publication of his first book *Os sertões* [Backlands] (1902). Defending himself for the voluminous use of scientific dictions, da Cunha writes in 1902 the following statement:<sup>26</sup>

Sagrados pela ciência e sendo de algum modo, permita-me a expressão, os aristocratas da linguagem, nada justifica o sistemático desprezo que lhes votam os homens de letras — sobretudo se considerarmos que o consórcio da ciência e da arte, sob qualquer de seus aspectos, e a tendência mais elevada do pensamento humano [...] o escritor futuro será forçosamente um polígrafo; e qualquer trabalho literário se distinguirá dos estritamente científicos, apenas, por uma síntese mais delicada, excluída apenas a aridez característica das análises e das experiências. (da Cunha, *Correspondência*, n.p)<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> José Veríssimo was one of the first public intellectuals to recognize the importance of Euclides da Cunha’s work, and particularly his first book *Os sertões*. Da Cunha’s letter to Veríssimo comes as a response to an article written by the latter, published in December 2, 1902, in the journal *Correio da Manhã*, in which the intellectual praises da Cunha’s work but criticizes the excess of technical language. Although this letter precedes the publication of *À margem da história*, it already illuminates the search for a new language to write about Brazil.

<sup>27</sup> “Sacred for science, and being somehow, let me say this, the aristocrats of language, nothing justifies the systematic rejection that you, men of letters, have for them [scientific terms], specially considering that the partnership between art and science, in any of its aspects, is the most elevated tendency of human endeavor... the future writer will inevitably be a polygraphist writer: any literary work will be differentiated from a scientific one, only because the literary one will have a more delicate synthesis of the analysis and the experiences, having excluded the typical roughness of scientific discourse” (Da Cunha, *Correspondência Ativa*, my translation).

What this highlights is the consciousness of writing as a stylistic and ideological act that would be fundamental in redefining and compensating for the frustration left by what he considers an unjust, limited, and ideologically detrimental tradition of representations of Amazonia. How to write Amazonia? How to write Amazonia against its own discursive history? Taking us back to the idea of Amazonia as a laboratory for literary production, it is no wonder, then, that the most important way in which da Cunha represents the region is through an image that implies the idea of *writing*: “a Amazônia é a última página, ainda a escrever-se, do Genesis” (da Cunha, “Preâmbulo,” 9).<sup>28</sup> The question is *how* will this page be written, and *who* will write it. The image of a blank page that needs to be written needs to be highlighted: it is a trope that will reappear throughout this dissertation, as it will be seen later on. As a blank page, it conjures the potential for invention and innovation, and it is the founding image of the experimentation associated with the laboratory for fiction. In addition to this, not inadvertently, the image of Genesis’ last unwritten page appears in a text that served as a prologue to Alberto Rangel’s collection of short stories *Inferno Verde* [Green Hell] (1909), an undoubtedly literary and fictional work. To what extent was da Cunha pointing to literary discourses as the one practice and discourse that would, finally, *do justice* in representing Amazonia?

To claim that da Cunha’s essays are the founding gesture of a literary tradition could possibly make a few a bit uncomfortable, specially when the texts in question are the heterogeneous essays of *À margem da história*. This is due, in part, because of the heaviness of the scientific influence in these texts, and the disparity of approaches with which he writes about the region. It also responds to the fact that the genre of the essay lends itself easily to be read and appropriated by other disciplines and practices. While it would be hard, or even impossible, to conceive Alejo Carpentier’s *Los pasos perdidos* [The Lost Steps] (1953) as a historical document or as a production of geographical knowledge, *À margem da história* could perfectly be considered both. Not going too far, one of the latest and most thorough works about da Cunha’s essays about Amazonia is Susanna B. Hecht’s *The Scramble for the Amazon and the Lost Paradise of Euclides da Cunha* (2013), an academic publication located in the field of geography. This helps to confirm the idea that identifying da Cunha’s essays as literature and as a literary origin could be seen as problematic.

My proposal of reading Euclides da Cunha’s works as literature and in the context of a literary tradition echoes previous ways of reading his work. For example, in 1902 José Veríssimo, while highlighting the sociological relevance of his first book, also described him as “um poeta, um romancista, um artista” (qtd. in Capra Filho 59).<sup>29</sup> Further than that, recent academic productions have delved into this same topic. In “O Impasse Euclidiano” Leopoldo Bernucci has stated that da Cunha’s prose is not the result of an ambiguous style, but of a deliberate literary impulse that is not always interested in faithfully representing reality.<sup>30</sup> In addition to this, Pericles Moraes in *Os Intérpretes da Amazônia* [The Interpreters of Amazonia] (1935) positions *À margem da história* as the origin of a literary tradition about the region based on a specific aesthetic that would serve as a point of departure for many other “imitators,” thus consolidating a literary tradition:

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<sup>28</sup> Amazonia is the last page of Genesis, still to be written (my translation).

<sup>29</sup> “a poet, a novelist, a writer” (my translation).

<sup>30</sup> It is relevant to highlight that Leopoldo Bernucci’s debate on the literariness of da Cunha’s work is informed by the debate on the properties of the literary. See note 2 on “O Impasse Euclidiano” (1995).

Euclides viu a Amazônia com a consciência do artista e a profundidade do cientista, deixando-nos algumas páginas de tão grande fertilidade de observações, que não se pode hoje emitir qualquer opinião deste domínio sem consultar-lhe a autoridade... a sua sombra, a sombra da sua glória, cresceu e floresceu uma floresta de imitadores solertes e subalternos, que lhe tentaram decalcar o estilo indecalçável, a forma e a superfície das idéias, copiando-lhe o vocabulário, reproduzindo-lhe os neologismos, deturpando-lhe as intenções... (14)<sup>31</sup>

Chapter One further develops the reading of *À margem da história* as the inaugurating gesture of the modern literary tradition of representations about Amazonia. It focuses, particularly, on the depiction of the region as a space that is unable and unwilling to fit into the stabilizing and logical strategies and discourses of geographical practices. In an attempt to criticize and interrupt the region's forced integration into the modernization of Brazil –that is, into discourses of History-, da Cunha resorts to poetic ambiguity and to the resistance of the norm conferred by the genre of the essay. Ultimately, I claim, da Cunha presents Amazonia as what philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have called “smooth spaces,” spaces that evade and escape a representation that would aid and facilitate its integration into capitalism and productivity. “Smooth spaces” are, as da Cunha's Amazonia, hard to grasp, control, possess, and ultimately, they resist, at least symbolically, their inclusion into a productive sphere –the productive sphere of modernizing Brazil.

Although I claim the essay is the genre that inaugurated the modern literary tradition, the genre *par excellence* of modern literature about Amazonia has been the novel, and it is this dissertation's most visible focus. The transition from essay onto fiction and the form of the novel is not, however, a big jump. On the one hand, there are many continuations between the form of the essay and the form of the novel. They can both be described under the idea of openness and flexibility. On the other, Euclides da Cunha's work orbits quite close to it. His 1902 masterpiece *Os sertões* borders the limits of the novelistic structure and his proximity with Alberto Rangel's fictions brings him closer to that kind of narrative. His would-be book *Um paraíso perdido*, who knows, could have been a sort of novel. What needs to be highlighted is that the transition between essay and novel appears organic and smooth, and if one takes into account the process of autonomy that literature was undergoing at the time, it even seems consequential: the novel symbolizes, in a much more radical way, the idea of an art form autonomous from any form of political praxis, even more so that the form of the essay.

One of the first elements that differentiate the novel is, though, the apparition of fiction. This category is one of the most unstable and difficult to define within the realm of literary and critical studies. After the emergence of the theories of structuralism and post-structuralism and the way in which they pulled the rug under the idea of language's referentiality, the categories of fiction and non fiction have become unstable, if not useless. This debate has been worked on Geir Farnen's *Literary Fiction: The Ways We Read Narrative Fiction* (2014). Attempting a safe definition, Farnen claims that fiction is the type of narrative procedure that exempts the author from a claim of truth. Literary fiction, he explains, “remains unconstrained by any direct link to

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<sup>31</sup> “Euclides saw Amazonia with the consciousness of an artist and the depth of a scientist, leaving written pages of such fertile observations, that one could not express any opinion about this topic without consulting his authority... behind his glory, a forest of good and bad imitators flowered, who tried to reproduce the inimitable style, the form and shape of his ideas, copying his vocabulary, and even reproducing the neologisms and intentions...” (my translation). For a critical commentary on Pericles Moraes' attempt to build a history of Amazonian discourses after da Cunha, see Allison Leão's *Amazonas: Natureza e Ficção* (2011).

reality owing to its freedom from the truth claim; the author takes by definition no responsibility for the relationship between the elements of his story and specific real elements” (21). Although Farner’s definition is safely conscious of the complications posed by the debates of fiction, it leaves behind some categories that I find immensely useful, specifically to this dissertation: the ideas of fabrication and invention. The novels that this dissertation studies present stories, situations, characters, spaces, and actions that are fabricated and invented; although they sometimes border a coincidence with reality, or even when they are based on facts that actually occurred (like the rubber extraction industry), they were not indented to present an objective reality of something that actually happened, but to offer a mimetic fiction; that is, a copy of reality through the invention of characters, situations, spaces and actions.

My intention in making a stop at the category of fiction is not to ask again the Auerbach question of *how* literature imitates reality, but to ask what is at stake. I do so because all three novels that this dissertation studies reflect on this question too. Not only they have an ongoing reflection of what representation is and how it should be done, but they also inquire into the nature and intention of the fabricated and invented story. In a pivotal moment of *La vorágine*, Cova, the protagonist, makes an uncanny comment that haunts the entire novel: “Cuenta usted con que la novela tendrá más éxito que la historia” (250).<sup>32</sup> In the context in which he says it, the word *novela* refers to a set of fabricated lies and to the form of the entire book. *La vorágine* also comments on the relationship between reality and fiction through the inclusion of very particular maps, photographs, and epigraphs that serve as paratextual elements for the novel. The many ideological and aesthetical implications of these complex elements are studied in detail in Chapter Two. For now, it is enough to say that *La vorágine* explores the potential of fiction as a kind of narrative that is “more successful” or more capable of dismantling the constructed social and cultural norms in which we live and, more specifically, the ways in which we see, understand, and integrate a territory like Amazonia.

Carpentier’s *Los pasos perdidos* does something similar by suddenly opening the possibility of understanding that what we read is a “patraña” [farce, fabrication, false news] inspired by a “novela famosa” (300). This, as it will be seen in Chapter Three, opens an entire discussion of what truth, genuineness, and originality are, and it complicates the ideas of source and copy, to the extent that the entire tradition of the “novelas de la selva” needs to be rethought. What ought to be highlighted is that *Los pasos* is built around the category of fiction and it causes, I propose, the consolidation of Amazonia as a literary trope –that is, the confirmation of a specific kind of selva that circulates in and for literature. As Chapter Four will show, this is also a preoccupation of Milton Hatoum’s *Órfãos do Eldorado*. In a moment where the protagonist uncovers the archive of his father (an archive that comes to symbolize the imperial colonization of Amazonia), he comes to the conclusion that all he knew about the past was a lie. However, the precarious state in which he is at the end of his life, when he narrates the novel, responds precisely, to those lies. Elaborating a reflection on his past, the history of Manaus, and the history of Amazonia as El dorado, he asks himself: “uma mentira repetida não é um arremedo de verdade?” (36).<sup>33</sup> Building his own narrative –and the novel itself- against the idea of these lies,

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<sup>32</sup> Poorly translated as “[the lies] will be more effective than your true story” (181). A more effective translation would be *count on the fact that the novel will have more success than history*. All translations from *La vorágine* come from *The Vortex* translated by Earle K. James (1935).

<sup>33</sup> “But perhaps a repeated lie is just an imitation of the truth?” (42). All translations of *Órfãos do Eldorado* come from *Orphans of Eldorado* translated by John Gledson (2010).

Hatoum brings relevance to the category of fiction within the context of contemporary literature about the region. To this extent, fiction appears in the “novelas de la selva” as a theme and it emerges as a practice that has the sharp potential of destabilizing and denaturalizing preconceptions of Amazonia. As such, fiction seems to have a capacity of affecting the real world even more than a non-fiction text would.

As it is seen throughout the examples quoted above, the category of fiction is intertwined with the category of the novel as a form. One could say, based on this, that Amazonia has served as a laboratory for fiction, but more specifically, as a laboratory for the novel. Further than that, I believe Amazonia and the trope of the selva have played a fundamental role in the development of the Latin American novel. This dissertation stands, hopefully, as a poof of this. Many of the topics, questions, and concerns that I study here could be extended onto other novels about and from Amazonia that I do not include. Generalizations are dangerous, but in spite of it, it could be possible to argue that most literary movements, periods, or developments in the Latin American tradition have visited or played with the idea of Amazonia: romanticism (Lourenço da Silva Araujo’s *Simá* 1857), modernism and the vanguards (Mario de Andrades’ *Macunaima* 1928), regionalism (Rómulo Gallegos’ *Canaima* 1935), the grand narratives of the 50s (Carpentier’s *Los pasos perdidos* 1953), the Latin American “boom” (Mario Vargas Llosa’s *La casa verde* [The Green House] 1966), indigenism (César Calvo’s *Las tres mitades de Ino Moxo* 1981), postmodernism (Vargas Llosa’s *El hablador* 1987), contemporary literature (Milton Hatoum’s *Órfãos do Eldorado* 2008), etc, just to name some examples. Sometimes Amazonia as a complex geographical region, or sometimes the trope of the selva, has provided the Latin American novel a site and/or topic of experimentation and renovation of the styles, aesthetics, and politics of the novel. For Mario de Andrade’s *Macunaima* the idea of Amazonia provided a site where the renewal of the Brazilian language, style, and aesthetics took place, as well as the redefinition of a national character and imagery. Something similar happened years later, when the challenge of how to describe or represent its nature ignited, for example, the revival of the baroque style in Carpentier’s *Los pasos perdidos*, an aesthetic that was as much a style as it was an ideological posture.

Similarly to the category of fiction, the novel is a genre whose characteristics and definitions have been constantly debated. To build a theoretical frame about the genre, I propose a dialogue between different concepts proposed at different times and by different people within the field of theory of the novel. The first one of them is the idea of the novel as the genre of modernity and capitalism, a line of thought developed by Lukács, Benjamin, and Watt. The second element is the idea of the novel as a form, and most specifically, as a *form of forms*, as developed by Lukács and Bakhtin. And thirdly, the idea of the novel as mimicry and archive as developed by Roberto González Echevarría and Lesley Wylie. Formulating an outline of the way I approach the genre of the novel is helpful in the sense that it describes the form through which the idea of Amazonia is symbolically and discursively liberated. In other words, it helps to describe the shape, volume, and dimension that language reaches –language’s expansion- to react against Amazonia’s imperial discourses.

Lukács, in his *Theory of the Novel* (originally written in 1914), states that “art forms become subject to a historico-philosophical dialectic” (40). Forms, he argues, have a dialectical relationship with the moment in which they emerge: they are shaped and they help shaping the historical and philosophical conditions that define a certain era. In a world abandoned by God, where there is no unifying and total sense for existence, and where the individual emerges as a

solitary category –that is, a world of “transcendental homelessness” (41)-, the novel is the form that attempts a reconstruction of the lost totality. For Lukács the novel is the form in which the fears and frustrations of modernity, but also the hopeless and nostalgic desires of reconstruction of a shattered world, are deposited. It is both the remedy and the symptom of a world gone wrong. The character of the novel, Lukács reminds us, carries within the “estrangement from the outside world” (66), an element from which he will try to re-establish his sense and place.

Following a similar understanding of the novel, Benjamin, in his essay “The Storyteller” (published in 1936) states that “the birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual, who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounseled, and cannot counsel others. To write a novel means to carry the incommensurable to extremes in the representation of human life” (87). He adds, too, that the novel, contrary to the oral narrative of a storyteller, is dependent on the individual experience of reading a book, and as such, the novel is correlatively dependant on the print (and here we see Benjamin’s concern with reproducibility and copy as one of the organizing principles of modernity). While Lukács sees homelessness as a metaphysical and theological condition, Benjamin understands it as a problem of sociality, community, and the forms of production that condition such categories. Nonetheless, both Lukács and Benjamin coincide in describing the novel as a symbol of a prevailing unrest, and of this unrest as one of the defining experiences of the modern individual.

This unrest and anxiety of living is brought, in part, by the secularization of life, war, and the alienation resulting from the modern world. To this extent, both Lukács and Benjamin signal the emergence of the genre in association with modernity and capitalism. In *The Rise of the Novel* (1957) Ian Watt extends the relationship between individualism and the genre. He proposes a dialectical process between the growing modern capitalist economies of expending empires and the interests, practices, and changes in the lives of modern readers. Instead of understanding individuality through a philosophical and transcendental tone, as Lukács or Benjamin do, he focuses on individuality as a paradigm of production, consumption, and leisure within the new modern economy. These new patterns would have facilitated and prompted the apparition of a form that was to be consumed as a leisure activity: the novel. Creating a dialogue between these practices and the fact that in the eighteenth century the novel was highly preoccupied with narratives of imperialism (Daniel Defoe’s 1719 *Robinson Crusoe* being the best example), Watt proposes a deep association with the emergence, growth, and development of capitalism and modernity, and the form of the novel.

Lukács, Benjamin, and Watt propose the novel as a form that responds to modernity, and as a genre deeply rooted in the values, discourses, and practices of modern life. To this extent, the novel is both a depositary of the elements that define modernity, but also a platform of debate, inquiry, and reflection of it. In this dissertation these ideas are important to the extent that they shed light on way the novel is a platform from which Amazonia’s inscription into modernity is contested. In other words, if modern literature speaks of and destabilizes the relationship between Amazonia and capitalism, the novel is the genre where this needed to happen.

But besides being a product of modernity, the novel is, in its most essential sense –one could even say geometrical sense-, a *form*. Lukács defines the novel as “the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality” (*Theory* 56). He expands this by explaining that the epic represents “a totality of life that is rounded from within,” while the novel “seeks, by giving form, to uncover and construct the concealed totality of life”

(*Theory* 60). The epic, in other words, is not really concerned with the idea of the *form*, in the sense that the epic belongs to a world that exists and thinks in terms of the *whole* –one, complete, infinite, entire, indivisible world. Hammer it down and break it and what you’re left with are the pieces: totality fractures and what was once whole and infinite is now fragmented. As a consequence, form appears –shapes, limits, and divisions. The novel, though, belongs to a world that *still thinks in terms of totality*, so the novel tries to reconstruct such totality. This effort is, however, only possible in abstract terms –the world is shattered forever beyond reconstruction: the attempt ultimately “amounts to resignation” (*Theory* 71).

Lukács speaks of totality as the “immanence of meaning in life.” He is speaking, after all, of a world crumbling down in violence amidst the First World War. For him, *totality* is a metaphysical and transcendental category, and its loss entails homelessness, not freedom. Nonetheless, renouncing to the category of totality could entail an act of liberation. What I am interested in highlighting, above all, is the idea of the novel as a form that seeks totality and therefore seeks expansion and inclusion. In its search for totality (although Lukács sees this as an inherent failure) the novel assimilates, engulfs, swallows, and expands onto everything trying to reconstruct what has been lost. One could interpret the novel not only as a form, but it could also be seen as a *freedom of forms*. Ultimately, this freedom mines the idea of totality: the novel is grounded on the always already incompleteness of life and it reaffirms the impossibility of one indivisible whole. This impossibility could be seen as a subversive political act: the novel, in its reaffirming of the impossibility of totality, stands up for the incomplete, the paradoxical, the non totalizing. Like the form of the essay, the novel is “reminiscent of freedom,” and as such “it provokes resistance” (Adorno “The Essay” 152).

In *The Dialogic Imagination* (1975) Bakhtin further develops the idea of the novel as a form of inclusion and expansion. For him, this outward movement –he would call it a centrifugal one (272)- operates in the primary source of the novel: language. “The novel as a whole,” he explains, “is a phenomenon multiform in style and variform in speech and voice” (261). The novel is the site where multiple languages, voices, speeches, styles and, with them, ideologies, come into interplay. It is the arena where “social heteroglossia” comes into a dialogic process of encounter, integration, and negotiation (263). For Bakhtin, language is much more than the primary source of discourse: it is a social manifestation that reflects the ongoing and never ending transformational process of life and society. It is a democratic phenomenon to the extent that it reflects and opens up a space for the inclusion and integration of difference. It dies when it is driven by a monolithic voice and it rejects the imposition of one truth. It is precisely the space where the *mono* is exposed to be contested, pluralized, and diversified. Seen like this, the novel offers the appropriate site for contestation and destabilization of the imperial imagery of Amazonia. It is consequential that the novel is the site of subversion, questioning, and contingency of the empire’s discourses and practices. It is not a coincidence that *La vorágine*, *Los pasos perdidos*, and *Órfãos do Eldorado* are novels grounded on the inclusion of multiple voices and intertextuality, and on the strive for discursive renovation. Both Lukács and Bakhtin, therefore, provide a model to think the novel as a form characterized by its openness and variability, assets that highlight its ideological potential as a form of destabilization of the norm

Within the Latin American critical tradition the idea of *transculturation* has emerged more than once to describe cultural discourses, processes, or practices that have generated dialectical encounters of languages, experiences, and worldviews. The concept of transculturation was first used by Fernando Ortiz in his book *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y*



*el azúcar* [Cuban Counterpoint of Tobacco and Sugar] (1940), and then re-appeared in the work of the critic Angel Rama in his 1982 *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina* [Narrative Transculturation in Latin America]. It proposes that Latin American literature, and its identity, at large, have been constituted by a process of appropriation and assimilation of different cultural sources, including European, indigenous, and African influences. Transculturation describes a process of negotiation in which a new autonomous cultural form is created and is capable of gaining agency as an element of post-colonial redefinition. Later on, in her book *Imperial Eyes* (1992), Mary Louise Pratt speaks of transculturation as a form of contact between cultures. She explains that while subjugated cultures cannot control what is placed upon them, “they do determine to various extents what they absorb into their own, how they use it, and what they make it mean” (7).

Ultimately, transculturation describes processes of cultural negotiations that acquire value in the articulation of autonomous post-colonial identities. Although transculturation is a concept that did not exclusively emerge as a critical tool to define or explain the genre of the novel, it is in dialogue with Bakhtin’s idea of dialectical heteroglossia, and it also provides a model for understanding Latin American literature as a politically charged space that challenges imperial authority. Lúcia Sá’s work *Rain Forest Literatures: Amazonian Texts and Latin American Culture* (2004) and Candace Slater’s *Entangled Edens: Visions of the Amazon* (2001), which are two important references for this dissertation, further the understanding of literature about Amazonia as a site of influence and interaction between local and western narratives of the region. Their studies, in addition to the concepts of heteroglossia and transculturation, are pivotal for my analysis of modern literature of Amazonia, but particularly for my reading of *Órfãos do Eldorado*, as it can be seen in Chapter Four.

The final elements that I want to bring as part of a possible frame to conceptualize the novel are the ideas of mimicry and archive developed by Roberto González Echevarría in *Myth and Archive: a Theory of Latin American Narrative* (1990) and by Lesley Wylie in *Colonial Tropes, Postcolonial Tricks: Rewriting the Tropics in the Novela de la Selva* (2009). Beyond its relationship to modernity and capitalism, or beyond the idea of the novel as a heteroglossic and ideologically charged form, González Echevarría and Wylie help me understand the novel as an apparatus that swallows and mimics other forms of discursive authority only to construct their literary authority through their subversive appropriation. “Having no fixed form of its own,” explains González Echevarría, the novel

often assumes that of the given kind of document endowed with truth-bearing power by society at specific moments at time. The novel, or what is called the novel at various points in history, mimics such documents to show their conventionality, their subjection to strategies of textual engerdenment similar to those governing literature, which in turn reflect those of language itself. It is through this simulacrum of legitimacy that the novel makes its contradictory and veiled claim to literariness. (8)

González Echevarría’s claim extends Bakhtin’s by affirming that the languages, styles, and worldviews of those in power –what the former calls “official texts” (9)- are also a fundamental part of heteroglossia. More than that, he claims that heteroglossia comes as a result of the re-appropriation and destabilization of those “official texts.” For González Echevarría, these texts are the writings of the hegemonic discourse of science: “the scientific consciousness that expresses itself in the language of travelers who journeyed across the Continent, writing about its nature and about themselves” (12). As the critic explains, in the case of the Latin American novel this evolves into narratives that mimic travel writing, and anthropological or ethnographical

reports. As a form that collects other previous forms to structure itself, the novel becomes an archive that contains the legal documents that introduced Latin America into the western narrative of History. This is the archive that Arminto, the protagonist of *Órfãos do Eldorado* uncovers, the same archive against which he articulates his narrative, and thus the novel. González Echevarría reads this novelistic archive as a form of knowledge that re-appropriates the origins of Latin American history. My interest is less focused on the idea of knowledge and more interested in underscoring re-appropriation as a political stance that regains control of the sources of legitimation and power, enabling the development of a postcolonial statement.

Following this line of thought, and within the theoretical frame of post-colonial studies (the ones proposed by Said and Homi K. Bhabha), Lesley Wylie's book is perhaps one of the most influential references for this dissertation. She explains that through "parodic reworkings of European perceptions of the tropics" (1) the "novela de la selva parodies European discourses... and initiates a new way of writing about tropical space, celebrating the perceived Otherness of the jungle and its native inhabitants" (2). Wylie argues that the re-appropriation of the European archive of the naturalist explorers operates by mining and challenging the possibility of depicting the tropics as a site for "self-edification for the traveler" (9), and of his imperial project by extension. This leads her to affirm that the jungle represented in the novelas de la selva "threatens not only the aesthetic models of travel writing on the tropics but also the Western ideal of 'civilization', which is revealed to be much less diffuse than its antonym 'barbarism' and, for the writers of the tropical novela de la selva, much less enabling for the postcolonial re-inscription of the nation" (11). Wylie extends González Echevarría's proposition of the novel as mimicry and as an archive, and takes it into a discussion of post-coloniality. For Wylie, mimicry and parody are subversive gestures that destabilize the authority of the empire's archive and its claim of possession and consumption over Amazonia. This dissertation adheres to this but also adds that the parody is just one part of the equation: the boldest destabilization of the empire is achieved, I claim, through a complex reflection on writing, representation, fiction, and the genre of the novel. I also content that more than a possibility for re-inscription of Amazonia into the nation, the novelas de la selva have offered a possibility for the articulation and development of a post-colonial literature, and for the development and transformation of the novel as a genre.

The ways of understanding the novel as a form recently presented –Lukács, Bakhtin, Benjamin, Wylie, etc- inform my interpretation of the genre and are in dialogue with the ways in which the novels I study think about their form. In the following paragraphs I want to focus on the reflection on writing and the genre that springs out of the novels. Similarly to da Cunha's pursuit for a precise language and form that would grant him the freedom necessary to represent Amazonia, these novels are driven by a search for the right way to depict the region. Interestingly enough, the image of the "blank page" as a symbol for the possibility of renewal of a language and style –lets remember that da Cunha called Amazonia the last unwritten page of Genesis- is a trope that appears repeatedly throughout these novels.

In *La vorágine* the manuscript that we read has many pages left unwritten, still waiting to be told: "¡Cuánta página en blanco, cuánta cosa que no se dijo!" (384).<sup>34</sup> This reference to the act of writing is only one of the echoes of a bigger and bolder reflection on the act or representation in the novel. *La vorágine* tells the story of a poet, Cova, who, trying to escape the rumors of a scandalous love affair, travels to the plains of southern Colombia, and eventually finds himself

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<sup>34</sup> "How many blank pages, how many things that haven't been said" (319).

immersed in the jungle and within the inhumane rubber extraction system. Throughout the narrative other characters often comment on Cova's dubious poetic career, building the impression that the protagonist is a mediocre writer. Face to face with the jungle and the atrocities of the rubber system, Cova's writing is challenged and transformed. One of the proofs of this transformation is the novel itself. In this sense, the mediocre poet becomes a successful writer by writing a novel.

The transformation, however, is not small: in order to properly represent the jungle, Cova has to renovate the style and language that has prevailed in his time –*modernismo*– and reinvent a new form of representation. Unwilling to represent the jungle as an idealized and harmonic nature, he asks the following question: “¿Cuál es aquí la poesía de los retiros, dónde están las mariposas que parecen flores translúcidas, los pájaros mágicos, el arroyo cantor? ¡Pobre fantasía de los poetas que sólo conocen las soledades domesticadas!” (296).<sup>35</sup> Against the poet's “soledades domesticadas” [domesticated retreats] and the “flores translúcidas” [translucent flowers], Cova –now a novelist– represents the jungle as a space that is barely comprehensible, and where accumulation, opacity, and impenetrability determine the depiction of Amazonia. Instead of a harmonious nature, *La vorágine* presents a centripetal vortex of aggressive and treacherous trees where humans are less than welcome.

In a key moment of the narrative, Cova consigns in his diary valuable information about his writing process: “Va para seis semanas que... distraigo la ociosidad escribiendo las notas de mi odisea, en el libro de Caja que el Cayeno tenía sobre su escritorio... Peripecias extravagantes, detalles pueriles, páginas truculentas forman la red precaria de mi narración” (345).<sup>36</sup> This passage not only provides a meta-reflexive moment of the text, but it also gives a strange piece of information that must not go uninterpreted: the narrative is written on an accountant's bookkeeping journal. As a novel that is written on the pages of a notebook that is destined to keep track of sales, incomes, and outcomes –a journal for numbers–, *La vorágine* is placing itself as a literary narrative of an economic reality. As Ericka Beckman and Jennifer French have explained, the novel stands as a form of writing against capitalism and neo-colonialism. To this extent, Cova's renovation of language and style, and specifically the production of a novel, point to a critique of the discourses and practices that have claimed possession and consumption of Amazonia.

Cova's literary transformation from a poet to a novelist is similar to Jose Eustasio Rivera's own transformation. Rivera belonged to a group of poets identified as the “Centenaristas,” a generation of writers who were defined by a nationalistic appropriation of the *modernista* aesthetic (a kind of movement not particularly characterized by its nationalistic enthusiasm). Prior to writing *La vorágine*, Rivera wrote a collection of poetry titled *Tierra de promisión* [Promised Land] (1921). The poems of this collection can be described as a poetic tour around Colombia's territory that aimed to celebrate and integrate the diverse regions and peripheries of the nation's map. Singing about the territories in the Andes, the plains, and the southern jungles, the book aimed to create a national imaginary in the context of the country's

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<sup>35</sup> “Where is that solitude that poets sing of? Where are those butterflies like translucent flowers, the magic birds, those singing streams? Poor fantasies of those who know only domesticated retreats!” (231).

<sup>36</sup> “It is now six weeks that I have killed time by writing up the notes of our adventures. I am doing it... in the cash book that El Cayeno had on his desk... Strange episodes, childish details, pages full of truculence – these make up the tenuous thread of my story” (280).

centenary of independence. Like Cova's *translucid flowers* and his *domesticated retreats*, *Tierra de promisión* depicts an idealized territory as a form of integration of the "pastoral nature" of Colombia's geography into the modern capitalist growth of the country. Later on in his life, when Rivera travels to the Amazonian territories and discovers the atrocities of the modern and capitalist enterprise, not only his style changes, but also the project of inclusion and integration of Amazonia into modern capitalism. As it will be seen, Rivera's novel is also a claim for Colombia's sovereignty against the neo-colonial appropriation of the Colombian forests. Amazonia, once again, functions as a laboratory for the renovation for literary aesthetics, and a site for the development of a post-colonial literature. Chapter Two of this dissertation studies the representation of Amazonian space in Rivera's *La vorágine*. It claims that by challenging and transforming the discourses and practices of spatial representation that have depicted Amazonia as an imperial desire, the novel depicts the selva as what José Rabasa has called an "elsewhere:" a place against and outside the processes of modernization.

The protagonist of *Los pasos perdidos* makes writing his central motive, and the image of a white paper to write on is an element that drives the narrative forward. The problem, however, is that he lacks paper to write: "Nunca pensé que la imaginación pudiera toparse alguna vez con un escollo tan estúpido como la falta de papel" (283).<sup>37</sup> Desperate to find a place to write, he tries to use natural and organic surfaces to do it on, until another character gives him one of the notebooks that is used with an "official" purpose: "Al saber que trataba de escribir en yaguas, en cortezas, en el cuero de venado que alfombra un rincón de nuestra choza, el Adelantado, compadecido, me ha dado otro cuaderno, aunque advirtiéndome que es el último" (285).<sup>38</sup> This notebook, echoing the bookkeeping journal where Cova writes, is a note pad where the Adelantado writes the rules, guidelines, important events, and administrative facts of the town he has founded in the middle of the jungle: it is, in other words, a sorts of archive of colonization. Seen like this, the writing project on which the protagonist embarks is a symbolic palimpsest that re-writes on the archive itself, pointing to a re-articulation of the colonial discourse, and echoing the other novels studied in this dissertation that destabilize the writings of the empire.

In addition to this, throughout the novel the protagonist believes to be in a journey towards discovering something "genuine," and he sees his immersion into the jungle as a regression in time and History where at the end the origin of human kind awaits him. Part of his 'discovery' at the 'beginnings' is, hence, a form of 'original or 'genuine' language, what he calls a "palabra desnuda" [naked word] (272). As a product of this discovery and realization, he feels the imperious desire to write: "Una obra se ha construído en mi espíritu; una 'cosa' para mis ojos abiertos o cerrados, suena en mis oídos, asombrándome por la lógica de su ordenación. Una obra inscrita dentro de mí mismo que podía hacer salir sin dificultad, haciéndola texto, partitura" (271).<sup>39</sup> Although the protagonist's writing project is a musical score, there is enough evidence that it is a metaphor working towards a reflection on language and writing. At the end, threatened by the lack of paper and ink to write his score, the writer decides to do what he thought was

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<sup>37</sup> "It had never occurred to me that the imagination could founder on anything so stupid as lack of paper" (224). All translations come from *The Lost Steps*, translated by Harriet de Onís (2001).

<sup>38</sup> "When the Adelantado discovered that I was trying to write on leaves, bark, a deerskin mat in our hut, he took pity on me and gave me another notebook, warning me that this was positively the last one" (227).

<sup>39</sup> "A work had been constructed in my spirit; a 'thing' before my eyes, open or closed, which rang in my ears, amazing me by the order of its logic. A work inscribed in me, which could be easily transferred to words, score, something that all could handle, read, understand" (213).

unthinkable: leave the jungle behind and return to ‘civilization’. Pressured to come up with a narrative of his adventures and experiences in the jungle, the writer decides that he must write a novel. This, I believe, is the key to interpreting *Los pasos perdidos*: in spite of having thought that he had encountered the ‘origins’ of human kind, and that he had found the ‘genuine’ language and expression in the jungle, the protagonist decides to copy (or quote or reproduce) another novel, most likely a novel like *La vorágine*: “Lo que venderé, pues, es una patraña que he ido repasando durante el viaje... tengo en mi maleta una novela famosa, de un escritor suramericano... en [la] que se [precisa] todo lo necesario para dar un giro de veracidad a mi relato” (300).<sup>40</sup> This “patraña” (lie, fabrication, etc) is the fiction proposed by the novel that has been commented some paragraphs above.

Taking the idea of writing as a quotation and simulacrum based on other writings, Chapter Three studies the consolidation of the jungle as a trope composed of literary artifacts that quote other literary artifacts. More than a failure, however, this constitutes a complex reflection on language and its referential capacity. It is not a coincidence that the novel engages in a deep intertextual dialogue with Claude Lévi-Strauss’ post-structuralist *Tristes Tropiques* (1955). Reading the problem of the representation of Amazonia through the impossibility of denoting the object through language, the novel underlines the separation, both cognitive and ideological, that the act of *writing about Amazonia* entails. Further than this, building the narrative through an intertextuality with the colonial archive, and by quoting *La vorágine*, Alejo Carpentier’s novel fully embraces the idea of Amazonia as a site of and for literature.

In addition to this, *Los pasos perdidos* consolidates the re-emergence of the baroque style and aesthetics in the Latin American tradition. This is seen in the novel, among others, in the accumulation of textual quotations and references that constitute the narrative, in the style of the prose, and the aesthetic patterns that define the representation of Amazonia as accumulation and simulacrum. As critics like Irlemar Chiampi, Steve Wakefield, or Antonio Benítez-Rojo have pointed out, Carpentier’s baroque can be read as a post-colonial discourse in the sense that it obscures and complicates a transparent appropriation of the object. In other words, the baroque style serves as a tool “to obscure or hide the object behind a linguistic barrier” (Wakefield 78). Through a complex reflection on what language is and how it represents, on the one hand, and by building a trope through the act of quotation of other novels, *Los pasos perdidos* further elaborates on the idea of Amazonia as a laboratory for fiction.

Lastly, Milton Hatoum’s *Órfãos do Eldorado* is also grounded on the idea of re-writing – or even better, how not to re-write- the colonial archive. By constantly invoking the idea of Amazonia as a site of “El Dorado,” the legend that served for the inscription of the region into the teleology of Western capitalism, the novel remembers a past that is longed for, but also questioned and critiqued. As an outsider from his family, the city, and ultimately History, Armintos’s voice stands as an alternative narrative that resists the (Hegelian) idea of progress leading to freedom and redemption. The novel does so by situating the narrative against a would-be historical account of the Cordovil family tentatively titled “Façanhas de um civilizador” [Endeavors of a Civilizing Leader]. The presence of this supposedly historical text is pivotal for understanding the novel’s ideological position. While “Façanhas...” would have confirmed the idea of El Dorado by legitimizing immigrants’ endeavors to “civilize” the region and their

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<sup>40</sup> “What I would sell was a tall story to which I had been putting the finishing touches during the trip... everything needed to lend a ring of authenticity to my narration” (242-243).

appropriation and exploitation of indigenous territory, Arminto's narrative serves as an opposing oral account that integrates the voices and visions of those pushed aside by processes of modernization and thus critiques the "civilizing" enterprise. *Órfãos do Eldorado*, hence, is built on the paradoxes of the archive versus the novel, and writing versus orality. In this sense, the blank page is not a literal piece of paper, but memory as the site where an alternative history can be written.

As part of the alternative visions that are included in the novel, the *encante* stories hold an important place. They are a series of myths and legends associated with local and indigenous perspectives of the region that offer alternative and competing forms of understanding Amazonia's nature as something elusive. To this extent, Arminto's oral narrative constitutes a form of fiction against the narrative of colonization and the Western discourses that have claimed possession of the region's nature.

By articulating a critique of History from the margins, Hatoum engages in an intertextual dialogue with da Cunha's idea of Amazonia "at the margins of History." While da Cunha represented Amazonia as a place soon to be integrated into History, Hatoum does so by focusing on the ruins left by the arrival of modernization and History, and through the voices of those marginalized by it. In dialogue with Benjamin's and Chakrabarty's critique of historicism and adhering to Chatterjee's critique of the nation's homogenizing time, Chapter Four argues that Hatoum's *Órfãos do Eldorado* critiques the integration of Amazonia into processes of modernization and into the narrative of History. Moreover, the novel re-elaborates the topic of the rubber production era in Amazonia and redefines the tradition of the "novelas de las selva" by representing the region through the rarely seen urban experience of the industrialized and cosmopolitan cities of Manaus and Belém do Pará. Through the contrast between the once vibrant cities of the rubber boom and the globalized urban spaces of today, where tourists and shantytowns overlap, the novel highlights its critical vision of Amazonia's modernity.

Echoing the search for a precise language and talking about the blank page, Hatoum has stated the following:

[P]ara um escritor que mora longe dos centros irradiadores de cultura, mas perto de uma das regiões mais exóticas do mundo, cabe-lhe responder a uma pergunta: como povoar de signos este espaço branco (a folha do papel), tendo como referencia simbólica um outro espaço em Blanco, konradiano, lugar longínquo, território perdido *num recanto da floresta e num desvão obscurecido da história?* (Hatoum *Escrever à margem* 6)<sup>41</sup>

By asking the question of how to write Amazonia, by making clear references to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and by quoting Euclides da Cunha's image of Amazonia as a "white page," Hatoum is deliberately re-stating the pivotal question of this dissertation: how to re-write and translate into the domain of literature the region in dialogue with its discursive past? As Hatoum explains, writing [a escritura] "trata-se simplesmente (mas isso é decisivo) da

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<sup>41</sup> A writer who lives far away from the centers from which culture spreads, but close to one of the most exotic regions of the world, must respond a question: how to fill with signs the blank space (the paper), having as a reference another Blank space, which reminds of Conrad, a faraway place, a lost territory *in a far corner of the forest and in a lost dark place in history?* (my translation).

dificuldade de escrever ou da recusa de repetir o que já foi pensado e escrito” (qtd. in Pinheiro 11).<sup>42</sup>

As a laboratory for fiction, Amazonia has forced reflections, renovations, transformations and re-writing processes for the Latin American novel. Driven by a meta-reflection on the process of writing, it is not a coincidence that the “blank page” becomes the ground zero from where these novels articulate questions and reflections on what writing means, how it should be done, and the forms in which Amazonia should be represented. To this extent, faced with the question of *how to represent Amazonia*, modern literature has confronted and re-defined what the categories of language, form, and fiction mean, and how they can be used as means for the articulation of a post-colonial discourse of both the Amazon region and Latin America by extension.

### **Amazonia as a Postcolonial Construction**

Modern literature about Amazonia, I claim, destabilizes, questions, and critiques the construction of the region as a conquerable, consumable, and apprehensible space. It writes against the discourses and practices that forced the integration of Amazonia into processes of modernization, and into the Western narrative of History as the development and expansion of “civilization.” In this section I want to focus on further elaborating what I understand when I claim that modern literature articulates a post-colonial discourse about Amazonia, and I also want to point to the main theories that, within the vast frame of post-colonial studies, inform my particular readings and analysis.

The three first chapters (the analysis of *À margem da história*, *La vorágine*, and *Los pasos perdidos*) focus, at large, on the category of space. They study the representation of Amazonia as a matter of dimensions, or of extensions, or as a location that one can travel through, either having a sense of orientation or, on the contrary, being disoriented through and in it. For da Cunha, for example, Amazonia is an immense and complex space that one is unable to comprehend in its totality; in Rivera’s novel it appears as one where disorientation is the norm; in Carpentier it appears as a space of accumulation and simulacrum, where things are not what they seem to be, and hence where one can get lost as well. In *Los pasos perdidos*, however, what seems to have more relevance is not the space in itself, but the possibility of writing about it. Nonetheless, in Chapters One through Three, the articulation of a post-colonial discourse appears through the category of space: Amazonia is a place that cannot be fully comprehended in its totality, and therefore it resists being structured into a stable, apprehensible, translatable structure. To this extent, the first three chapters recurrently refer to landscapes, maps, cartography, or geography at large (and each chapter specifies and theorizes each one of these categories). To a certain extent, these chapters represent Amazonia, among others, as a space unable and unwilling to be comprehended and represented by a conventional and effective map. Responding to this, some of the most important categories of post-colonial criticism with which this dissertation is in dialogue are categories related to space. Some of these are, as it will be seen later on, Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of *smooth* and *striated* spaces, or José Rabasa’s concept of an “elsewhere.”

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<sup>42</sup> Writing is simply about –and this is pivotal– the difficulty of creating or avoiding the repetition of that which was already thought and written (my translation).

However, the category of space is intertwined and codependent with the category of time. This dissertation operates on the claim that an apprehension and rationalization of space is also an integration of space into the discourses and practices of modernity; that means, an integration of space into a scope of control, and thus its integration into a system of capitalist production. But as such, it is also the integration into the temporalities of modernity and, particularly, into the narrative of History. Consider, for example, the category of the *landscape*, a pivotal concept for Chapter Two. Landscapes are a conventional form of spatial representation where a land is depicted as an extension that is *seen*, and as such, apprehended. As the gaze contemplates the horizon, the subject appropriates the land and converts it into a territory. The extension of the land above and ahead becomes a dominated space, or at least one that will be, once the subject's power extends to its horizon. Landscapes, as W.J.T Mitchell explains, are concomitant to imperialism. Landscapes were not only depictions that reflected and projected the empire's desire of growth and appropriation, but were also "a crucial means for enlisting 'Nature' in the legitimation of modernity" (Mitchell 13). In other words, landscapes exposed a kind of land and nature that needed to be tamed and conquered, and as such they legitimated the project of modernity. In this sense, landscapes *wrote spaces into* History, and the extension and the horizon constitute the future of the empire. Something similar could be said for cartography, or for any other of the forms of spatial appropriation that are considered in this dissertation. To this extent, the study of the category of space is also, necessarily, the study of the category of time. Time is pivotal for the analysis of all the texts studied in this dissertation. Nonetheless, it is the particular focus of Chapter Four and the analysis of *Órfãos do Eldorado* – in particular the temporality of History. Consequently, as it will be seen later on, the articulation of a post-colonial discourse through the "novelas de la selva" will spring out of a dialogue with theory of time as a post-colonial problem: Chatterjee's notion of a heterogeneous time, and Chakrabarty's critique of historicism.

In this dissertation I understand *post-colonial* to mean a set of rhetoric and literary gestures that could be understood as a response that critiques, questions, or destabilizes, the imageries, discourses, and practices that consolidated Amazonia as a site for the expansion and consumption of the empire, neo-colonial endeavors, and the expansion of the nation. This means that I understand *post-colonial* as a category that does not exclusively belong to the Empire, but to all projects of expansion and consumption that spring from neo-colonial foreign interests, and even from within the nation building processes. In this sense, I don't think colonialism is a category that ended with the Latin American processes of independence, but a continuing and ongoing process that left its echoes, footprints, and legacies as seen in the evolution and consolidation of capitalism by elites, private institutions, and the government itself. In some instances the appropriation of Amazonia is an endeavor of the empire itself, but other times it is a practice executed by the nation state, or even the economies that they support through the development of national industrialization processes. The post-colonial resistance of which I speak is thus a fluid and ever moving confrontation against the English naturalist explorers, the processes of national modernization, or the industries of the elites, among others.

The ground zero of my analysis is the category of space: either Amazonia as a real geographical space, or space as something that appears through representation (a literary space). This dissertation, as a study of literature, is less interested in place (location) and more concerned with the broader, multilayered category of space (a social construction). Before claiming that modern literature deconstructs, critiques, or dismantles, or to say the least, manipulates, this



category, one would have to define *what it is*. Answering this question, Henri Lefevre starts by explaining that space is a category that one is able to understand only through the division created by the modern distribution of knowledge. In this sense, space can only be defined within the fields of mathematics, geography, politics, economics, etc. Space, thus, is signified by the mediation of forms of knowledge that serve modern production and capitalism. The *production of space* is determined by the idea that space is also a *social practice* and a *representation*: it is determined by the set of practices, relations, and signs that at the same time occupy it and define it. The space of the nation, for example, is defined by the interactions between locations and, above all, the social relationships between state, citizens, and their integration to modes of production. Space is, Lefevre argues, that which gives consistency to ideology (44); it is a contingent category that is produced by the knowledge and social relations that determine the conditions of capital productivity.

Space is, therefore, a concept tightly intertwined with capitalism and, as such, with History as the expansion of Western “civilization” and its economy: “According to Hegelianism, historical time gives birth to that space which the state occupies and rules over” (Lefevre 21). This brings us back to the inseparability of the concepts of time and space. Space is concomitant with European imperialism and the acts of “discovery,” conquest, and possession of the colonies. Hegel understood History as a progression and evolution in time towards a liberating goal, towards the triumph of individual freedom, reason, and to the secular law-regulating state and its economy. The world’s History –and by this Hegel means the History of the West– can be explained as the development and progress of a consciousness of freedom and liberation that ends up in the institution of capitalism. But in addition to this, taking into consideration Lefevre’s point, History is also the production of space as a category for the implementation and expansion of the productive forces of capitalism. This is important in this dissertation to the extent that it illuminates that a critique of the production of space also entails, necessarily, a critique of History and a critique of capitalism.

The question that occupies this dissertation is less an inquiry into how does one *produce* a space and more a problem of how does one *make sense* of a space. Literary discourses, Lefevre would say, are part of the social relations and signs that produce a space, but they are far from being the primal factors in its production. This is to say that I don’t believe literature has the capacity to produce space: it is merely one of the contributing factors, among many more. To this extent, I want to state clearly that my interest does not revolve around a *philosophy of space*, but around the practices, and more specifically, the cultural representations that *make sense* (that is, that support and/or confront) the ideologies that are imbedded in space.

One of the first ideas that help me think how to make sense of a space are the concepts of *striated* and *smooth* spaces as developed by philosophers Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze in *A Thousand Plateaus* (originally published in 1980). The first one, the striated, is the kind of space instituted by the state apparatus: it is measurable, optically perceived, it organizes matter and is organized matter. It is compartmentalized and systematized, for it is the optimization of space for production. The grid of the agricultural land is a vivid example, with its delimitations, rows, systems of irrigation and recollection: tamed nature at its maximum. The smooth space, on the other hand, is its opposite: it is a space not perceived optically, but haptically (the gaze is the extension of reason through the eye). It is filled with intensities and happenings rather than with

organized processes: it is felt, perceived and experienced rather than explained. Imagine, for example, the selva of the opening example of this dissertation, ¡*Árboles, árboles, árboles!*

Smooth space... is a space of affects, more than one of properties. It is a haptic rather than an optical perception. Whereas in the striated forms organize a matter, in the smooth materials signal forces and serve as symptoms for them. It is an intensive rather than extensive space, one of distances, not of measures and properties... A Body without Organs instead of an organism and organization. Perception in it is based on symptoms and evaluations rather than measures and properties... Striated space, on the contrary, is canopied by the sky as measure and by the measurable visual qualities derived from it. (Deleuze and Guattari 479)

Yet, smooth and striated spaces, although different in nature, are not opposed binaries: they need each other to coexist; one becomes one or the other because of its contrary. In a similar way, Amazonia only becomes a smooth space upon the arrival of the striated force, which in the case of Amazonia stands for the transformation of the region into the site of consumable wealth. The concepts of smooth and striated spaces let me understand that space is a category that can present itself -or be constructed as- something that can be either grasped and apprehended, or in opposition, difficult and impossible to seize. Amazonia can be depicted as a space that could be organized and put into a production mode (i.e. the landscape and the map) or it could be presented as a space that can hardly be rationalized (i.e. the ever moving Amazonia that appears in da Cunha, or the impenetrable selva, as it appears in Rivera).

If spaces give consistency to ideology, changes in the experiences, practices, and perceptions of space can imply modes of confrontation to ideologies. Besides the concepts of smooth and striated spaces, I also find useful José Rabasa's concept of "elsewheres." Although developed in very different fields of academic production (Rabasa is located in the contemporary field of subaltern studies), the concept of "elsewhere" also implies a resistance to a dominating ideology. In *Tell me the Story of How I Conquered You* (2011), Rabasa proposes a conceptual *locus* that describes experiences of resistance, questioning, and undermining of imperial practices of subjugation. Rabasa develops this concept through an analysis that highlights both the ideological and epistemological position from which subjects speak of their own position. When the imperial power demanded the Aztec *tlacuilo* to tell the story of how their people committed ethnocide, he created a narrative that, although responding to the demand, included variations and nuances that subverted the "epistemological certainty of the missionaries" (*Tell me* 195). In doing so, the *tlacuilo* dislocated and disjointed himself of the all embracing ideology of the empire: he presented a version that was not quite the version of the empire. He presented himself as an Other whose experience and worldview could not be fully conquered and comprehended by the empire's ideology. He created, within his rhetoric, a place of a certain autonomy and resistance. This place is an "elsewhere," and it is inaccessible to the empire.

"The space of *elsewheres*" says Rabasa, "remains indeterminate, if not empty of positive characteristics. It's haunting because it sets the limits of empire, whether understood as a domain of reason or as the space of a gaze that by definition remains inaccessible and troubling." (*Tell me* 195). On the first place, "elsewheres" denote the apparition of a conflicting *other* epistemology that resists being canceled by one dominating ideology or story: they reveal a symbolic space that is not conquered and not apprehended. They also denote the possibility of an outside of ideology, outside of History, and outside of modernity. They help us reveal and understand instances or spaces that are not pre-modern or pre-History, but that are all together

outside of these narratives. This concept is relevant and useful for this dissertation in the sense that it provides a model for thinking Amazonia outside the dichotomies of wild/tamed, prehistorical/historical, included/excluded, included in the nation/outscribed from the nation, etc. The concept of “elsewheres” helps clarify that when one says, as I do, that the literary depictions of Amazonia construct the region as a symbolic space that resists imperialism, modernization, capitalism, etc, they do not become, thus, *pre spaces* awaiting for them, but, as Rabasa explains, spaces that are indeterminate. By framing it as an epistemological problem, one that is grounded on the act of *writing*, Rabasa’s concept also points to *representation* as the mechanism through which the ideological resistance happens.

The concepts of striated and smooth spaces, and the concept of “elsewheres” provide models for understanding how representation is capable of depicting spaces as sites of resistance and confrontation to Western imperialism. Chapter One proposes to think da Cunha’s literary representation of Amazonia as a smooth space in the context of Brazil’s growing capitalist modernization; the region appears as a space constantly in motion, unstable and too immense to be put into a grid. Chapter Two proposes that Rivera’s reflections on the process of writing itself point to the emergence of Amazonia as an “elsewhere” where the selva cannot be fully comprehended into the scope of modern thought. However, I do not think that these concepts are the only ways of thinking about da Cunha’s essays or Rivera’s novels. By including them as theoretical apparatuses in these analyses I want to create a fluid and open dialogue of possibilities. None of these concepts really fit into the texts as jigsaw puzzle pieces: they are rather attempts –*essayers*- to generate a conversation about the possibility of reading modern literature about the region as a post-colonial discourse. In other words, they are tools, models, and ideas to open up the complexities and layers of the literary texts I study.

Inseparable from space, time is the other category that this dissertation studies. Within this category, I am only interested in the idea of History, and I start from a Hegelian understanding of it. In this sense, time –History- is understood as the progression and expansion of Western values, ideals, politics, and economy, in itself a progression and triumph of the individual’s freedom and reason. From the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment, and from there to the French Revolution and later on the Industrial Revolution, Hegel’s narrative of History is also the narrative of the development of Capitalism, and as such, the arrival of modernity, in itself a category invented within the Western narrative of History. Being included or excluded from the category of History means, in this sense, to be included or excluded from modes of modern production. Amazonia, as it was explained earlier, was *inscribed* into the narrative of History through the texts written by the imperial explorers. Modern literature, as a post-colonial response, complicates this inscription.

The starting point for destabilizing this category is through the idea that time is not homogeneous. In “Thesis on the Philosophy of History,” written in 1940, Benjamin writes that “the concept of historical progress of mankind cannot be surrendered from the concept of its progression through a homogeneous, empty time. A critique of the concept of such a progression must be the basis of any criticism of the concept of progress itself” (261). Benjamin dismantles the idea of History as progress, but most importantly, critiques the act of “establishing a casual connection between various moments in history” (263) as a form of articulating a narrative

towards “redemption” (254). He critiques Historicism, the tendency to always read and include past events into this narrative.

A critique of historicism is precisely what enables José Rabasa to conceive “elsewheres” as instances outside the dominating narrative of the West. On the other hand, and very much in dialogue with Rabasa, it enables Dipesh Chakrabarty to “provincialize” Europe’s narrative, that is, to frame it into a very specific context, and by doing so limiting its potential to inscribe the rest of the world. Historicism, explains Chakravarty, “was a mode of thinking about history in which one assumed that any object under investigation retained a unity of conception throughout its existence and attained full expression through a process of development in secular, historical time” (*Provincializing* xiv). Historicism, continues to explain Chakrabarty, “enabled European domination of the world in the nineteenth century” (7), formulated progress and development as dominating ideologies, and facilitated the expansion of capitalism as a legitimate global enterprise for Europe (7). This is relevant to this dissertation to the extent that it illuminates how the Empire understood (and understands) Amazonia only as a space that was either waiting to be modernized, or that could only be comprehensible if and when it was inscribed into the narrative of West’s expansion and project.

Partha Chatterjee also proposes a criticism that helps to articulate a post-colonial resistance to the idea of History. His criticism is aimed specifically at questioning Benedict Anderson’s definition of the nation as an imagined political community that, as Chatterjee explains, is also imagined as living in a “homogeneous empty time” (4). The modern project of nation building was structured around the idea of a “simultaneous experience” of modernity, in itself centered around the idea of the establishment of capitalism. “Empty homogeneous time is the time of capital,” explains Chatterjee. In “The Nation in Heterogeneous Time,” the critic explains that

[P]eople can only imagine themselves in empty homogeneous time; they do not live in it. Empty homogeneous time is the utopian time of capital. It linearly connects past, present, and future, creating the possibility for all of those historicist imaginations of identity, nationhood, progress, and so on that Anderson, along with many others, have made familiar to us. But empty homogeneous time is not located anywhere in real space- it is utopian. The real space of modern life consists of heterotopia. (My debt to Michel Foucault should be obvious, even if I am not always faithful to his use of the term.) Time here is heterogeneous, unevenly dense. (6-7)

Chatterjee’s critique complicates the idea of the nation as a coherent unit by explaining that there is no *one* time that governs, but that disparity and heterogeneity are the structuring principles of the modern nation. The idea of a “heterogeneous time” emerges as a resistance to be simplified and apprehended by one temporality that is not only unable to reach to all the corner’s of the country, but that in doing so it also executes a political and epistemological violence.

Rabasa’s concept of “elsewheres,” together with Chakrabarty’s critique of Historicism, and Chatterjee’s idea of a heterogeneous time, offer models to think about the limitations of the narrative of History and, most importantly, open up alternatives for discursive resistance. A critique of the ways in which Amazonia has been constructed as a conquerable and consumable site is necessarily a critique of the ways in which Europe, the nation, and capitalism have imagined and represented their History. As a *written narrative*, History finds its legitimacy in the

domain of authority granted by the relationship between writing and power. To this extent, as a corpus of literature that reflects on processes of writing and representation, modern literature about Amazonia creates a critical distance from the texts and discourses that have integrated the region into the Western scope.

Chapters Three and Four propose an analysis in dialogue with the ideas about time presented here. In many ways a re-writing of a colonial chronicle, and itself a novel written on a notebook that recalls the act of colonization, Carpentier's *Los pasos perdidos* signals the writing of history as, precisely, just another act of writing and language. In this sense, it comments on the limitations of apprehending the selva through an act of writing. On the other hand, built against an archive and a narrative of "civilization," and including the narratives of those at the margins of History, *Órfãos do Eldorado* is a powerful critique of modernization and History as failed promises that were only capable of leaving ruins and desolation.

The novels studied in this dissertation, in conclusion, articulate a discourse that resists and complicates the idea of Amazonia as a conquerable and consumable space apt for imperial and capitalist expansion. This is not to say that they de-colonize the region, but it does bet on the idea that literature creates an awareness of the discourses and practices that have claimed possession over the region, and in doing so they complicate our understandings, notions, and imageries. Western ideology sheds a light that expands and penetrates, trying to illuminate all corners of the world. It is so powerful that it has violently diminished all the other lights that were where the big light now shines. If this is so, the texts that I study interrupt this light and they create shadows, disturbances, gloominess. Within these dark spots other fires have the possibility of shining.

### **Literature: A Laboratory for Amazonia**

One could turn around the idea of Amazonia being a laboratory for fiction, and start considering the possibility of literature being a laboratory for Amazonia. The question is then not *how to represent Amazonia* but *how to return to Amazonia from the tropes that literature created*. In other words, what can literary discourses say about the region? Does literature convey an ethics and a politics through which we can return to Amazonia, its people, and its nature? At the verge of environmental collapse, these questions are urgent. As a critique of capitalism's consumption of nature, this dissertation is also critiquing of the ways in which Amazonia's nature has been thought of, represented, and included into processes of modernization. It speaks of the ways in which capitalism has relied on Amazonia's imagery as a site of natural wealth awaiting to be integrated and consumed.

So far, the focus has been modern literature about Amazonia and the ways in which it destabilizes and critiques the discourses and practices that forced the integration of the region into processes of modernization. It generates a dialogue between theories of the novel, post-colonial criticism, and the criticism that has dealt specifically with the development of either Latin American literature at large, or of Amazonia specifically. Nonetheless, this dissertation's future is to bring these debates into the field of eco-criticism, which is, in many ways, always latent and even sometimes present. The same ways in which modern literature creates a critical distance and an awareness of the imageries with which we have come to understand Amazonia,

modern literature draws our attention to the ways in which we, as a modern capitalist society, negotiate our relationship with nature.

As a mode of analysis concerned with nature and its functional balance, eco-criticism studies “the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (Glotfelty 122). It is based on the idea that the ways we think and represent nature inform, and are informed by, the ways in which we operate on nature. By analyzing and deconstructing the ways in which nature appears in cultural products, we are able to see with clarity what are the economic, political, and epistemological reasons that determine our negotiation with nature. Further than that, by pointing at the ideologies that rule the forms of representing it, eco-criticism also directs its attention to modernity as a pivotal axis of our relationship with the environment. As Ursula K. Heise explains,

environmentalism and ecocriticism aim their critique of modernity at its presumption to know the natural world scientifically, to manipulate it technologically and exploit it economically, and thereby ultimately create a human sphere apart from it in a historical process that is usually labeled ‘progress’. This domination strips nature of any other value other than as a material resource and commodity and leads to a gradual destruction that may in the end deprive humanity of its basis for subsistence. (167)

From the chronicles of the conquest to the narratives of the scientific explorers, and farther than that, Amazonia has been represented as the proper site for exploitation. The very colonial idea that the region is, above all, a *site of nature*, must be critiqued and complicated. To this extent, an eco-critique of Amazonia’s discursive history must work hand in hand with a post-colonial inquiry. In their introduction to *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2006), Graham Guggan and Helen Tiffin argue that “European justification for invasion and colonization proceeded from the basis of [that which is not human], understanding non-European lands and the people and animals that inhabited them as ‘spaces’, ‘unused, underused, or empty’” (181).

As it has been explained some paragraphs above, writing authorized and legitimized a separation from the European man, and the nature and inhabitants of Amazonia. This separation guaranteed and justified the dominion over the region and enabled its consumption and exploitation. As Guggan and Tiffin continue to explain, “[t]he very ideology of colonization is thus one where anthropocentrism and Eurocentrism are inseparable” (181). The pervasive anthropocentrism with which and through which Amazonia has been represented has enabled its devastation. The resistance with which Amazonia appears in the literary works that this dissertation studies challenges and limits human control over the region’s nature and, in this way, at least at a symbolic level, they question and destabilize the anthropocentric rationale that has prevailed.

In this sense, an eco-critique of discourses of Amazonia should question the relationship between literature and nature, critique its integration into modernity, and from a post-colonial perspective, challenge the anthropocentric and Eurocentric perspective with which it has been imagined. Regarding this, and about Amazonia specifically, relevant work is already being written: the work of Scott M. DeVries, Jorge Marcone, and Candace Slater are good examples of it. I believe one of the central challenges of an eco-critique of Amazonia relies, above all, in the question of *how to return to Amazonia as a place*. In other words, the challenge is to bring the

study of literature into a *sense of place*.<sup>43</sup> How does literature about the region matter to the actual and contemporary challenges that the region faces?

This question is not an easy one. It echoes one of the most difficult questions to answer: why does literature matter? As scholars devoted to literature, we all seem to know why. Literature gives the answer to who we are and it shows how we do it. Literature is, on top of that, language, and what are we if not beings determined, empowered, and limited by language? However, this is not a satisfactory answer when it comes to the question of how does literature intervene on the level of the praxis of capitalism. Perhaps literature cannot intervene in its praxis, and this responds to the place capitalism itself has given to literature. To this extent, the future of this dissertation is to propose a debate around the possibility of returning to a sense of place in the literature about Amazonia.

This debate, I believe, should take place at the intersection between sciences and the humanities. As a closing gesture, then, let me return to fiction, or even better, the point where science and fiction meet. There is no other more powerful symbol of the praxis of capitalism than science; science is, after all, the discourse and practice that allowed Amazonia's consumption. But what would happen if one starts to understand science, above all, as language, and as such, as something all too similar to literature? "Knowledge," explains Bruno Latour, "does not reflect a real external world that it resembles via mimesis, but rather a real interior world, the coherence and continuity of which it helps to ensure" (58). We think of science as the discourse of *exactitude* where the sign stands for reality, where a mimetic act occurs. But science and knowledge, Latour tells us, are also practices of language whose relationship to reality is not that different from that of literature. "The sciences do not speak of the world but, rather, construct representations that seem always to push it away, but also to bring it closer" (Latour 30). As a system of signs that distances itself from the world, but at the same time brings it closer, science is like literature. This leads Latour to wonder "how the sciences can be at the same time realist and constructivist, immediate and intermediary, reliable and fragile, near and far" (30).

My proposal is that one can ask about the ways in which literature intervenes in the world by asking, in a paradoxical way, about the ways in which a praxis of the real world –science- is always already an act all too similar to literature. By doing so, perhaps, one can argue, together with Timothy Morton, that ecology is, first and foremost, not a matter of organisms interacting with each other, but of the relationships and interactions between all discourses and practices of the planet. Within this debate of language, literature, science, and the world, I propose, as a future destination for this dissertation, a conversation that starts with Latour's groundbreaking question: "Does science and fiction differ?" (30).

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<sup>43</sup> An important corpus of academic production has proposed thinking about place, like Ursula K. Heise in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* (2008), and Elizabeth de Loughrey and George B. Handley in *Postcolonial Ecologies, Literatures of the Environment* (2011).

At the start of the twentieth century Amazonia seems to be the place where modernity's collapse announces itself. Its nature and societies are already too much into the vortex of modern demands. Exiting or stopping the vortex seems impossible. One possibility of making sense of it arises, however: the blank page. A white paper to fill, write, re-write and confront the vortex. The act of writing becomes the site of possibility and experimentation: a laboratory for making sense, albeit through language, of Amazonia.



## Chapter One

### “Uma miragem de territorio”: The Emergence of a Literary Amazonia in Euclides da Cunha’s *À margem da história*

#### Introduction

Writing about the Marajó island, a considerably big portion of land where the Amazon River meets the Atlantic, Euclides da Cunha (1866-1909) explains that, although it is a location with a well developed vegetation, it is, altogether, “uma miragem de territorio” (*À margem* 6).<sup>1</sup> This strange phrase deserves to be looked at with special attention for the combination of words creates an image that contains and summarizes da Cunha’s depiction of Amazonia. On the one hand, a *territory* is a word that denotes a defined portion of terrain under the control of a ruling power. It conveys the idea of a demarcated, organized, compartmentalized land, looked upon from an ideological apparatus that controls and determines its function. It is, in other words, a land that is overseen, regulated, and integrated into a political scope. A territory is a space that has been claimed, possessed, and regulated. On the other hand, the word *mirage* conveys an opposite phenomenon; it implies an illusion, perhaps an ambiguity, that mines the legitimacy of the optical order which oversees and controls. It distorts, un-regulates, and deforms. When one sees a mirage one is uncertain of what one sees: it conflicts the real with the imaginary, the objective experience with the hallucination, and it conveys that which is inapprehensible. *Uma miragem de territorio*, then, invokes a conflicting zone, or a zone of conflict: the regulated territory deforms and escapes from the optical rational order which oversees it and evades the power to which it is subjected. As it becomes a mirage, a hallucination, an ambiguous image, it also becomes impossible to grasp, hard to conceive, and difficult to apprehend. I believe Euclides da Cunha’s representation of Amazonia is exactly this: a *mirage territory*. This is what this chapter is about.

The following pages focus on Euclides da Cunha’s late work, specifically his writings about the Amazon, produced in the context of his appointment as the leader of a bi-national commission between Brazil and Peru to establish the geographical limits between the two countries in an area known as the High Purús. It focuses specifically on the first half of the book subtitled “Terra sem história,” which is about Amazonia.<sup>2</sup> It studies da Cunha’s literary representation of the region, which contradictorily tries to integrate it into the modernization process of Brazil, but at the same time represents it as an evasive and resistant space to the rationalizing logics of geographical and cartographical practices.

This chapter is, above all, about the ways in which literature re-appropriates geographic discourses. The main idea that this chapter argues is that da Cunha –or Euclides, as he has come to be known- represented Amazonia in his essays as an incomprehensible space to the

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<sup>1</sup> All English translations come from *The Amazon: Land Without History*, translated by Lúcia Sá (2006): “a mirage land” (7).

<sup>2</sup> *À margem da história* is divided into five parts, “Terra sem história,” “Vários estudos,” “Da independência à república” and “Estrelas indecifráveis.” However, the most renowned essays of the entire book are the first seven, under the title “Terra sem história,” and they have come to be known as *À margem da história*. This is true to the extent that many common editions of the text only include the first seven essays. In this dissertation I refer to these essays with the general title of the book.

rationalizing modern project that threatened to include the region into processes of modernization, and to consume the region's natural wealth. Amidst many contradictions, da Cunha's essays present a region that is unable and unwilling to be comprehended by the geographical practices that would facilitate its integration into the modern nation. Instead, what appears is a *literary* geography that is also an acute criticism of the imperial desire of apprehension over Amazonia. In doing so, da Cunha inaugurates the modern literary tradition about the region.

*À margem da história*, da Cunha's main Amazonian text, is an unfinished project that, through out seven essays, talks about his general impressions of the Purús and about Amazonia at large. It delves into the science of rivers, analyses the climate, represents the cruel life of the rubber tappers, and proposes a complex infrastructure of roads and railways for the development of the region. The text is highly influenced by a scientific perspective immersed in the context of a nation building momentum. Da Cunha's Amazonia appears, primordially, as an *unfinished* and *unstable* place where the unpredictable forces of a world still in formation operate. It is a pre-historical place, not only in the sense that it resembles a landscape of the pre-history, but most importantly in the sense that it has not been integrated into western History and "civilization." Within this space, rubber tappers, migrants from the desolate backlands of Brazil, live enslaved to the economic system of rubber exploitation that reduces them to insignificant subjects of capitalist production.

Ultimately, *À margem da história* is the creation of a national narrative filled with patriotic sentiment that aims to justify how Brazilian the Purús territory really was. It claims, together with the cartography produced by the commission, that the territory in dispute belongs to Brazilians, because Brazilians occupy it and because they take better care of it. The general project of integrating this territory into the nation responded to the need of integrating the region into the general growth of capital that was shaping the newly formed republic, and this also included the integration of the rubber system into the state's scope. However, in spite of its desire to integrate this part of Amazonia into the nation, these essays (some more than others) are more than just informational writings on the territory and its characteristics: they are complex and sophisticated literary representations that contradict, complicate, and *resist* the production of knowledge about the area.

The key to Euclides' rendition of Amazonia and the way in which it becomes ideologically resistant of the modern capitalist enterprise is language. Although highly informed by science, Euclides' linguistic register constantly moves into the domain of poetics, and in doing so, it undermines the scientific substrate of his approach to Amazonia. It is the logics of poetry that takes over the narrative, and it is literary *form* that which, at times, becomes more important than the production of objective scientific knowledge. Da Cunha represents and explains through the use of images, either presenting Amazonia as an unpredictable *mirage*, or the rubber tappers are conflicted dramatic souls, similar to literary characters in a novel. His language is contradictory, often pointing to various semantic meanings at the same time, more interested in the creation of ambiguous images (like *uma miragem de territorio*), and in the development of a rhythm and a literary tone, than in the production of accurate information. It's, to say the least, full of imagery and rhythm, and has the outstanding ability of being so emotionally charged that Amazonia is understood less from the scientific standpoint than by the drama of its nature. To this extent, da Cunha's writings are not just aesthetically complex: they

call attention onto themselves and the materiality of their form and language. In this sense, they embody the essence of what I have described in the Introduction to be *modern literature*. It is in the use of language, as well, where Amazonia emerges as a space that resists a rational apprehension into the discourses and practices of processes of modernization.

One of da Cunha's most significant elements, in which language is also a key factor, is *À margem da história's* critical intertextuality with the previous discourses about the region. His inclination towards a language informed by science but operational through poetry, responds, in part, to a deep disappointment with the ways in which Amazonia had been represented before. This disappointment is also an ideological reaction against the imperial discourses that claimed to understand, and thus appropriate, the region. If imperial discourses –those produced mainly by the naturalists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries- depict a space that can be studied, collected, and possessed, da Cunha's Amazonia is represented as an inapprehensible one. However, nowhere is da Cunha's project's contradiction more evident than in this, for he himself leads a colonizing enterprise in the Purús area, with the only exception that he stands for the project of nation building and not for European imperial expansion.

The representation of the space through images of constant movement and instability, together with the invalidation of the discourses that preceded him, lead to a representation of Amazonia as an unclassifiable and unpredictable space. Critic Pedro Maligo has referred to this as the creation of an aesthetic of chaos (40) that functions both as a "tabula rasa" that eliminates the legitimacy of previous discourses, and creates a blank page where a new representation of the region can take form. According to Maligo, the aesthetic of chaos implies the creation of a literary Amazonia as a new beginning. Euclides' literary project, together with his colleague Alberto Rangel's –with whom he shared an aesthetic and political vision- are probably the first in the Latin American tradition to depict Amazonia through a discursive machinery that strives for an, albeit problematic and contradictory, in-depth questioning and complication of the discourses and practices of modernization. This "chaos," both as an aesthetic and formal endeavor, reminds of the genre of the essay as a form that resists a conclusive and truth-seeking agenda. Seen like this, the inaugural character of Euclides' work is not only a "tabula rasa," as Maligo explains it, but the initiation of a literary tradition of which the authors included in this dissertation are immersed.

As a contradictory endeavor in between the integration of Amazonia into the modern nation and its resistance, da Cunha's literary project is illuminated when studied through Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "smooth" and "striated spaces" developed in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1981). Inapprehensible, only perceived through haptic experiences, and un-systematized, "smooth" spaces are the counter face of "striated spaces," which are delimited, controlled, and systematized spaces of production perceived through an optical order.<sup>3</sup> While "striated" spaces are the locus of capitalist production, "smooth" ones resist and avoid the forces of capitalism: the experience of "smooth" is not governed by reason, but by the senses, and experience becomes unproductive. Amazonia is constructed in da Cunha's work as a "smooth" space: optical orders

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<sup>3</sup> The relationship between an optical regime and a structure of power is a concept also developed by Martin Jay in "Scopic Regimes of Modernity." ocular experiences or forms of seeing (or not seeing) determine the way the world is comprehended and apprehended. For more on this in representations of Amazonia, see Mark Anderson's essay "The Natural Baroque: Opacity, Impenetrability, and Folding in Writing on Amazonia" (2014).

fail, haptic orders sharpen, imagination increases, reason fails, instability rules, and unproductive boredom takes over.

Moreover, according to Deleuze and Guattari, “smooth” and “striated” spaces are less opposite concepts than correlative experiences of space: one cannot happen without the other. There is no “smooth” space without its neighboring “striated” order. This correlative dichotomy becomes highly productive in understanding da Cunha’s project as a whole. In *À margem da história* the conflicting forces between the establishment of a modern regime and its resistance are always present. In the case of Amazonia, they signal both the integration of the region into the modernizing processes of Brazil, and an attempt to symbolically resist –that is, in the domain of the literary- the subjugation of the Amazon into the state’s apparatus. The concepts of “smooth” and “striated” spaces frame these contradictory forces as necessarily coexistent dimensions.

These concepts provide an understanding of the paradoxical forces of modernity in Latin America, as well. The establishment of Europeanized, urban, productive, and capitalist systems, together with a nostalgia of a pre-modern world and a resistance to modernization, characterize the experience of modernity in the continent. Through the concepts “smooth” and “striated” spaces, and through literary representations like the one da Cunha delivers, we are able to understand that modernity is both the *desire* and an *anxiety* of being located on a map. To this extent, the modern discourse of Amazonia is characterized by a desire of inclusion and nationalization, but also by the apparition of a literary discourse that critiques and destabilizes such desire. And more than that, this dichotomy is precisely what defines modernity in the Amazon. “Uma miragem de território” (6), da Cunha’s uncanny phrase, is the modern discourse of Amazonia. It is not only a zone of conflict, but a conflicting zone: a zone where the forces of modernity are diffracted, where the optical order becomes distrustful, and where the systematization becomes obstructed. Moreover, it is literature (*miragem*) taking over politics (*territory*): that’s the conflict. It is chaos taking over order, the smoothing of the striated.

This chapter situates Euclides da Cunha’s work at the origin of a tradition that speaks about the tension that defines twentieth century discourses on Amazonia, struggling between its autonomy as a space and a struggling region in the isolation and periphery of central governments. In the following pages this chapter will start by situating Euclides da Cunha within the Brazilian literary tradition, and it will then delve into an analysis of *À margem da história*’s literary representation of space. It will comment on the role of da Cunha amidst the production of geographical knowledge in modern Brazil, and it will analyze the essays in “Terra sem história” as the creation of a *literary* geography. In the end, the analysis will return to the idea of an aesthetic of chaos, and Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of “smooth” and “striated” spaces, as ways to understand how da Cunha’s texts represents Amazonia through a post-colonial frame.

### **The Man of *Os sertões***

For a better comprehension of Euclides da Cunha’s writings and his work as an official commissioner for the state in the delimitation of Brazil’s Amazonian frontiers, it is important to understand who he was in the political ambiance of his time. When he produced his work about the Purús region he was already a public figure whose influence in the intellectual circles was important. His participation in public affairs was achieved, in part, by the publication in 1902 of *Os sertões; Campanha de Canudos* [The Backlands: The Canudos Campaign], which positioned

him as an active member of literary and political circles. As it will be seen further on, *Os sertões* reveals Euclides' vision of Brazil and the contradicting ideological frames with which he understands the young republic. The national narrative that is delineated in *Os sertões* is essential in understanding his later work about Amazonia and his vision of Brazil as a nation.

Euclides da Cunha was born in Rio de Janeiro in 1866 and was raised between his native city and the northeastern state of Bahia. He started a career in engineering and soon moved to a military institution, where he finished his studies at the age of 26, renouncing to his military position as well. During his career, due in part by the fact that he was temporarily expelled for participating in minor rebellious acts, da Cunha started to collaborate with the journal *O estado de São Paulo*, where his first writings began to circulate. In 1897 he was sent to the northeastern dry backlands of Brazil (the *sertões*) to report on a series of uprisings of a poor and forgotten town called Canudos, where a notorious leader, Antonio Conselheiro, problematic figure for the newly established Republican government, was leading a revolt. His first reports assured the nation that the military were winning over the "conselheristas" (the followers of Conselheiro), a fact that probably led him to be rapidly appointed by the government as the official reporter of the expeditions to eradicate the rebel. His participation in these series of attacks, what he ended up writing about them, defined his place within Brazil's history and positioned him as a fundamental thinker of modern Brazil.

Euclides went to the *sertão* both to report and understand what had lead to this revolt. The town of Canudos, in the middle of the northeastern dry-lands, was a precarious settlement of at least 30,000 people who lived in absolute poverty and abandonment from the state, which had been recently proclaimed as a Republic. Conselheiro (an unconventional mix of a mystical and a political character), attracted people in very precarious situations from all different places in the north of Brazil, and became a leader who demanded the attention of the state. They lived in a region where droughts were so harsh that life was often unsustainable, making their isolation even more severe. The neighboring towns rapidly saw them as a rebellious and anarchist settlement where the state needed to intervene, and the state itself saw them as a growing cancer that needed to be eliminated. What was first thought of as an easy fight to dissolve the problematic town, soon started to be a much harder situation to deal with. The people from Canudos rapidly defeated the military incursions that attempted to destroy them, and these events rapidly became a matter of national interest. What was believed to be a barbarous and poor forgotten town, began to hurt the ego of a powerful and modern Republic. After three battles lost, the military's comeback was brutal and definitive: in October 1897 Canudos was destroyed and most of its people finally killed.

During and after Canudos, da Cunha started publishing articles and informing the nation about the *sertões*. He became recognized as an expert on the region, and began forming part of an elite of intellectuals that worked closely with the government and whose voice was heard throughout the country. He became a member of the *Instituto Histórico e Geográfico*, where he gave lectures, and often participated in state affairs where his experience and knowledge were often consulted. He gathered all his impressions, observations, and studies in a final comprehensive book about the *sertões*. After four years of exhaustive revisions, in 1902 Euclides da Cunha published what came to be his masterpiece, *Os sertões. Campanha de Canudos*, a description and study of the Brazilian backlands, its geography, its history, its people, their culture, and the event that ended up with the destruction of Canudos.

Da Cunha was an engineer and an intellectual shaped by his military upbringing and formed by science, and in many ways all these inform his book. *Os sertões* is a scientific and anthropo-geographical study of the Brazilian backlands that is mostly coded under the nineteenth century categories of barbarism and civilization, and under the ideas of backwardness and progress that ruled nation building liberalism in Latin America during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But although it is a book informed by these perspectives, it is also a cornerstone in the creation of a new post-colonial outlook of Brazil.

*Os sertões* starts with a narrative map of the country that describes the territory as a totality seen from above that slowly finds its way into the backland territory. In the opening of the first chapter, “The land,” the narrator gives the following description:

O Planalto Central do Brasil desce, nos litorais do Sul, em escarpas inteiriças, altas e abruptas. Assoberba os mares; e desata-se em chapadões nivelados pelos visos das cordilheiras marítimas, distendidas do Rio Grande e Minas. Mas ao derivar para as terras setentrionais diminui gradualmente de altitude, ao mesmo tempo que descamba para a costa oriental em andares, ou repetidos socalcos, que o despem da primitiva grandeza afastando-o consideravelmente para o interior. (5)<sup>4</sup>

The narrator’s gaze sees the totality of the Brazilian map, noticing the formations of the land and navigating a geological landscape that, like a bird, flies above the continent, repeating with its flight the steeps and drops of the territory. Once the gaze from above reaches the northeastern region, the perspective of the narrator zooms into the space of the *sertões*, as if the flight had a destination to which the gaze was arriving. The arrival, though, is marked by the contrasting fact that the region lacks precise geographical information:

Abordando-o, compreende-se que ate hoje iscassem sobre tão grande trato de território, que quase abarcaria a Holanda (9° 11’ - 10° 20’ de lat. e 4° to 3° de long. O.R.J), notícias exatas ou pormenorizadas. As nossas melhores cartas, enfeixando informes escasso, lá tem um claro expressivo, um hiato, *Terra ignota*, em que se aventura o rabisco de um rio problemático ou idealização de uma corda de serras. (9)<sup>5</sup>

Da Cunha’s opening of the text implies a desire of totality that aims to visualize and organize a territory that stands for three quarts of the Latin American continent. The gaze implied in the description reveals a position of dominance and power that controls the vast territory, depicting both a landscape and cartography of the land that identifies and controls the space of the nation. The gaze that beholds the territory stands for the gaze of reason, science, and progress; it is a controlled and known portion of land because there is information –knowledge– about it. In this narrative map, however, the *sertões* appear to be an *unknown* land, a gap in

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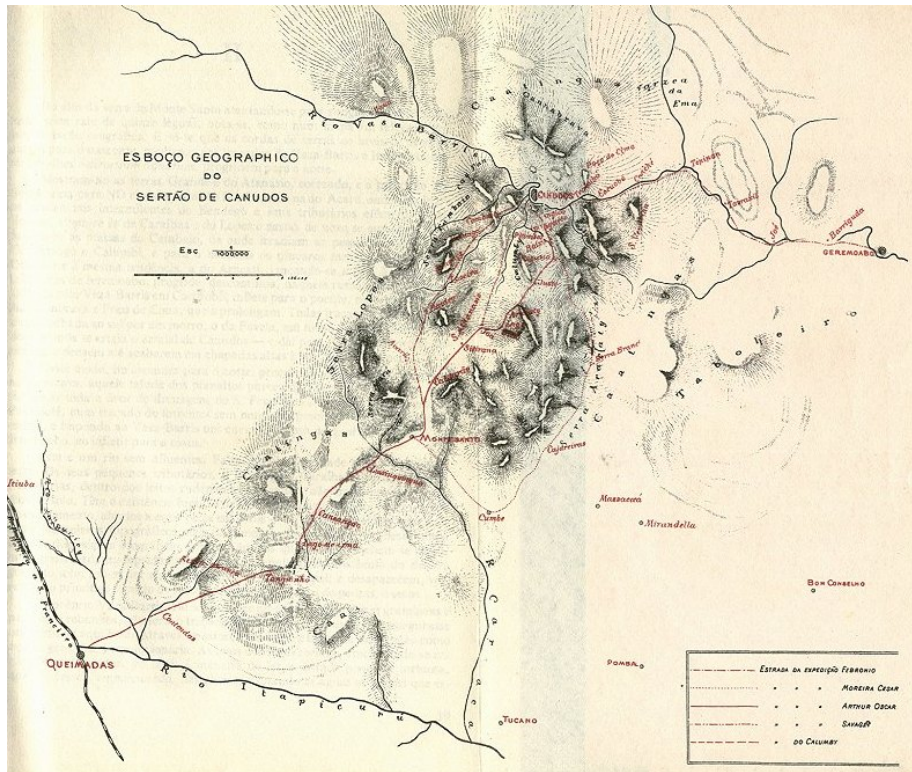
<sup>4</sup> All translations of *Os sertões* come from *Backlands. The Canudos Campaign* translated by Elizabeth Lowe (2010). “Along the southern coast of Brazil the central plateau descends in high, steep escarpments. It towers over the waves and moves back in ridges, leaving off from the peaks of the coastal ranges, extending from Rio Grande do Sul to Minas Gerais. As it continues along to northern regions, however, it gradually decreases in altitude. Descending eastward to the coast in a series of flatlands, it is stripped from its primitive grandeur, which is left considerably farther back in the interior” (5).

<sup>5</sup> “As we approach we must understand that even today there is no exact or detailed information about such a large piece of territory, which could almost take in all of Holland. Our best maps, based on scanty reports, have a blank there, a hiatus. Terra incognita, where there is an imaginative sketch of a dubious river or the idealization of a string of mountains” (13).

Brazil's configuration as a comprehensible space. The backlands are a *hiatus* –a *terra incognita*–, and as such, they are an interruption and discontinuation of Brazil. *Os sertões* endeavor is, thus, to fill in the hiatus of knowledge that interrupts the continuity of the map and thus the unification of Brazil as a modern nation.

Part of this endeavor will be to produce geographical knowledge about the *sertões*. Da Cunha's initial task is to integrate this land into the cartography of Brazil, and thus produce maps and cartographic descriptions of the land. Geography and cartography are pivotal elements in the configuration of a national narrative in *Os sertões*. They are powerful tools both in the creation of a spatial representation and a national consciousness because maps equate knowledge of the land and, most importantly, in da Cunha's positivistic mindset, highly influenced by theories of racial determination, maps also provide the comprehension of cultural and sociological aspects of its inhabitants. For da Cunha geography is the gateway to cultural, racial, and social knowledge. To study and approach the backlands of Brazil he relied on many maps of the region by Frederick Hartt and Orville Derby, among others, but also created several maps of Canudos. A close look into these maps deserves some attention.

“Esboço geográfico do sertão de Canudos” [Geographic Sketch of the Canudos Sertão] presents a space that is seen from above, permitting an omnipresent look at the land, registering terrain elevation, towns, distances between towns, and roads. It represents elevation with thin paralleled lines that converge into central points, creating the effect of mountains coming up and out of the paper. There are parallel elements that connect the map (that is, the cartographic pictorial language) with the narrative description of the land quoted some paragraphs above. For example, the cartographic resource used to generate the perspective of a space seen from above (the lines ascending and descending) is equaled to the narrative techniques used in his opening description: the paragraph quoted above relies on the description of lines descending or decreasing, and in the distinction of flat lands from risen territories, creating the illusion of a higher, powerful and omnipresent gaze that controls the totality of the territory. I believe highlighting this is important to the extent that it reveals the cartographic imagination that structures da Cunha's narrative and language: his narrative aims to work through a cartographic impulse. As critic Willi Bolle says, da Cunha is a “cartographic narrator” (54), intertwining his role as an authorial voice and his role as a cartographer, developing a literary representation of space that relies heavily on scientific geographic endeavors. It is important to highlight this because the relationship between cartographical information and writing will be one of the main elements that will be transformed and subverted in *À margem da história*, as it will be seen later on. If in *Os sertões* da Cunha appears as a “cartographic narrator,” later on he will transform into what could be described as a ‘literary geographer’, where the cartographical information is deformed (and here the idea of the *mirage* reappears) by an aesthetic impulse.



“Esboço geográfico do sertão de Canudos” [Geographic Sketch of the Canudos Sertão] 1897, designed by Euclides da Cunha in the context of his visits to the Canudos region, [www.euclidesdacunha.org.br](http://www.euclidesdacunha.org.br)

It is important not to forget that the cartography and the geographical narrative aim to complete the map and fill in the “hiatus” that the region is within the nation. The underground equation that da Cunha points to is that a comprehensive narrative of the nation could only be gained by the overarching inclusion of all the territory into a geographical continuity. However, as it will be clear throughout the chapter, this will not be the case in Amazonia: da Cunha’s literary representation of the region does not fit into a geographical logic, and thus the comprehensive continuity of the nation will be disrupted. In this sense, the idea of the backlands as a *terra incognita* or as a “hiatus” transforms from something that needs to be resolved, to something that needs to be kept as a “hiatus”: as it will be seen later on, to a certain extent, Amazonia will be represented as a space that resists to be translated into cartographical information.

Having presented the territory (and its hiatus), *Os sertões* moves inward, into the man and his culture. Framed by a positivistic ethnographic approach based on Eurocentric and urban racial constructions typical of his time, da Cunha identifies types of humans (the *gaucho*, the *vaquero*, the *yagunzo*) and their associated characteristics related to their work of the land. But in spite of the strong racial classification that structures his understanding of Brazilian non-urban society, the *sertanejos* (inhabitants of the *sertões*) become much more than just inhabitants of the region. For him the *sertanejo* is, above all, a strong man: “O sertanejo é, antes de tudo, um forte” (75).<sup>6</sup> He is not the isolated and forgotten barbarous inhabitant of the backlands, but a strong,

<sup>6</sup> “the backlander is above all a strong person” (96).



exemplar type of man that defines what Brazil is. In this sense, the destruction of Canudos was seen first as a necessary process of modernization, but ultimately it was defined by da Cunha as the most atrocious auto-inflicted wound: it was the heart of the nation that was being wounded, the cornerstone of Brazil's race: "entalhava-se o cerne de uma nacionalidade,"<sup>7</sup> [the essence of nationality was being consumed], "Atacava-se a fundo a rocha viva da nossa raça" (390).<sup>8</sup> It was the true heart of Brazil what was being attacked, its real people and culture. This changed the way the nation conceived itself, revealing it from its inside out. The country that was being presented was not uniquely composed of southern Europeanized middle class people, but also of that which was the *other*, now as an integral part of the nation. By killing the *sertanejo* and the town of Canudos, it was the heart of Brazil that was being killed.

Ultimately, Euclides understood the war of Canudos as Brazil's attack on itself, both as a result of the unstoppable forces of modernity and as a result of Brazil's weak identity. As he explains in the prologue to *Os sertões*, the insensitive elite that commanded and condoned the events were a bunch of "mercenarios inconcientes" and the events were "um crime" (1).<sup>9</sup>

This vision of the events around Canudos was a shocking verdict to the elites who supported them. It was a trap for elite readers, who flew from above with Euclides' vision – reading what they wanted to read about the backwardness of the *others*- but were suddenly forced to confront their ideals with the version of the state and the nation that the book was depicting. Not only was he criticizing the entire enterprise of war and the consolidation of the modern Republic, but was also calling into question the Europeanized and falsely constructed identity of the elites that ruled the nation. By stating that Brazil's character did not have "tradições nacionais uniformes" and that its people were "vivendo parasitariamente a beira do Atlântico, [e] dos princípios civilizadores elaborados na Europa" (1), he was launching a critique of colonialism and its legacies in the young republic.<sup>10</sup> The ideals of progress and civilization that structured the nation building process became conflicting paradigms that opened a fracture in the Brazilian identity discourse. *Os sertões* poses a question for a new identity that ought to come out of this fissure, placing the *sertanejo* at the epicenter of a new national imaginary.

As it was said before, *Os sertões* illuminates much of da Cunha's work about Amazonia. From a certain perspective *À margem da história* can be seen as a continuation of the 1902 book: it is also an inquiry into a marginal region whose exploration seeks to complete the wholes in the Brazilian map (Amazonia, and particularly the Purús region, was also a "hiatus"). More than that, it places the *sertanejo* once again as the epicenter of the Brazilian character, for it is *he* who has migrated and lives in Amazonia. However, it could be argued that *À margem da história* contains elements that denote an important evolution on Euclides' ideological discourse. *Os sertões* starts as a comprehensive cartographic depiction of the territory that seeks to include the backlands into its logic; the initial claim of the book is that geographic continuity symbols the unity of the nation. However, after the realization that the destruction of Canudos was a mistake, this symbolic continuity becomes very problematic. Da Cunha's literary representation of the

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<sup>7</sup> This famous sentence of Euclides' book is inexistent in Lowe's translation.

<sup>8</sup> "the troops were attacking the very bedrock of our race" (454).

<sup>9</sup> "unconscious mercenaries" and "a crime" (2).

<sup>10</sup> "no uniform traditions" and "[living] as parasites on this Atlantic shore of the civilizing principles drawn up in Europe" (2).

Amazon as a space inapprehensible by geography points to the complication of the modern ideals that structured the idea of the nation, as seen by the elites. In addition to this, *À margem da história* is founded right from the start on a questioning and destabilization of the previous European discourses, and places the *sertanejo* (presented more as a character than as an ethnographical type) as the unquestionable protagonist. The latter book, then, could be understood as an ideological discourse in its maturity, of which *Os sertões* is an embryo.

Although formed by very conservative and Eurocentric notions of the world, Euclides da Cunha (1866-1909) lived in a time where Brazil experienced many changes in its political sphere. This explains, in part, the shifting ideologies that shape his work. Slavery ended in 1888 and in 1889 the Portuguese Crown, which had been established in Rio de Janeiro in 1808, was inherited by the son of the Emperor Dom Pedro and ultimately overthrown by a Military Coup that gave birth to a very problematic and unstable Republic. Da Cunha became an adult surrounded by anti-imperialist ideas, often accompanied by an intellectual elite that rejected Brazil's imperial past and embraced the idea of a modern Republic. His conception of society was different from what was typically expected from liberal intellectuals like himself. By the end of his life, in the years that followed the publication of *Os sertões*, and around the publication of *À margem da história*, he became attuned with socialist ideology, highlighting the shift he experienced after facing many of the historical events of his time. This shift also underlines da Cunha's criticism and distance from the capitalist modernization enterprise of the young Brazilian republic.<sup>11</sup>

After his success with *Os sertões* Euclides became a renowned public figure, central in all debates around the configuration of the nation. In 1903 he was appointed as a member of the national Academy of Letters, proving how influential he had become after his book. By 1905 one of Brazil's main political concerns was the delimitation of its frontiers. One of Brazil's most influential names in the diplomatic arena, José Maria da Silva Paranhos, known mostly as the Baron of Rio Branco, was in charge of the delimitation of the frontier between Peru and Brazil in a region of the Amazon called the Purús. The Baron is known in Brazil's history mainly as a founding figure of diplomatic relationships, although he was a dedicated geographer fundamental in the configuration of Brazil's geography and geographic academia. José Veríssimo, another literary intellectual who became very close to Euclides, managed to put the Baron and the young Euclides in contact. This relationship would prove to be one of the most fascinating intellectual friendships of its time, and the founding link to Brazil's modern map: the Baron rapidly appointed da Cunha as the chief of the Mixed Commission (Peruvian and Brazilian) for the recognition and delimitation of the frontiers in the Amazonian region of the high Purús River, which ultimately defined the territory as Brazilian. Ready to embark in a new adventure (and, why not, in a new book), Euclides traveled to Brazil's Amazonian city of Manaus on December 13, 1905.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For more on da Cunha's life, career, and shifting ideologies, see Sylvio Rabello's *Euclides da Cunha* (1966).

<sup>12</sup> For more on this, see Susanna Hecht's book *The Scramble for the Amazon and the Lost Paradise of Euclides da Cunha* (2013). Biographies and criticism of his work abound in Brazilian and even broader Latin American scholarship: Leao's (1966), Rabello's (1966), and Ventura's (2003) work, together with Hecht's, provide an insight to both his biography and writings. Specifically about Euclides' life in the Amazon and the documents around these events, Robério Braga's book *Euclides da Cunha no Amazonas* and Leandro Tocantin's *Euclides da Cunha, Um Paraíso Perdido* are some of the most valuable texts. The latter one includes a collection of all the documents

Biographers agree in describing this trip as an escape from the hardship of his personal life. The peak of Euclides' academic and public career was also the worst moment of his private life. His wife, Ana Emilia Ribeiro, had been engaged in one of the countries most documented love affairs. Traveling to Amazonia meant some quietness away from the drama of his adulterous wife. After spending 250 days through the interior of the region, da Cunha came back defeated by malaria and to a pregnant wife carrying the child of another man. It was in this time, too, that he started publishing different essays and reports on the Amazon, specifically about the Purus River region. Critics agree that all these essays were paving the path for a soon to be book, a project for which Euclides himself was very excited, called *Um paraíso perdido*. These years were his most prolific ones: the position he had among Brazilian intellectuals placed him as one of the most important figures of his time. He participated in public debates, published his report on the Mixed Commission, wrote on journals, published essays (some gathered in books, like *Contrastes e confrontos* and *Peru versus Bolivia*, both from 1907), and was even a patron for literary authors like Alberto Rangel, who published an important collection of short stories in 1908 titled *Inferno verde*, and to which Euclides wrote the preface. In 1906 (three years after being appointed) he finally gave his speech of acceptance in the Brazilian Academy of Letters, which is today one of the key texts in Euclides bibliographic work, confirming his important place within the Brazilian intellectual atmosphere.

In 1908 he started to prepare his third book about the Purus region in the Amazon. These seven essays (some were published already on other medias) revealed a more elaborate work around the Amazon. Critics like Velloso Leão have even called them possible chapters of his soon to be book *Um paraíso perdido*. However, that's all da Cunha left us with, for his personal life interrupted his academic career once and for all. In August 15, 1909, anxious and mad, Euclides went for one last time to confront Ana, his wife. In an armed gun confrontation his wife's lover, military man Dilermando de Assis, shot Euclides to death. In 1909, one year after his death, those last seven essays selected were published under the name "Terra sem história" in the book *À margem da história*. They constitute a clue to Euclides' unfinished book *Um paraíso perdido*. *A margem da história* is, without a doubt, the first text that ruptures the Amazon's colonial past putting into question the discursive tradition that precedes it and inventing a literary representation unpaired in his time. The following pages attempt to study these complex texts about Amazonia.

### **A Productive Amazonia for the Modern Nation: A Reading of *À margem da história***

Euclides da Cunha wrote several essays about Amazonia, both before and after his actual trip to the region. These texts include the prologue to his friend Alberto Rangel's collection of short stories *Inferno verde* (1908) and the official report of the commission, the *Relatório da Comissão Mista Brasileiro-Peruana de Reconhecimento do Alto Purus* (1906). Most of these texts were published in journals like *O estado de São Paulo*, *O jornal do comercio*, or in magazines like *Kosmos*, or even the periodical publications of the *Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro*. In 1907 two sets of texts were published in separate books, titled

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written by him during his period, published in journals or other media. The recent *A vingança da Hileia: Euclides da Cunha, a Amazônia e a literatura moderna* (2009) by Francisco Foot Hardman traces the impact of da Cunha's writing in the modern Brazilian tradition.

*Contrastes e Confrontos* and *Peru versus Bolivia*. A year after his death, in 1909, his most important writing on the topic, *À margem da história*, was published containing seven essays, some of which had been published before. The majority of these texts vary from personal impressions of the landscape to scientific and geographical analysis of the land and rivers, passing through sociological and anthropological comments about the life of the rubber tappers and the delimitation of national frontiers. All these texts were destined to serve as an intellectual draft that would culminate in the book *Um paraíso perdido*, to which I will return later on.

In the following paragraphs I would like to offer an analytical reading of this unfinished text, touching on some of the most important issues raised by the book. It is interesting to notice the coincidence between da Cunha description of Amazonia as a land “unfinished,” with the fact that the literary project he embarked on for the writing of *Um paraíso perdido* was, as well, unfinished. In addition to this, he described Amazonia as an “unfinished” page that needed to be written, or re-written. I believe the idea of *the unfinished* is important to the extent that it speaks of both an ideology and a form through which, and into which, da Cunha portrays Amazonia. Later on, I will come back to the idea of the unfinished as a defining element of the form of the essay and its implication in the representation of Amazonian space. In the following paragraphs I will provide a general reading of *À margem da história*, followed by an analysis on the politics and aesthetics of language to which it points.

Euclides’ opening impressions in “Impressões Gerais” [General Impressions] confront us with the jungle as an unstable and unfinished territory, still in formation, like a pre-historic space, where human kind is nothing else than an impertinent intruder (da Cunha 2). It is a place where “desaparecem as formas topográficas mais associadas à existência humana” (29).<sup>13</sup> Rivers form and deform the shape of the landscape in an indecisive and endless process of construction and devastation that moves masses of land from the interior of the continent to the international Atlantic waters. Such are the Amazon and the rivers that wander through its valleys, he affirms; “revolta, desordenada, *incompleta*” (my emphasis 9).<sup>14</sup> Da Cunha’s understanding and portrayal of Amazonia as an unfinished pre-historical land associated with the biblical genesis draws back into a stereotypical construction of the region as a pristine paradise, typical of colonial and imperial narratives. However, da Cunha’s notion is not as simplistic as this. His pre-historical image of the region is more informed by the science of his time than by a desire to re-cast the Amazon in its old stereotypes, of which he himself is very critic.

[A] natureza é portentosa, mais incompleta. É uma construção estupenda a que falta toda a decoração interior. Compreende-se bem isto: a Amazônia é talvez a terra mais nova do mundo, consoante as conhecidas induções de Wallace e Frederico Hartt. Nasceu da última convulsão geogénica que sublevoou os Andes, e mal ultimou seu processo evolutivo com as várzeas quaternárias que se estão formando e lhe preponderam La topografia instável. (3)<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> the topographic forms most associated with human existence are absent” (32)

<sup>14</sup> “tumultuous, disorganized, incomplete” (11).

<sup>15</sup> “nature is portentous but at the same time incomplete. It is a stupendous construct lacking internal coherence. We must bear in mind that, if the calculations of Wallace and Hartt are correct, the Amazon region may well be the world’s newest land. It was born of the last geographic upheaval, which raised the Andes and has barely finished its evolutionary process with the Quaternarian plains that are still in formation and are preponderant within its unstable topography” (5).

Amazonia, very much in dialogue with the style and form in which he is writing, is presented as incomplete and lacking internal coherence. In this sense, there is a continuation with the geological theories that he is adhering to, and the writing project that he is performing. His vision of Amazonia is in dialogue with geological and geo-morphological theories of his time, not only the ones developed by Wallace and Hartt, but also by the ones developed by Charles Lyell, that claimed that Amazonia was a recent geological formation created as a result of the rise of the Andes mountain range, which would explain its pre-historic aspect. They were also in dialogue with the works of Darwin, whose theories of natural selection inform the idea of a place still adapting to changing conditions. What I would like to highlight, besides the scientific context in which da Cunha is immersed, is the idea that these theories, from Wallace to Darwin, point to a nature that is always changing and always incomplete. I believe this should be kept in mind for later on, when I focus on the essay as a form and in writing as an inconclusive endeavor.

Unlike the texts of the naturalist explorers that preceded da Cunha, Amazonia in *À margem da história* is, above all, a place full of people. Rather than being a desolated space only occupied by untouched nature, the Purús River valley is seen as a transnational and dynamic socioeconomic space. Amazonia is presented as a land sought by many, especially by Brazilian *sertanejos* (the protagonists of Euclides' *Os sertões*) who migrated into the region in search of a viable life, a specific aspect of the text to which I will return later on. Globalized economies, international markets, foreign travelers, and local *sertanejos* crossed paths in the interior of the Amazonia, making it one of the most multi-cultural and globalized spaces of the 1900s, or as Hecht describes it, as a violent and infamous backstage of growing capitalism (281). This is the kind of Amazonia da Cunha shows throughout his essays.

In a place like this, under the constant changing of conditions, human settlement is exercised through nomadic practices. *Sertanejos* wandered into Amazonia in search for a better life, fleeing the isolation and roughness of the natural dry conditions (a point where *À margem da história* becomes the continuation of *Os sertões*). The migration of people from the rest of Brazil into the Amazon was done in disorder and abandonment, without any kind of systematic principle or state regulation. This means that they came from abandoned and isolated regions only to make it worse, to be hidden in the middle of a forest where help or assistance from the state is unthinkable. These men –Brazilian above all, but also Peruvians- arrive to Amazonia without being aware of the fights they have to battle. The struggle with nature is a matter of taming the wild: “As gentes que a povoam talham-se-lhe pela braveza. Não a cultivam, aformoseando-a: domam-na” (29).<sup>16</sup> Nature, and here da Cunha's positivistic background becomes evident, scrutinizes men in a competition for the survival of the fittest, for “nos trópicos, é natural que o escrutínio biológico tenha um caráter gravíssimo” (35).<sup>17</sup>

The second battle, and probably the most excruciating one, is with themselves, for *sertanejos* travel to the Amazon to be enslaved. From the late 1870s to the 1920s the Amazon was the site of one of modernity's biggest commodities, rubber, and its system of extraction

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<sup>16</sup> “The people who live in the Amazon work it in the wild. They do not cultivate it...; they barely tame it” (32).

<sup>17</sup> “in the tropics it is natural that biological scrutiny should have a central role” (38).

relied on a demoralizing debt system in which the tapper was perpetually owned by the hosting rubber company. The fate of the rubber tappers was inhuman and aggravating.

[The rubber tappers] mourejam improficuamente longos anos; enfermam, devorados das moléstias; e extinguem-se no absoluto abandono. Quatrocentos homens as vezes, que ninguém vê, dispersos por aquelas quebradas, e mal aparecendo de longe em longe no castelo de palha do acalanhado barão que os escraviza. O conquistador não os vigia. Sabe que não lhe fogem. (47)<sup>18</sup>

It is in his representation of the rubber tappers that da Cunha's project acquires the most complex sociological character and finds the deepest lyricism. This is important to the extent that in his previous book about the backlands, he already presented the *sertanejo* as the heart and center of the Brazilian identity. It is also through him that da Cunha articulates his criticism of the young Brazilian republic. In this sense, by placing this same character as the epicenter of the neo-colonial rubber economy, and as a victim of the capitalist and global modernization endeavor, he is also drawing a picture of the nation's state of affairs.

The special place the *sertanejo* has in *À margem da história* is specially visible in the essay "Judas Asvero," a sort of short story of an annual celebration of the rubber tappers. Each year in the holyday of Saint Judas the *sertanejos* build a human size doll dressed with old clothes. The *sertanejos* take extreme care in doing it, fixing every little detail, for at the end, what they're really doing, is a mirror image of themselves. They throw this figure down the river, in a mixture of compassion and anger, freeing for once the body of those who cannot be freed. But sending this doll down the river is also getting rid of it -killing it- for all the *sertanejos* along the river wait with their rifles for the fake bodies and shoot their anger at them.

The *sertanejo* "vinga-se de si mesmo" (55) in a symbolic suicidal act.<sup>19</sup> The tensions and contradictions in the language of the following description speak of the bravery with which the *sertanejos* are portrayed, but also of the brutality and senselessness in their endeavor: "O cauchero é irritantemente absurdo na sua brutalidade elegante, na sua galanteria sanguinolenta e no seu heroísmo à gandaia. E o homúnculo da civilização" (49).<sup>20</sup> This celebrated but feared barbarian is the residue of the process of civilization, a simple human creature that survives to sustain with his inflicted and tortured body the development of progress. He is the forgotten one, the abandoned, "o redentor universal não os redimiu; esquece-os para sempre, ou não os viu tal vez, tão relegados se acham à borda do rio solitário, que no próprio volver das águas é o primeiro a fugir, eternamente, àqueles tristes e desfrequentados rincões" (53).<sup>21</sup>

The abandonment of God, which can be compared with the isolation and abandonment from the state, articulates a desire and a need for integration of these national heroes living in

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<sup>18</sup> "Here they labor long years to little avail; here they become ill, devoured by disease; here they die in absolute abandonment. Often as many as four hundred men, appearing only once in a great while at the straw castle of the haughty baron who enslaves them. The conqueror does not keep track of him. He knows that they will not run away" (51).

<sup>19</sup> "has taken revenge on himself" (60).

<sup>20</sup> "The *cauchero* [rubber tapper], by contrast, is irritatingly absurd in his elegant brutality, in his blood gallantry, and in his sometimes heroism. He is the homunculus of civilization" (53).

<sup>21</sup> "clearly the Universal Redeemer has not redeemed them; he has forgotten them forever, or perhaps has simply not noticed them, relegated as they are to the margins of the solitary river which, in the very rush of its waters, is the first to flee, eternally, from these sad and unfrequented places" (58).

these forgotten territories. More than a “barbarous” land that needs to be put under a productive regimen, Amazonia is a land already occupied by capitalism, but unregulated and uncontrolled by the state. In this sense, the text launches a critique of the unregulated and brutal ways of the growing capitalist system when it is not overseen by the national project. Da Cunha’s most prominent criticism is, thus, aimed at undermining the legitimacy of Peruvians in the Purús River territory, and claiming the region as part of Brazil. Seen like this, the text’s purpose is double, to integrate and claim possession of those territories for the Brazilian nation, but also to reveal them to the state.

According to da Cunha, Peruvians are treacherous and a bad influence for nature and Amazonian societies: “A exploração do caucho como a praticam os peruanos, derribando as árvores, e passando sempre a cata de novas “canchas” de castilhoas ainda não conhecidas, em nomadismo profissional interminável, que os leva a pratica de todos os atentados nos recontros inevitáveis com os aborígenes – acarreta a desorganização sistemática da sociedade” (66).<sup>22</sup> Peruvians are not only creating an ecological debacle, but are a threat to indigenous and *sertanejo* communities. By pointing at Peruvians as not fit for the rubber business in the Purús region, and by claiming their un-legitimate population of the land, *À margem da história* justifies, through the argument of *uti possidetis* (Sá, “Voicing,” xv), the legitimacy of the Purús region as a Brazilian territory. Lucia Sá argues that the text’s central theme and argument revolves around the question of who owns the Purús region (“Voicing,” xvi), a question that is answered in the creation of a nationalistic argument.

Critics agree in saying that *À margem da história*’s main point is the appropriation of the Amazon through the creation of a national narrative and a patriotic sentiment (Hecht, Sá, Slater). Hecht states that Euclides intended to create a discourse of creole nation building through his depiction of the *sertanejos*, ultimately directed to the formation of a patriotic episteme that would justify the settlement of Brazilians in these lands and that reclaimed the territory to the Brazilian nation (234, 351). Slater affirms that da Cunha wanted to integrate the Amazon in the general project of modernization, pointing towards an autonomous new Brazil (*Entangled* 194). For the readers familiarized with da Cunha’s textual production, the Purús River region depicted in these essays was a forgotten place where the presence of the Brazilian state was urged, where the real Brazilian people, the *sertanejos*, worked it and maintained it, as opposed to the Peruvian settlers. It is important to note that Euclides’ interest in indigenous communities only finds a place by saying that Peruvians upset Amazonian societies, but not much is said about the Amazon as an indigenous region, at least in the seven essays of *À margem da história*.<sup>23</sup> One way to interpret the lack of specific indigenous presence in the texts is by understanding that Euclides’ conception of Amazonian societies was determined by the circulation of capital introduced with the rubber economy. For da Cunha, indigenous communities were not detached, as they certainly were not, from the capital economies that rubber industry generated. Besides

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<sup>22</sup> “The exploration of caucho [rubber] as the Peruvians practice it, with its falling of the trees and the constant movement in search of undiscovered stands of *Castilloa* in an endless professional nomadism, leads them to practice all manner of abuse in the inevitable confrontations with the natives, and thus brings with it the systematic disruption of society” (71).

<sup>23</sup> Chapter 20 of Susana Hecht’s book provides a more ample insight on Euclides’ relation with indigenous communities in the Amazon. However, it is possible to say, in general terms, that indigenous Amazonia was not da Cunha’s main concern.

this, the *sertanejos* were da Cunha's national protagonists, thus framing the argument of a Brazilian Amazon through the presence and settlement of *sertanejos*: they were the ones who would end up integrating Brazil to the nation.

After being introduced to the land and its geological history, after having studied the rivers and their nature, and after having stated the legitimacy of the Brazilians in the Purús Region –the Brazilians who would raise a capital modern nation-, da Cunha introduces the final future of the region: a complex system of highways and transportation systems, the Transacrea. A system of roads and rails, modest, at first, almost local, he says, would in the long term increase the circulation of commodities and wealth, decrease the importance of other foreign centers (like Iquitos, in Peru), and will become, finally, a great national and international avenue of commerce (82). Da Cunha's infrastructure system is the natural plan resulting from the appropriation, regulation, and modernization of the Amazon for Brazil. Opening up Amazonia to the world, but regulated by the state, will transform Brazil into an international potency in the modern world. Da Cunha finishes his last essay with a grandiloquent celebration of the modern future, “uma grande estrada internacional de aliança civilizadora e de paz” (84).<sup>24</sup> Slater (*Entangled* 191) and Sá (“Voicing” XXI) have pertinently commented on the contradictory and paradoxical nature of these essays, in which colonial practices in Amazonia are criticized, but ultimately celebrated under the paradigm of the nation. For Euclides, though, it is all a matter of the presence of the state and the control it exercises over it. One cannot forget that his main mission in the Purús Region was, after all, the delimitation of frontiers and the making of maps commissioned by the government.

*À margem da história*, eclectic and paradoxical as it might be (it claims both that Amazonia is an unstable territory and that a train must be constructed in its ever moving and changing terrains), follows, after all, a consistent narrative, that of ‘an Amazonia for the nation’, or even better, ‘a productive Amazonia for the modern nation’. Its isolation from history, as insinuated in the title, is related to the idea that the Amazon will only be part of history as long as it starts to be integrated to the nation's project, and thus being productive. There's something very subversive about it, for it undermines and eliminates all the previous western history of the region, mainly that of colonial and imperial writings (this subversive attempt will be looked at in detail farther on). It is a dangerous claim, though, for it also implies oblivion of local histories and the questionable reinforcement of western paradigms as the only possible way to understand, comprehend, and possess, Amazonia.

So, in many ways, da Cunha stands as the new colonizer of the Amazon, a settler, not carrying the flag of the Portuguese or British empire, but of the Brazilian nation, and the “ordem e progresso” [order and progress] that can be read in its flag. However, da Cunha's work must not be simplified to this single perspective. His work transformed much more than an imperial desire into a national instinct, it transformed the way the Amazonia was going to be *written* and integrated into continental literary discourses. I adhere to the readings of Slater and Sá mentioned above: da Cunha represents the Purús, and the Amazon territory at large, through an agenda that wants to perform a double endeavor: to integrate it into the national consciousness and into a very specific idea of a modern Brazil, one that da Cunha had been articulating since the publication of *Os sertões*. However, my personal reading of the essays adds that *À margem*

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<sup>24</sup> “a great international avenue of civilizing alliance and of peace” (90).



*da história*'s essence relies, above all, on its incompleteness and heterogeneity. These traits, I believe, are much more than the consequences of this work being an unfinished project. While it is true that we lack any notion of how the final project would have been, the disparity, contradictions, and incompleteness of the essays seem to point to an aesthetics and a politics. He describes an Amazonia that is “revolta, desordenada, *incompleta*” (my emphasis 9), and these words actually describe the nature of the texts as well.<sup>25</sup> In this sense, the essays' key is to be found on the parallelism between form and content, in the idea that Amazonia, as a tumultuous, disorganized, and incomplete phenomena can only find its form in a series of texts that are tumultuous, disorganized, incomplete, and contradictory. My reading, thus, forces us to see *À margem da história* first and foremost through its form and language. Or in other words, forces us to see Amazonia as a matter of literature.

### **Re-Writing Amazonia: Form and Language in *À margem da história***

Euclides da Cunha becomes a central figure in twentieth century discourses about Amazonia because he brings into crisis the ways of representing the jungle that preceded him. A heavy corpus of texts that constituted the history of discourses on the region, from the colonial Portuguese period to the European imperialist narratives of the scientific explorers, suddenly comes to a standstill in Euclides' discourse. He is the first in a very long tradition that both questions the previous ways Amazonia had been represented, and that engages in a rhetorical struggle to give a new account of it. This struggle leads him to pay close attention to the politics of language in the act of representing space. The main question that haunts his writings is *how does one write about Amazonia?* This section will explore the politics of language and representation in da Cunha's *À margem da história*. Da Cunha, I argue, dismantles the tropes created by the discourses that precede him to eventually inaugurate a literary discursive tradition. At the same time, and as a consequence of this, da Cunha engages in a reflection of the appropriate form and language through which Amazonia should be represented. To this extent, da Cunha's work, but particularly the seven essays studied here, inaugurate Amazonia as a laboratory for literature.

Being the thorough student that he was, da Cunha was very familiarized with the discursive tradition of the region. He was aware of the colonial discourses that represented Amazonia through mythical tropes from the sixteenth century (like the ones by Orellana and Walter Raleigh, for example), and he studied closely the texts of Humboldt, Bates, Wallace, Agassiz, and other naturalist explorers from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the opening chapter of *À margem da história* da Cunha quotes or mentions the works of Alfred Russel Wallace (1855), Alexander von Humboldt (1804), Frederick Hartt (1870), W. Eduards (1847), and Charles D'Orbigny (1834), among others. By quoting them, he acknowledges their existence, but also discredits them by labeling them as products of dysfunctional imaginations. Da Cunha writes the following:

As “amazonas” de Orellana, os titânicos “curriquerés” de Guillaume de L'Isle, e a “Manoa Del Dorado”, the Walter Releigh, formando no passado um tão deslumbrante ciclo quase mitológico, acolchetam-se em nossos dias as mais imaginosas hipóteses da ciência. Ha uma hipertrofia da imaginação no ajustar-se ao desconforme da terra, desequilibrando-se a mais solida mentalidade que lhe balanceie a grandeza. Daí, no próprio terreno das indagações objetivas, as visões de Humboldt e a serie de conjeturas em que se

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<sup>25</sup> “tumultuous, disorganized, incomplete” (11).

retratavam, ou contrastam, todos os conceitos, desde a dinâmica de terremotos de Russel Wallace ao bíblico formidável das galerias prediluvianas de Agassiz. (3-4)<sup>26</sup>

As Susana Hecht indicates, “certainly what da Cunha understood better than most of the scientist and scientific tourists of the age was how the impact of centuries of mythmaking, speculative maps, and preconceptions had formed a screen through which people viewed ‘their’ Amazon” (233). In other words, he knew very well what Pizarro means when she says that Amazonia was a geography that belonged to the field of imaginary utopias (11). By mentioning that these writings are the product of a *hypertrophied imagination*, da Cunha implies that not even the “objective” theories can escape falling into a mythical imagery. The knowledge produced so far, thus, is incapable of denoting any reality about the land, which is precisely the element that creates an unbalance in reasoning and imagination. It is consequential, then, that being first and foremost informed by the previous writings about the region, da Cunha’s first impression of Amazonia is of disappointment, the unpleasant surprise of something that has gone wrong: “Ao revêz da admiração ou do entusiasmo, o que sobressalteia geralmente, diante do Amazonas [...] é antes um desapontamento” (1).<sup>27</sup> The river, da Cunha tells us, is not as he expected to be. Yes, it is a mass of waters without equal,

mas como todos nos desde mui cedo gizamos um Amazonas ideal, mercê das paginas singularmente líricas dos não sei quantos viajantes que desde Humboldt até hoje contemplam a *Hylae* prodigiosa, com um espanto quase religioso –sucede um caso vulgar de psicologia: ao defrontarmos o Amazonas real, vemo-lo inferior a imagem subjetiva ha longo tempo prefigurada. (1)<sup>28</sup>

The idea of disappointment with which da Cunha opens his text is essential. What seems to fail is not the grandeur of the place itself, but the many “pages” of “travelers” that have ever written something about it. The recognition of a previous written discourse, on which he will insist several times in his text, denotes the acknowledgement of a tradition that precedes him; a tradition that must be questioned and re-evaluated. The use of the word “travelers” denotes the acknowledgement that such a discourse has been produced by foreign voices whose relationship to the Amazon has been purely utilitarian. Da Cunha believes that all that has been written about the region has hardly produced serious knowledge about it. He states that the previous writings are vast and incongruous, just like the actual territory: “a literatura científica amazônica, amplíssima, reflete bem a fisiografia amazônica: é surpreendente, preciosíssima, desconexa.

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<sup>26</sup> “Orellana’s Amazons, Guillaume de l’Isle’s titanic *curriquerés*, and Walter Raleigh’s Manoa del Dorado formed a fascinating mythological cycle of sorts. They are replicated today in the most imaginative of scientific hypothesis. The imagination can become hyperdeveloped (*hipertrofiada*) when acting on a discordance in the land itself. Even the most ordered of minds can become unbalanced on inquiring into such grandeur. The results, in the area of objective research proper, are views such as Humboldt’s and the conjectures through which the entire set of notions, from Wallace’s dynamics of earthquakes to Agassiz’s formidable biblical concept of antediluvian glaciers are either set forth or contested” (6).

<sup>27</sup> “Rather than admiration and enthusiasm, what usually comes over someone beholding the Amazon at the point where the Tajapuru’s vibrant confusion flows full into the great river is a sense of disillusionment” (3). Although Sá translates “desapontamento” as disillusionment, I believe a more precise word would be “disappointment”.

<sup>28</sup> “but since, from early on in life, each of us has drawn an ideal Amazonia in our minds thanks to the remarkably lyrical pages left us by the countless travelers, from Humboldt down to today, who have completed the prodigious hylean rain forest with almost religious awe, we experience a common psychological reaction when we come face to face with the real Amazon: we see it as somehow lacking with respect to the subjective image we have long held of it” (3).

Quem quer que se abalance a delecteá-la, ficará, ao cabo de esse esforço, bem pouco além do limiar de um mundo maravilhoso” (3).<sup>29</sup> Da Cunha explains that Amazonia is perhaps one of the most studied lands but at the same time one of the least known: European travelers have barely wandered past the great valley: “De Humboldt, a Em. Goeldi – do alveolar do século passado aos nossos dias, perquirem-na, ansiosos, todos os eleitos. Pois vem, lede-os. Vereis que nenhum deixou a calha principal do grande vale” (3).<sup>30</sup>

Da Cunha undermines the narratives that precede him in two main forms. On the one hand, he discredits the fact that they constitute any form of knowledge about Amazonia, because they have either been the result of a “hypertrophied” imagination, or because they haven’t actually penetrated the interior of the region further than the valley of the Amazon River. On the other hand, he states that they don’t do justice in representing Amazonia, for they have done it through mythical conceptions or imaginary hypothesis. Their exploration has been minimal and taken barely outside of the European cultural frame. The knowledge they provide is thus insufficient and wrong in his perspective. Moreover, by saying so, da Cunha is already signaling Amazonia as a land that is unable and unwilling to be translated into a scientific and comprehensive narrative.

The questioning of the European narratives that precede *À margem da história* becomes highly important knowing that da Cunha’s approach to Amazonia is determined by the idea of nation building. If none of the scientific travelers have successfully written about the region is because their ideological apparatus has been unable to either decipher it or represent it outside the European cultural imagination. Da Cunha’s task is to do what the others haven’t been able to do: decipher Amazonia and write about it. As a consequence of this, the core of the problem relies on two fundamental elements: the form through which Amazonia is presented, and the language that ought to be used. How to write about the region? How to represent it? If the language of empire has failed, how, then, to give a representation of the space that fully deciphers Amazonia?

It shouldn’t be strange, thus, that one of Euclides’ most emblematic images of the Amazon is the idea of it as a blank page of Genesis: “a Amazônia é a última página, ainda a escrever-se, do Genesis” (“Preâmbulo” 9).<sup>31</sup> The idea of a blank page is a powerful metaphor that speaks of the need to re-invent a language for the region and re-write the Amazon. As it was commented on the Introduction, and it will reappear throughout the following chapters of this dissertation, the image of a blank page is frequent in modern literature about Amazonia. This blank page became Euclides’ most ambitious task and most intense struggle; he had to undo what came before him so that he could re-write it. This, in itself, is a political and discursive strategy: it meant destabilizing the certainty upon which the imperial project was founded, and it implied the rupture and inauguration of a new tradition.

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<sup>29</sup> “the scientific literature on the Amazon reflects the physical geography of Amazonia: it is amazing, highly unusual and exceedingly disjointed. Any who dare study it carefully will, at the end of that attempt, get but a small way past the threshold to a marvelous world” (5).

<sup>30</sup> “From Humboldt to Emilio Goeldi –from the dawn of the past century to our own day- the best minds have scrutinized it intently. Read them. You will see that none have ventured beyond the great vertebrating valley” (5).

<sup>31</sup> Amazonia is the last page of Genesis, still to be written (my translation).

In a famous speech delivered for the Academy of Letters, Euclides recalls his experience when writing the first texts and struggling with language. Disappointed as he was, he was urged to write his own impressions about the landscape: “retraí-me a um recanto do convés e alinhei nas folhas da carteira os mais peregrinos adjetivos, os mais roçagantes substantivos e refulgentes verbos com que me acudiu um caprichoso vocabulário... para ao cabo desse esforço rasgar as páginas inúteis onde alguns períodos muito sonoros bolhavam, empolando-se, inexpressivos e vazios” (“Discurso de Pose” n.p).<sup>32</sup> As this quote indicates, part of da Cunha’s search was precise language to fill the “blank page.” The problem was not what one could call the ineffability of Amazonia, but the task of saying something new that does not fall into the already existing stereotypes. This struggle, which will be repeated by all the other writers studied on this dissertation, is the inaugural point of a reflection and a transformation on the act of representation.

The search for a language is also seen in a reply to a review that José Veríssimo wrote after the publication of his first book *Os sertões* (1902). Defending himself for the voluminous use of scientific dictions, da Cunha writes in 1902 the following statement:<sup>33</sup>

Sagrados pela ciência e sendo de algum modo, permita-me a expressão, os aristocratas da linguagem, nada justifica o sistemático desprezo que lhes votam os homens de letras — sobretudo se considerarmos que o consórcio da ciência e da arte, sob qualquer de seus aspectos, e a tendência mais elevada do pensamento humano [...] o escritor futuro será forçosamente um polígrafo; e qualquer trabalho literário se distinguirá dos estritamente científicos, apenas, por uma síntese mais delicada, excluída apenas a aridez característica das análises e das experiências.<sup>34</sup> (da Cunha, *Correspondência*, n.p)

The relationship between literature and science speaks of da Cunha’s formation as an engineer and of his belief in science as a promising modern episteme.<sup>35</sup> However, what needs to be highlighted is less his inscription into the sciences, and more the interest in articulating a new language. He opposes the dichotomy between technical diction as exclusively scientific, and literature as an imaginative, fictional, aesthetic discipline. Both of them together form the character of the future writer, a versatile voice that is both technically informed and aesthetically shaped. What needs to be highlighted, I believe, is the drive to include literary practice as a

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<sup>32</sup> I retired to a corner and filled pages of my notebook with the most elaborate adjectives, stirring nouns, and glittering verbs that I could muster. But I ended up ripping up those pointless scribbles, ultimately inexpressive and empty” (Qtd. in Hecht 222). His own process made him discover “how difficult is a trivial thing in these times when the earth is crammed with books: *to write*” (Qtd. and translated by Hecht, in Hecht 223).

<sup>33</sup> José Veríssimo was one of the first public intellectuals to recognize the importance of Euclides da Cunha’s work, and particularly his first book *Os sertões*. Da Cunha’s letter to Veríssimo comes as a response to an article written by the latter, published in December 2, 1902, in the journal *Correio da Manhã*, in which the intellectual praises da Cunha’s work but criticizes the excess of technical language. Although this letter precedes the publication of *A margem da história*, it already illuminates the search for a new language to write about Brazil.

<sup>34</sup> “Sacred for science, and being somehow, let me say this, the aristocrats of language, nothing justifies the systematic rejection that you, men of letters, have for them [scientific terms], specially considering that the partnership between art and science, in any of its aspects, is the most elevated tendency of human endeavor... the future writer will inevitably be a polygraphist writer: any literary work will be differentiated from a scientific one, only because the literary one will have a more delicate synthesis of the analysis and the experiences, having excluded the typical roughness of scientific discourse” (Da Cunha, *Correspondência Ativa*, my translation).

<sup>35</sup> For more on da Cunha and the sciences, see José Carlos Barreto de Santana’s *Ciência e arte: Euclides da Cunha e as ciências naturais* (2001). For more on a da Cunha’s relationship with other arts, see José Leonardo do Nascimento’s *Euclides da Cunha e a estética do cientificismo* (2010).

means to complete a kind of language –the scientific- that he feels lacking. As Leopoldo Bernucci explains, in da Cunha’s vision, “well achieved poetry would achieve scientific truths, and a scientific theory would condense a poetic vision” (“Prefácio” 32, my translation). For Pedro Maligo, “Euclides added an arbitrary, subjective text to what was initially presented as scientific observation and later developed into objective conclusion” (38).

On the one hand, the discussion between language as the material stratum of both literature and science reminds of the questions posed by Latour, and which were presented in the Introduction. To a certain extent, da Cunha anticipates part of the debate on the relationship between literature and science. As Latour would explain a century later, “Knowledge does not reflect a real external world that it resembles via mimesis, but rather a real interior world, the coherence and continuity of which it helps to ensure” (58). In this sense, both science and knowledge, Latour tells us, are also practices of language whose relationship to reality are not that different from that of literature. “The sciences do not speak of the world but, rather, construct representations that seem always to push it away, but also to bring it closer” (Latour 30). This leads Latour to wonder “how the sciences can be at the same time realist and constructivist, immediate and intermediary, reliable and fragile, near and far” (30).

On the other hand, it redefines what we understand by the act of *the production of information and knowledge*. The “objective” writer, in da Cunha’s perspective, will eventually disappear and in its place the “polygraph” writer will take over. This futurist vision could be interpreted as a symptom of a change in da Cunha’s rhetoric paradigm: it speaks of a desire to renovate and transform a rhetoric that the author already perceives as lacking and unsatisfactory for his objectives. The result of this will be the emergence of a style that prioritizes not information and knowledge, but subjective perceptions and experiences. Above all, a style that calls attention onto itself to the extent that it exposes the materiality of language through its potential semantic fluidity. This is the moment where, I propose, literature emerges.

Pointing to this change –to the emergence of literature-, both as a necessary transformation and as a change in style and perception, da Cunha writes the following to Artur Lemus in 1905:

Se escrevesse agora esboçaria miniaturas de caos, incompreensíveis e tumultuárias, uma miniatura formidável de vastas florestas inundadas e de vastos céus resplandecentes. Entre tais extremos está, com as suas enumeráveis modalidades, um novo mundo que me era inteiramente desconhecido... Além de isso, esta Amazônia [...] esconde-se a si mesma. O forasteiro contempla-a sem a ver, a traves de uma vertigem [...] E uma grandeza que exige a penetração sutil dos microscópios e a visão apertadinha e breve dos analistas; é um infinito que deve ser dosado. (Qtd. in Rabello 289)<sup>36</sup>

Out of this letter, and together with the other reflections on how to represent Amazonia, it becomes apparent that da Cunha rejects, above all, a form of writing that points to

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<sup>36</sup> If I were to begin writing now I would sketch miniatures of chaos, incomprehensible and tumultuous, a miniature of formidable vast flooded forests and shining skies. In between such extremes and its many possible modalities, there is a world that is entirely unknown... Besides from that, this Amazonia hides itself. The foreigner contemplates it without seeing, through a vertiginous feeling... It is of a grandeur that demands the subtle penetration of the microscopes and the tight and concrete vision of the analysts. It is, altogether, an infinite that needs to be dosed. (My translation)

conclusiveness and totality. His “revelation” of Amazonia, contrary to the grand narratives of the explorers, characterized by a mythical drive and a hypertrophied imagination, consists of titillating and inconclusive “miniatures” that resemble chaos. Later on, at the end of this section, I will return to the idea of chaos and Pedro Maligo’s use of this concept to define da Cunha’s ideological procedure. For now, however, the idea of miniatures of chaos points to the essay as *the* form of, precisely, inconclusiveness, chaos, and *attempt*.

Above all, the essay is a genre characterized by the flexibility of its structure, an element that grants it some of its essential characteristics: the inconclusiveness and inexhaustibility of that of which it speaks. Not concerned with the idea of completeness, it thrives in subjectivity, doubt, and suspension. It does not seek knowledge, but performs the circularity and waviness of thought. Its finality is not more important than its own style and language. As Adorno puts it, the essay “gets rid of the traditional idea of truth” and “suspends the traditional concept of method” (Adorno, “The essay” 159). It is the anti-scientific practice. It is, thus, contingent: concepts “gain their precision only through their relation to one another” (Adorno, “The essay” 160). As he goes on to explain, “the essay begins with such meanings and, itself being essentially language, forces this meanings on farther; it wants to help language, in its relation to concepts, to grasp these concepts reflectively in the way that they are already unconsciously named in language” (Adorno, “The essay” 160). The essay, reminiscent of *essay*, presents itself as an attempt that seeks no more than the attempt. Ultimately, lacking a triumphant conclusion, the essay is “reminiscent of freedom” and “it provokes resistance” (Adorno, “The essay” 152).

Under the light of da Cunha’s search and renovation for a new language, and under the idea of a form –the form of the essay- as the incomplete form for that which is incomplete (Amazonia is, above all, an incomplete space for da Cunha), one must return to the specificities and “miniatures” of the text.

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Da Cunha writes:

Atravessa quinze dias infindáveis a contornar a nossa costa. Entra no Amazonas. Reanima-se um momento ante a fisionomia singular da terra; mas para logo acabrunha-o a intensidade deprimida – onde o olhar lhe morre no próprio quadro que contempla, certo enorme, mas em branco e reduzido ás molduras indecisas das margens afastadas. Sobe o grande rio; e vão-se-lhe os dias inúteis ante a imobilidade estranha das paisagens de uma só cor, de uma só altura e de um só modelo, com a sensação angustiosa de uma parada na vida: atônicas todas as impressões, extinta a idéia do tempo, que a sucessão das experiências exteriores, uniformes, não revela – e retraída a alma numa nostalgia que não é apenas a saudade da terra nativa, mas da Terra, das formas naturais tradicionalmente vinculadas as nossas contemplações, que ali se não vêem, ou se não destacam na uniformidade das planuras... (Da Cunha 29)<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> “He invests fifteen interminable days rounding our north coast. He goes into the Amazon. He takes heart for a moment upon meeting the singular physiognomy of the land. But then comes the low-lying immensity –where his gaze is exhausted by the very scene he is contemplating, enormous to be sure but content-less, reduced to the vague frame provided by distant banks. He travels up the great river. And the days pass without definition before the strange motionless of a picture done in one single color, one single height, and one single model, to which is added the dread sensation that life has simply stopped. Every impression is inert. The concept of time is abolished, for the succession of uniform external phenomena does not disclose it. The soul withdraws into a nostalgia that is the longing not merely for native land but for Land, for the natural forms traditionally linked to our contemplations. They are not available here – or do not stand out amid the uniformity of the plains” (da Cunha 31-32).

Da Cunha's narrative of his arrival to the Amazon recalls the travel narratives of explorers and naturalists that wandered through the Americas in the late nineteenth century. However, the narrative functions in exactly the opposite way as a travel narrative would: the travelling gaze does not depict a promised land of beauty, adventure, and abundance, but rather an extended space where the powerful gaze (the optical order) dies and time stops: boredom instead of adventure, monotony instead of beauty, repetitiveness instead of wealth. The arrival to the Amazon becomes the passage from a delineable geography into a land of "indecisive" shapes, where the soul of the traveler feels nostalgia for land itself. The terrain is both described as being indecisive (an image of movement), and also lacking any particularity due to its stillness and monotony in colors, textures, and shapes. The idea of travel, which would denote the idea of movement in time, is interrupted here by the prevalence of the image of stillness and the anxious idea of life and time having stopped. Instead of the movement and displacement that characterizes the act of traveling, da Cunha is instead still and immobile. The arrival to the Amazon, then, is the entrance into another logic; certainly not the one that informed travel narratives preceding the author, but neither the logic of reason and progression. Rather, it is the entrance into a space of contradictions (movement versus stillness, timelessness versus nostalgia) that could only be possible under the logics of poetics: only poetics can conjure the contradictory experience of space that Amazonia entails, it is the register that will allow him the symbolic images of an unsettled and unsettling place.

In *À margem da história's* opening essay "Impressões Gerais," Euclides gives us a hint of the unavoidable tendency towards poetry. Commenting on the pages of lyric descriptions that other travelers have fallen into while being on the Amazon, he explains that what happens is that the river summons 'the marvelous' in such a way that not even romantic adventurers, unaware chroniclers, or educated minds can avoid falling into it. For him, the Amazon is a place where "ha uma hipertrofia da imaginação," (4) "as verdades desfecham em hipóteses," (4) and where "a volubilidade do rio contagia o homem" (12).<sup>38</sup> Hypertrophy, hyperbole, and volubility are all nouns that denote notions opposed to stability and they function as the structuring principles of the representation of Amazonia. Language in *À margem da história* points to multiple directions at once and moves from the scientific fact to the poetical image: language, thus, disorders and resists alignment into a stable semiotic paradigm in the same way the land resists any stability.

One of the reasons that compromise the stability of the space and that accounts for the nostalgia of land itself is the fact that Amazonia is, as da Cunha writes, a *territory of waters*, a poetically and politically contradictory image. Rivers are a "plasma gerador de territórios" (7),<sup>39</sup> a metaphor that stands for a double image, that of the river as plasma, the scientific term for the ultimate state of matter (volume-less and shapeless), and as a matterless aquatic force that creates its opposite, land.

The river is an artist, too:

Em toda parte a terra é um bloco onde se exercita a molduragem dos agentes externos entre os quais os grandes rios se erigem como principais fatores, no lhe remodelarem os acidentes naturais, suavizando-

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<sup>38</sup> "The imagination can become hyperdeveloped" (6); "truth can devolve into hyperbole" (4); "The changeability of the river infects the human being" (13).

<sup>39</sup> "huge load of matter capable of generating land..." (9).

lhos. Compensando a degradação das vertentes com o alteamento dos vales, corroendo montanhas e edificando planuras, eles vão em geral entrelaçando as ações destrutivas e reconstrutoras, de modo que as paisagens, lento e lento transfiguradas, reflitam os efeitos de uma estatuaria portentosa. (5)<sup>40</sup>

Earth is a block of mud carved by the smoothing work of the rivers, who characterized as animated forces, seek an equilibrium of forms “compensating” highlands and valleys, and performing “edification” with its “destructive” and “reconstructive” forces. The formed landscape, thus, is seen as a gigantic sculpture created by the artistic river. Land, fearful of the waters, engages in a constant battle with the forces of the river. Pushed by water, land only finds a place beyond the plains in an attempt to “avoid” the currents: “Os litorais do Amazonas mal lhe definem a calha desmedida. São margens que evitam o rio. Ficam-lhe, normalmente, fora das águas, para além das vastas planuras salpintadas de “lagos de terra firme”, que atenuam, feito compensadores, a violência das caudais nas cheias” (8).<sup>41</sup>

Da Cunha characterizes the river and the land as conflicting forces that operate as art (as in the metaphor of the sculpture), and through the image of violence as a generating telluric force. In the rainy season, when rivers grow, they become “vengeful” (“o rio vinga as ribanceiras”) and they “detach” (“desarraigam”) complete forests in violent explosions of power and strength (8).

The literary version of the struggle between water and land is informed by science. In *À margem da história*'s second essay, possibly the most technical and scientific one, “Rios em abandono” [Rivers in abandonment], he writes the life cycle of a river:

Todas as caudais, de feito, atravessam períodos inevitáveis, de ritmos uniformes e constantes, malgrado a variabilidade do teatro em que se operam: a principio indecisas, errantes e frágeis, derivando ao acaso, ao viés dos pendores, como a procura de um berço em cada dobra de chão, e acumulando-se nos numerosos lagos, incoerentemente esparsos, onde repousam; depois, definidas nas primeiras linhas de drenagem mais estáveis e fundas para onde convergem, adensadas, as chuvas, formando-se o aparelho das correntes, reprofundando-se os leitos esboçados e iniciando-se com a energia tumultuária das cachoeiras o choque secular com as asperezas da terra, longo tempo: até que, extintos os empedros estruturais, estabelecido um leito e definido um traçado, o rio se constitua, com os seus afluentes fixos, um declive continuo em curvaturas regulares, um *thalweg* ajustado a contextura do solo e á diferenciação morfológica que lhe reflete a um tempo os seus vários estádios- das cabeceiras onde perduram as águas selvagens do antigo régimen torrencial, ao curso médio que lhe caracteriza a situação presente, e ao trecho inferior, prefigurando-lhe a decrepitude, onde ele se espraia repousadamente e constrói, pela *colmatage* das vasas que acarreta com velocidade insensível, a própria planície aluvial em que descansa.<sup>42</sup> (17)

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<sup>40</sup> “All land is a kind of block that is molded by external agents, among which the great rivers are primary remodelers of natural features. Compensating for the degradation of peaks with the raising of valleys, wearing down mountains and building up planes, they in general combine constructive and destructive processes in such a manner that landscapes, in their slow, constant transfiguration, manifest the effects of a prodigious sculpting process” (7).

<sup>41</sup> “The Amazon banks do not channel its powerful flow. They are instead banks that avoid the river. They normally remain at the edge of its vast plain dotted with “solid ground lakes,” which compensatorily mitigate the violence of the flood during high water” (10).

<sup>42</sup> “Despite the variations of theater in which they operate, all watercourses pass through inevitable stages in regular rhythms. At first indecisive, errant, fragile, they run according to chance among topographical features, as though seeking a cradle in each and every low area of the land, gathering in numerous incoherently distributed lakes, where they come to rest. Then, when their first regular carved-out drainage troughs become defined channels into which the water from the rains flows and gathers, currents form, carving out incipient beds and initiating, with the tumultuous energy of the cataracts, a centuries-long stage of clash with the solidity of the earth. Finally, when the



The scientific aspect of the use of language is seen, mostly, on the topic da Cunha is writing about: this paragraph explains the ways in which rivers grow and decrease, and the manner in which they ultimately find a path through the valley. It speaks of unstable currents that find river-beds through the morphological differentiations on the ground, forming temporary lagoons and branches, until they finally find a stable path. The scientific description reflects the theories of limnology available at da Cunha's time, specifically influenced by the North American geologist and limnologist Morris Davis, whose study on the rivers of Pennsylvania constitute a point of departure for the description of the rivers in Amazonia. However, his rendition of the river's life cycle is very much transformed; science is narrated using a language and a style closer to poetry that ends up narrating the dramatic development of temperamental character (the river) whose life we read until its decrepitude.

To this extent, the variable conditions that determine the river's life operate, according to da Cunha, in a theatrical way, as if the river were a character performing on stage. Further more, the river is fragile, unstable, indecisive, as if it were on the search for a river-bed, in a teen like behavior, where incoherent wandering defines the immaturity of the character. After this, when more stable paths are found, the river enters a stage of maturity where collected waters and currents continue to tumultuous waterfalls, described as a secular crash of water with the roughness of the earth. In its decrepitude, the final stage of the character, the river finds a plain to rest, where he abandons the insensitive speed of the gathered currents, and finally finds a place to spread. The characterization of the river and the use of adjectives move the register of the river's description into the literary domain where scientific knowledge transforms into images of movement, sound, and time. The structure of the sentences and the rhythm established by the use of punctuation and the enjambment of clauses causes a movement that imitates the topic of which it is speaking: the entire quoted paragraph is one sentence regularly paused by the use of varied punctuation marks, *creating a rhythm that imitates the wandering uncertainty and undecidedness of the river* (!). The reader follows through the lines like the river searches for its path, finally resting, with the final word, literally to "rest".

Science and poetry meet once again in the explanation of the climate in the Amazon. Influenced by Darwin's evolutionary theories, da Cunha depicts the region's climate as a judgmental character that, acting as a moral sanitizer, performs a selective pressure on human kind: "Policiou, saneou, moralizou. Elegeu e elege para a vida os mais dignos. Eliminou e elimina os incapazes, pela fuga o pela morte. E é por certo um clima admirável o que prepara as paragens novas para os fortes, para os perseverantes e para os bons" (40).<sup>43</sup> To adapt to the region's conditions it is necessary to find a balance between thermal, hygrometric, and barometric elements (science) and the most *subjective* impressions of the landscape, in which the

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structural obstacles are overcome, a course is established and a riverbed defined, the river is fully constituted, with its stable tributaries, a continuous slope descending in regular curves, a thalweg adjusted to the contexture of the soil and to the morphological differentiation that reflects its various segments—from the headwaters where the wild flows of its former torrential regime remain, to the midcourse, which characterizes its current stage of development, to the lower stretch, which prefigures its decrepitude and where it spreads out to build, with the settling out of the silt that it bears imperceptibly, the very alluvial plain through which it runs" (19).

<sup>43</sup> "It has policed, it has cleansed, it has moralized. It has selected – and continues to select- the most worthy for life. It has eliminated – and continues to eliminate- the less fit, through flight or through death" (43).

resistance of the body's cells and the muscles, but also of the most complex and refined energies of the soul, come into play (da Cunha 35). Da Cunha's poetic vision of mankind in Amazonia materializes in the idea of men's absolute subjection to the will of the climate. Against it, da Cunha explains, the individual postulates himself to life, as in an election or in a cruel auto-democracy, and nature decides if he gets elected or not to survive: "Toda aclimatação é desse modo um plebiscito permanente em que o estrangeiro se elege para a vida" (35).<sup>44</sup>

*À margem da história's* representation of Amazonia (its land, its climate, and its rivers) as a character –the characterization of the Amazon as a willful teenager or violent being- is one of the most emblematic features of the literary representation of Amazonia. Euclides da Cunha and his literary colleague and partner Alberto Rangel (author of the book of short stories titled *Inferno verde* [Green Hell], published in 1908, almost at the same time that *À margem da história* was published) represent Amazonia through a characterization in which the *selva* has will, desire, and fury. Alberto Rangel and Euclides da Cunha inaugurate the twentieth century literary tradition making Amazonia not an object but a literary subject. The characterization of Amazonia is of pivotal influence in future writers like Horacio Quiroga, José Eustasio Rivera, and Raul Bopp, among others.

This personification coincides with the emergence of the rubber industry, which enslaved its workers through debt, leaving them merciless and vulnerable to both the capitalist productive system and the climatic and natural conditions of Amazonia. It is not a coincidence that the first literary representations are, in its majority, depictions of a furious, aggressive, violent, and menacing character. Scholars have usually argued that the representation of vegetation as a violent entity is a symbolic projection of the violent act of possession and consumption of Amazonia itself. For example, Pedro Maligo has argued that "the image of [Amazonia as] hell is that of a force that resists progress" and explains that the violence attributed to nature "[justifies] the destruction of the land by man" (66, 60). According to his analysis, the violence and aggressiveness of the personified nature is a projection of the human desire of exploitation: in this sense the resistance and difficulty in exploiting Amazonian nature calls for a stronger taming practice. Maria Helena Rueda echoes Maligo's reading by arguing that "the jungle became an enemy of progress, a hostile body/territory that needed to be penetrated, molded, and dominated" (38). This shift highlights the resistance and antagonism to the idea of an easily consumable nature and signals a problematic re-enchantment of nature as that which escapes rationalization and control. While readings like the ones from Maligo and Rueda are insightful, this personification could be read less as a stimulus for a stronger modernizing force and more as a mechanism of resistance and, most importantly, a critique of the discourses and practices that facilitated the exploitation of Amazonian nature. So while critics may interpret their violence as psychoanalytical projections of the penetrating desire, the anti-colonial awareness of these texts must not be overlooked: the aggressiveness is a form of representation that highlights nature's agency.

Alberto Rangel points to this in the short story that gives name to his book. Given a voice for the first time, the *selva* speaks to his/her victim's claim that Amazonia is not a paradise anymore but a *hell*:

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<sup>44</sup> "All acclimatization is thus a permanent plebiscite in which the newcomer is chosen for survival. In the tropics it is natural that biological scrutiny should have a central role" (38).

Perdô-te e compreendo o estigma que me lanzas. Fui um paraíso. Para a raça íncola nenhuma pátria melhor, mais farta e bemfazeja. Por mim as tribos erravam, no seu sublime desabafo do seus instintos de conservação, livres, nas marnotas, por essas vazias fluviais afora. Ainda hoje, o caboclo, vive renunciado e silencioso, abordando-me e bemdizendo: -seu repouso edênico, sua plaga abençoada, seu recanto pacífico, na herança fetichica e venerativa dos povos autochtones, d'onde proveio. Deante dos insucessos da avidéz do “branco”, o nativo murmurá: “Comtudo aqui se sofre, mas ainda se agüenta...” Se não paraíso, ser-lhe-hei um purgatório, no qual ele expia, conformado, a sua impotência, na dilação impiedosa da Justiça, que o reabilitará em suma, rememorando a sua historia de heroísmos obscuros, na luta com as fatalidades sociais, que os esmagarão completamente. Inferno é o Amazonas... inferno verde do explorador moderno, vândalo inquieto, com a imagem amada das terras d'onde veio, carinhosamente resguardada na alma, ansiada de paixão por dominar a terra virgem, que barbaramente violenta [...] <sup>45</sup> (281)

Rangel's Amazon assumes the identification of his/herself as an *inferno* in an attempt to avenge the history of colonization and exploitation of western intrusion in the region. Rangel's main discourse is centered in the idea of criticism of the modern project that seeks to consume and exploit the Amazon. To this extent, Rangel's personification of nature, one of the most salient characteristics of “green hell” imagery, could be interpreted as a means to articulate an ethos and a pathos in the human-nature relationship. Further than that, by giving symbolic agency to nature through its anthropomorphism, the text highlights what Jane Bennett has called “the material agency or effectivity of nonhuman or not-quite-human things” (ix). In doing so, Bennett points to the relationships, causes, and effects between co-habiting beings, thus signaling an “*ecological sensibility*” of interconnected presences (p. xi). To this extent, the personification of the trees becomes a way through which the “material agency” of nature becomes present in the texts, and an ecological relationship between nature and humans is represented.

Rangel's portrayal of Amazonia as a resistant “green hell” is important to the extent that da Cunha describes Rangel's work in the prologue of *Inferno Verde* as the creation of a new form of language to represent the region and as a “moving and vengeful” style and aesthetics that achieves a re-casting of the Amazon into a new form of literature (16). For da Cunha, Rangel's short stories were a form of “emancipation” (15) from previous imperial conceptions of Amazonia or, in other words, a mechanism through which the history of Amazonia (its inscription into modernity) was being re-written. Seen like this, Rangel's literary endeavor extends and exemplifies some of the ways in which da Cunha conceived his own discursive project.

Da Cunha's representation of the rubber tappers connects directly with Rangel's criticism. In *À margem da história* men are impertinent intruders in the Amazonian forests. The emphasis is placed on the idea that the intrusiveness is a reaction against colonialism on the

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<sup>45</sup> I understand the curse you send me, and I forgive you. I was a paradise. For the indigenous race there is no other fatherland, generous and kind. Through me tribes wandered, with unrestricted and sublime conservation instinct, in the prairies and fluvial outer lakes. Even today, the indigenous live silent and rendered, coming to me, and well, telling me –their edenic rest, their sacred plague, their pacific place. In front of the events of the greedy ambitions of the white, they say: “One here suffers, but one endures.” If not paradise, I will be for the white man a purgatory, in which he pays, in his condemned state, the delay of Justice, which will rehabilitate him, reminding him the history of his obscure heroisms, in the struggle of social fatalities that crushed them completely. Amazonia is hell... green hell for the modern settler, restless vandal, with the loving memory of the lands where he came from lovingly kept in his soul, full of passion to dominate the new virgin land that he barbarously rapes...” (my translation).

region. If the Amazon is humanized, men undergo the opposite process gradually becoming objectified. In the chapter “Os caucheiros” da Cunha describes the animalistic degradation of an indigenous person:

Num dos casebres mais conservados aguardava-nos o ultimo habitante. Piro, amahuaca ou campá, não se lhe distinguia a origem. Os próprios traços da espécie humana, transmudava-os a aparência repulsiva: um tronco desconforme, inchado pelo impaludismo, tomando-lhe a figura toda, em pleno contraste com os braços finos e as pernas esmirradas e toliças como as de um feto monstruoso. Acocorado a um canto, contemplava-nos impassível. Tinha a um lado os seus haveres: um cacho de bananas verdes. (51)<sup>46</sup>

Having lost the “traces of the human specie,” with a “repulsive appearance”, of swollen body, fine arms, and thin and defective legs, sitting next to bananas, this indigenous person is more a “monster fetus” and more of an animal than a human being. The animalization of humans responds to a degradation of the body within the enslavement system of rubber extraction. Images like this one have echoes in Alberto Rangel’s literature, and even in characters like José Eustasio Rivera’s Clemente Silva, who first appears in the novel as a sick and moribund body, as it will be seen on Chapter Two. The degradation of men and their bodies, seen together with the humanization of the forest, point at the exploitation of both nature and men within the rubber extraction industry and they signal a resistance to the capitalist enterprise.

Moreover, da Cunha, focuses particularly on the rubber tapper. The *sertanejos* that escape the harsh conditions of the *sertões* and enslave themselves in the forests, are complex men: “O cauchero é irritantemente absurdo na sua brutalidade elegante, na sua galanteria sanguinolenta e no seu heroísmo á gandaia. E o homúnculo da civilização” (49).<sup>47</sup> In *A margem da história* he is represented as a tragic victim. The rubber tapper is helplessly and ironically auto destructive: “O homem, ao penetrar as duas portas que o levam ao paraíso diabólico dos seringais, abdica as melhores qualidades nativas e fulmina-se a si próprio, a rir, com aquela ironia formidável” (12).<sup>48</sup> Da Cunha presents a cynical character who knows himself subjected to economic forces he cannot control: the ironic laughter at himself signals an individual no longer in control of his own destiny, but ruled by the systems of production in which he is immersed. He is, in other words, a victim of himself. Besides this, it is interesting to note the words “paraíso diabólico;” the oxymoronic description serves as a subtle but fundamental shift from the mythical colonial imagery (paradise) to the myth elaborated by modern literature (hell, signaled through the devil and the “diabólico”), a shift that in itself describes the emergence, consolidation and crises brought by capitalism.

Related to this, the essay “Judas Asvero” is where da Cunha makes further remarks about the rubber tapper, his subjectivity, and the victimization to which he has taken himself into. In the Saturday of Holly Week, rubber tappers perform one of their most significant and moving rituals: in the name of Judas, the traitor, they build a copy image doll of themselves and,

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<sup>46</sup> “In one of the better preserved of the outlying buildings, the last inhabitant awaited us. Piro, Amahuaca, or Campa, his provenience was indistinguishable. His repulsive appearance transformed the very features of the human species: a huge trunk bloated with malaria dominated, in obvious contrast to thin arms and thin, withered legs, like those of a monstrous fetus” (55).

<sup>47</sup> “The *cauchero* [rubber tapper], by contrast, is irritatingly absurd in his elegant brutality, in his blood gallantry, and in his sometimes heroism. He is the homunculus of civilization” (53).

<sup>48</sup> “On entering through the two portals that lead to the diabolical paradise of the rubber tracts, man abdicates the highest of the qualities with which he is born and laughingly condemns himself with that formidable irony” (14).

throwing it down the river and shooting bullets at it, they free their symbolic bodies of the enslavement they can't be liberated in reality. In a profound melancholic state, passively and quietly, they spend the days of Holly Week in an introspective mood:

Não tiveram missas solenes, nem procissões luxosas, nem lavapés tocantes, nem prédicas comovidas. Toda a semana santa correu-lhes na mesmice torturante daquela existência imóvel, feita de idênticos dias de penúrias, de meios-jejuns permanentes, de tristezas e de pesares, que lhes parecem uma interminável sexta-feira da Paixão, a estirar-se, angustiosamente, indefinida, pelo ano todo afora. (52)<sup>49</sup>

The syntax and the rhythm of the description exacerbate the idea of extension, monotony, and endlessness of the sad condition of the characters. The idea of monotony –of nothing happening- is a constant in da Cunha's representation of Amazonia, an idea that contradicts the fast moving time of production in capitalism. Both the listed repetition of their misery and the verbs and adjectives (“a estirar-se, angustiosamente, indefinida, pelo ano todo afora”) decrease the speed of the sentence and force the reader to dwell on the timeline described. Further more, “as luzes agonizam nos círios bruxelantes, e as vozes se amortecem nas rezas e nos retiros, caindo um grande silencio misterioso sobre as cidades, as vilas e os sertões profundos onde as gentes entristecidas se associam a mágoa prodigiosa de Deus” (53).<sup>50</sup> The creation of an ambiance through images of shadows (vanishing lights), sounds (whispers and prayers), together with the melodramatic tone posed by the common association through pain, set the atmosphere of desolation and isolation that structure the representation of the rubber tappers' life.

To this extent, the sociological presentation of the *sertanejo* is delivered through literary techniques, such as mood, tone, scene, and characterization. In *À margem da história* da Cunha creates a dramatic character that is understood not through the racial or anthropologic discourse, but by the portrayal of emotional and psychological depth. He is a strong man, but in the sense that he resists with stoicism the situation in which he is in. As in *Os sertões*, the *sertanejo* is a strong man but, above all, a solitary one.

É mais forte; é mais digno. Resignou-se á desdita. Não murmura. Não reza. As preces ansiosas sobem por vezes ao céu, levando disfarçadamente o travo de um ressentimento contra a divindade: ele não se queixa. Tem a noção pratica, tangível, sem raciocínios, sem deduções metafísicas, maciça e inexorável –um peso a esmagai-lhe inteiramente a vida- da fatalidade; e somete-se a ela sem subterfugir na cobardia de um pedido, com os joelhos dobrados. Seria um esforço inútil. (53)<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> “There are no solemn masses, no magnificent processions; there is no touching foot washing or inspirational preaching. All of Holly Week has represented for them the torturing sameness of that static existence made up of identical days of penury, a permanently bleak environment of sadness and worry that seems like an interminable, anguished Passion Friday stretching forth to the entire year ahead” (57).

<sup>50</sup> “the lights would agonize on flickering candles and voices grow faint in prayer and meditation. A great mysterious silence would fall upon the cities, the villages, and the remote sertões where the saddened people identified with God's prodigious sorrow” (57).

<sup>51</sup> “He is stronger than that; he is more worthy. He has resigned himself to misfortune. He does not grumble. He does not importune. Sometime anguish prayers rise to heaven bearing a disguised resentment against the deity. But he does not complain. He has a practical, tangible notion, created without deliberation, without the delusion of metaphysics. It is a massive, inexorable, fatalistic notion –a great weight crushing his whole life. And he submits himself to it without the subterfuge of cowardly entreaty set forth on bended knee. That would be a useless effort” (58).

The rubber tapper is a tragic man who, kneeled down on the floor, accepts the abandonment of god and his ill fate. He's a practical man, he knows his place; knows not to fight against it or demand more from life, for it will be a useless attempt. A terrible burden crushes his life. It is through the images of him kneeling down and being crushed that the literary character emerges on the text. We approach him through his pain and solitude. He is less the racial *other* and more the system's victim: he is the subjugated individual of modernity, a subject standing in the production line of a factory, though his factory is the *selva* and the product its rubber milk.

While *Os sertões* pictures the *sertanejo* as a racial other and through ethnographic types, *À margem da história* depicts a character with whom it is easy to develop an emotional identification. For readers across Brazil this character has a double purpose: on the one hand, it works forth a patriotic sentiment, for the *sertanejo*, at least for da Cunha's readers, was the national tragic hero and his appearance in the Purús territory implies the identification of the region as a Brazilian site. On the other hand, his tragic and poignant character points to an emotional rejection, and thus criticism, of the system of production that subjected them.

The essay "Judas Asveru" becomes symbolic not only in the emotional and ideological dimension of the rubber tapper as a character, but also in the description of the human doll that the text explains. The tormented subject becomes a creative artist and produces an object that symbolizes all his emotional existence and, at the same time, redeems him. Like all art, it is transcendental. Nonetheless, the project is still a "tarefa funambulesca" (54) and a "tortura de artista incontentável" (55) that finally becomes a "doloroso triunfo" (55).<sup>52</sup> The oxymoronic descriptions of the artistic process describe the symbolism of the doll itself: it is the materialization of his helplessness and the liberation of his abandonment.

O sertanejo esculpiu o maldito a sua imagem. Vingase de si mesmo: pune-se, afinal, da ambição maldita que o levou àquela terra; e desafia-se da fraqueza moral que lhe parte os ímpetos da rebeldia recalcando-o cada vez mais ao plano inferior da vida decaída onde a credulidade infantil o jungiu, escravo, á gleba empantanada dos traficantes, que o iludiram. (55-56)<sup>53</sup>

This work is his sculpture, his prime opera, "a criação espantosa do seu gênio rude longamente trabalhado de reveses" (54-55).<sup>54</sup> The artistic process seems to reverse the idea of the human animalization mentioned some paragraphs above. The object is a monster that becomes a mannequin, which later on becomes a man: "E o monstro, lento e lento, num transfigurar-se insensível, vai se tornando em homem. Pelo menos a ilusão é empolgante..." (55).<sup>55</sup> The use of the word "illusion" to describe the final result is interesting (absent in the English translation): illusion refers to the optical similitude between the doll and his creator, but it also points to the

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<sup>52</sup> "funambulatory undertaking" (58); "patience and agony of the artist never satisfied with his work" (61); "dolorous triumph" (61).

<sup>53</sup> "The *sertanejo* has sculpted the accursed figure in his own image. He has taken revenge on himself. In the final analysis he has punished himself for the accursed ambition that brought him to this land and takes revenge on himself for the moral weakness that shatters his impulse to rebel, pushing it ever further onto the lower plane of this degenerate life where infantile credulity has tied him to this swampy realm controlled by scoundrels who deceive him" (60).

<sup>54</sup> "Common mannequin" (59); "the astonishing creation of his crude genius long affected by adversity" (59).

<sup>55</sup> "Slowly but surely, in an imperceptible transfiguration, the monster changes into a man" (60).

emotional redemption that the doll symbolizes. What is the illusion? The similarity between man and doll, or the idea that it liberated the subject?<sup>56</sup>

Euclides' creation of a literary world is based on his use of language, on the symbolic dimension of his stories, and in the way he captures subtle gestures that consolidate the complexity of his discourse. While working on the human doll, the "practical" *sertanejo* reveals an ulterior sensibility that is represented through the gesture of silently backing up from his creation and contemplating it critically: "Recua meia dúzia de passos. Contempla-a durante alguns minutos. Estuda-a" (55).<sup>57</sup> He accentuates the facial lines, darkens his face with a cloth, and marks the lips in a better way (54). The passage reveals the character's sensibility within his brutality and strength.

When the rubber tapper finally sends his creation down the river, da Cunha creates an image of mysterious and almost supernatural nature. The world itself fears the doomed doll: floating down the river going towards "desolation" and "horror,"

as aves retransidas de medo acolhem-se, mudas, ao recesso das frondes; os pesados anfíbios mergulham, cautos, nas profunduras, espavoridos por aquela sombra que ao cair das tardes e ao subir das manhãs se desata estirando-se, lutuosamente, pela superfície do rio; os homens correm às armas e numa fúria recortada de espantos, fazendo o <<pelo-sinal>> e aperrando os gatilhos, alvejam-no desapiadadamente. (57)<sup>58</sup>

Silently floating down the river, all the dolls gather, like in a procession, into the indeterminate space beyond the river bend: "Depois, a pouco e pouco, debandam. Afastam-se; dispersam-se. E acompanhando a correnteza, que se retifica na última espira dos remansos –lá se vão, em filas, um a um, vagorosamente, processionalmente, rio abaixo, descendo..."(58).<sup>59</sup> The use of punctuation reproduces the topic of the sentence and generates a tone that is both an image of time, movement, and uncertainty. The sentence opens an interruptive clause that is never closed and leaves both the image and the rhythm in a decreasing endless and meaningless movement. Besides that, the repetition of commas separating each group of words establishes a metric that imitates the alignment of the dolls. Once again, form embodies the subject of which it speaks.

It is pivotal not to lose track of the fact that da Cunha's literary endeavor is anchored in a text that is, ultimately, a discourse of cultural geography written as a byproduct of a geographical expedition, highly informed by the scientific theories of his time, and aimed at the integration of Amazonia into the idea of a modern Brazil. Therein lies the complexity of this text.

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<sup>56</sup> The topic of human animalization or animal humanization present through out *A margem da história* under the context of the increasingly alienating productive forces of modernity and capitalism could be approached through the theoretical frame of "biopolitics," where the Foucault's concept of "biopolitics," Agamben's idea of "bare life," and Nicole Shunkin's notion of "animal capital" provide grounds to understand the politics of the body as a form of inclusion and resistance to the state's apparatus productive system and ideological enterprise.

<sup>57</sup> "The seringueiro walks back a half dozen paces. He looks it over for some minutes. He studies it" (60).

<sup>58</sup> "The birds stricken with fear, take silent refuge on inner branches. The heavy amphibians protect themselves by diving deep under the surface, frightened of that shadow that, as afternoons wane or morning draws, lengthens, stretching lugubriously across the river's surface. Men race for their arms and in a fury mixed with fright, making the sign of the cross and cocking their rifles, riddle it piteously" (61-62).

<sup>59</sup> "Then, one by one, they drift away. They leave, disperse. And moving with the current as it picks up again at the last eddy of the pool, they float on, in rows, one after the other, slowly, processionally, downstream" (63).

In the prologue to Alberto Rangel's short stories, da Cunha argues a totalitarian approach to describe and understand Amazonia –a desire to comprehend it through comprehensive narratives, like science would- “impossibilita o descortino desafogado do conjunto” (4).<sup>60</sup> The region escapes: its enormity ends up fragmented and dispersed, its amplitude and greatness unseen. Paradoxically, Amazonia's greatness is only seen through the eye of a microscope: “a grandeza... só se deixa ver, apequenhandose, a través dos microscópios” (4).<sup>61</sup> It is the detail, the subtle feature, the specific element that reveals and unveils the *selva*. Otherwise no vision is able to withhold its greatness.

This sort of look through specificity takes us back to the idea of “miniatures” as a technique through which the region is exposed. This procedure, according to da Cunha, is the one taken by Rangel. In an attempt to describe and praise the latter's representation of the region, Euclides writes what could be considered an *ars poetica*, not only of his colleague's work, but of his own writing. In doing so, da Cunha returns to the idea of chaos:

Linhas nervosas e rebeldes, riscadas ao arrepio das fórmulas ordinárias do escrever, revelam-nos, graficamente visíveis, as trilhas multivias e revoltas e encruzilhadas lançando-se a todos os rumos, volvendo de todas as bandas, em torcicollos, em desvios, em repentinos atalhos, em súbitas paradas, ora no arremesso de avances impestiosos, ora de improviso, em recuos, aqui pelo elivoso abrupto dos mais alarmantes paradoxos, alem, desafogadamente retilínea, pelo achanado e firme dos conhecimentos positivos de uma alma a divagar, intrépida e completamente perdida. (6)<sup>62</sup>

Writing is described as the process of putting language through chaos: it moves constantly in all possible directions, suddenly stopping or returning, divagating and contradictory. Words like “graficamente visíveis,” “rumos,” “desvios,” “atalhos,” “paradas,” and “perdida,” describe the process of writing through metaphors of space and chaotic movement. Writing is an erratic wandering that imitates the erratic wandering of Amazonia as a space itself.

Pedro Maligo believes that the kind of aesthetic and language that da Cunha puts to work in *À margem da história* point to what he calls the archetypical image of literature in the Amazon: the image of chaos. This image becomes the functional principle of the narrative, operating at the level of language, but ultimately serving a greater ideological purpose. Euclides da Cunha puts in crisis the discourses about Amazonia that precede him in order to find a new way of representing it. According to Maligo, the construction of chaos “becomes functionally vital to the need for creating this *tabula rasa*, since it allows the writer to present a reality which he dismisses as unformed, and which he proceeds to organize critically” (41). The text dismantles the previous discursive history and becomes the creator of a new *interpretative model* that claims to be a more appropriate one. Being also a problem of how to integrate Amazonia into the nation, this reinvention procedure is also a matter of reformulating the language and aesthetic through which a nation conceives itself. Chaos, thus, is not only an aesthetic resource,

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<sup>60</sup> “makes it impossible to reveal the collection” (my translation).

<sup>61</sup> “Amazonia only lets herself be seen, scaling down, through the eyes of the microscope” (my translation).

<sup>62</sup> “Nervous and rebel lines, in the chills of the standard writing formulas, reveal, graphically visible, revolted and in multiple paths and crossroads, verging into every possible direction, coming from every corner, in curves and deviations, sudden shortcuts and sudden stops, in the shock of energetic advances, now sudden, coming back, here through the most alarming paradoxes, or even more, lineally uncontained, in the flatness and firmness of the positive knowledge of a divagating, intrepid and completely lost soul” (my translation).



but also an ideological and political strategy for it inaugurates the mythical and historical origin of a new and autonomous, anti-imperialist way of conceiving the Brazilian Amazonia.

A more precise idea of chaos can be inferred from the work of da Cunha himself. In “Impressões Gerais” he calls Amazonia a space lacking “internal coherence” where imagination and reason are transformed, and where everything lacks purpose and stability. Chaos can be defined as a force that disorders, confuses, and creates a constant flux of contradictory energies that point to multiple registers and directions at the same time. This idea of chaos is not distant from the way in which the selva has been thought of in the western tradition. As it was quoted in the Introduction, the word selva implies the notion of something disorganized, uneven, and confusing. To this extent, by representing Amazonia through the idea of chaos, but using it as a form to dismantle and reinvent the tradition, da Cunha re-appropriates a colonial imaginary into a post-colonial one. Amazonia is not a chaos that needs to be organized and squared, but that is unwilling to be subjected to a modern norm.

This form of re-appropriation as a subversive criticism on the imperial tradition of Amazonia is echoed in da Cunha’s description of the book he had envisioned to write, but wasn’t able to, *Um paraíso perdido*. In a letter to the Brazilian writer Coelho Neto in March 10, 1905, da Cunha describes this future book as a project that would articulate a *vengeful* justice against the previous discourses that represented the region (*Correspondencia*, n.p). Further than that, in a letter to Artur Lemos, also from 1905, da Cunha describes *Um paraíso perdido* as a project “whose amplitude frees me from a precise definition of the facets of a land that, to be well understood, requires the unremitting efforts of a lifetime” (qtd. in Hecht 225). The idea of avoiding a “precise definition” prematurely describes the openness and complexity of the literary project that *À margem da história* points to, and echoes on the “vengeful” character that he envisions for his book. It is, as well, a calling for a *form* that frees him, as a writer, an Amazonia, as an object, of a “precise definition.” This brings us back to Adorno’s description of the essay as a form for inconclusiveness that resists the stabilization of the norm.

Chaos tends to disorganization and obscurity instead of order and structure. As da Cunha states, the *unveiling* of Amazonia happens through miniatures of chaos. Both the creation of a literary representation of Amazonia that resists any kind of stabilization and the aesthetic of chaos violently disrupt the preceding traditions, create a corpus of powerfully poetic images, and depict an Amazonia that resists being comprehended into a totality.

Pedro Maligo says that

[W]hat makes the region enigmatic is the construction of a cultural text by authors who are uncertain as to how they can reach the finished definition, the final form of the region that they are creating through language. Enigmas can be described, but cannot be solved... Thus, for Euclides and other writers on Amazonia, the riddle is their own texts, in which they are confronted by the impasse of not being able to find a conclusion to their ideological creation. As they question their transfer of their cultural apparatus to Amazonia by reflecting on its intrinsic flaws, Amazonia (that is, their ability to create a literary Amazonia) becomes increasingly incomprehensible, because the longer one dwells on the riddle, the farther one is from solving it: pondering the riddle only perpetuates the existence of the enigma. (Maligo 48)

Maligo points at the key concepts that define da Cunha’s rhetorical project: inconclusiveness and incomprehensibility. Being such, Amazonia is also inapprehensible to the discourses and practices that forced the region’s integration into processes of modernization.

Euclides da Cunha's Amazonia is ultimately an elusive selva that is unable to be codified in other form than the one provided by literary representation.

The representation of Amazonia as a chaotic and unstable place that responds more to a subjective than an "objective" representational paradigm is echoed by Auerback's analysis of "the representation of reality in western literature." In *Mimesis* (1942), his classic work about the development of literary discourses, Erich Auerback states that by the end of the nineteenth century "[T]he writer as narrator of objective facts has almost completely vanished; almost everything stated appears by way of reflection in the consciousness of the dramatic personae" (534). He continues to explain that by the turn of the century narrative representations of the world undertook "extremely subjective, individualistic, and often eccentrically aberrant impression[s] of reality, and which neither sought nor were able to ascertain anything objective or generally valid in regard to it" (536). It is possible to extend his notions into the discursive history of Amazonia. The nineteenth century literature that claimed an "objective" undertaking of the world was closely related (and influenced) by the naturalist rhetoric of the European travelers like Bates, or other to which Euclides responds. These are what the kind of grand conclusive and comprehensive narratives to which da Cunha opposes with his idea of "miniatures of chaos." The representational paradigms of *À margem da história* signal the crisis of realist "objective" renditions of the world and inscribe him into a literary moment and aesthetic that adds complexity to the political dimensions of his work as a reactionary "tabula rasa" of imperial depictions of the region.

To this extent, I adhere to Pericles Moraes when, in *Os Intérpretes da Amazônia* (1935), he positions *À margem da história* as the origin of a literary tradition about the region based on a specific aesthetic that would serve as a point of departure for many other "imitators," thus consolidating a literary tradition:

Euclides viu a Amazônia com a consciência do artista e a profundidade do cientista, deixando-nos algumas paginas de tão grande fertilidade de observações, que não se pode hoje emitir qualquer opinião deste domínio sem consultar-lhe a autoridade... a sua sombra, a sombra da sua gloria, cresceu e florejeou uma floresta de imitadores solertes e subalternos, que lhe tentaram decalcar o estilo indecalcavel, a forma e a superficie das idéias, copiando-lhe o vocabulário, reproduzindo-lhe os neologismos, deturpando-lhe as intenções... (14)<sup>63</sup>

Chaos and elusiveness, though, seem to be ideas opposite to what informs common geographical practices. To what extent does chaos disrupt geography in *À margem da história*? What's at stake when a geographical narrative is coded through the idea of chaos and incomprehensibility?

### **Amazonia as Literary Geography**

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<sup>63</sup> "Euclides saw Amazonia with the consciousness of an artist and the depth of a scientist, leaving written pages of such fertile observations, that one could not express any opinion about this topic without consulting his authority... behind his glory, a forest of good and bad imitators flowered, who tried to reproduce the inimitable style, the form and shape of his ideas, copying his vocabulary, and even reproducing the neologisms and intentions..." (my translation). For a critical commentary on Pericles Moraes' attempt to build a history of Amazonian discourses after da Cunha, see Allison Leão's *Amazonas: Natureza e Ficção* (2011).

Euclides da Cunha stands at the intersection of literature and geography in the twentieth century. Critics like Leandro Tocantins have stated that da Cunha is “the first great geographer of the Acre region,” (xv) and this is only confirmed by his inclusion in the *Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro* and its confirmation of Euclides as one of Amazonia’s most noticeable geographers in publications like *Amazônia Brasileira* (1944) by the *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística*. Added to this, there is the obvious fact that he did engage in the delimitation of national frontiers and in mapmaking in the Purús region. Since *À margem da história* is a collection of essays in proximity with geography, what does its proximity to literature entail? In this section I want to focus on the answer to this question and point to the emergence of a literary geography in da Cunha’s work.

As a starting point, a brief look into the discipline of geography is useful to contextualize da Cunha’s work as geographical endeavor. The modern understanding of geography as a science began with the rise of European imperialism and the need of control and expansion of new territories. As more recent post-structuralist criticism of mapmaking has noted (J. B. Harley), maps constitute textual and constructed forms of knowledge that enable territorial control and the exercise of power.<sup>64</sup> The entrance of geography into the sciences appears in the eighteenth century with the phenomena of European naturalist explorers and their desire to comprehend (understand and possess) the world. Two specific explorers can be seen as pioneers in this endeavor, French explorer Charles Marie de la Condamine (1701-1774) and Prussian/German explorer Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859). By the nineteenth century geography had been constituted as a science directed towards the measuring of the world, another branch of the positivistic apprehension of the planet that helped imperial powers in Europe maintain their control and build their capital.<sup>65</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century the strictly scientific structure of geography gave way to a more sociological and cultural understanding of the discipline. Richard Pete explains that this change responds less to a process of intellectual criticism, and more to a “shift in societal demands,” upon the appearance of a “consumerist capitalist (Fordist) society” (14). The more cultural or sociological construction of geography responded to a shift in the way economy was organized: previously, it responded to the construction of European empires, where territorialization of the land enabled the consumption of the colony’s wealth and resources. After the independences, though, the modern capitalization of national economies demanded a type of geographical discipline that could serve nation building, and this included the study of class, gender, race, and culture. In addition to Richard Pete’s explanation, the fact that imperialism (and the philosophical apparatus that it put to work)

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<sup>64</sup> J.B. Harley’s work constitutes a key criticism in modern studies of cartography and geography. In “Maps, Knowledge, and Power” (1988) and “Deconstructing the Map” (1989) he proposes mapmaking as a socially and textually constructed object that provides knowledge, and thus control of territories. Harley states that “both in their selectivity of their content and in their signs and styles of representation, maps are a way of conceiving, articulating, and structuring the human world which is biased towards, promoted by, and excerpts influence upon particular sets of social relations” (53). Because of this, maps have been an important “weapon of imperialism” (57) that helped built and maintain imperial expansion and control over foreign territories. For these reasons, modern history of geography and of cartography cannot be unattached of the history of European imperialism.

<sup>65</sup> Further reading on positivism in the Americas, C. M de la Condamine, Alexander von Humboldt, and the beginnings of science can be found in Neil Safier’s thorough study of de la Condamine’s project in *Measuring the World: Enlightenment Science and South America* (2008) and Mary Louise Pratt’s *Imperial Eyes* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. 2007).

was already being contested and criticized, added an intellectual reason for this shift. Geographic knowledge started to develop an “antipathy” towards the positivistic character of nineteenth century geography (Pete 15).

Carl Ortwin Sauer’s foundational essay from 1927 explains that “geography is based on the reality of the union of physical and cultural elements of the landscape” (303). Sauer proposed a geography concerned with the ways in which culture and society interact and help form our conceptions of land, leading him to use the word landscape as the essential unity of geography. Aspects like population, density, mobility, housing, production, communication, and economies play a fundamental role in the new form of geographical knowledge. Sauer’s work also emphasized that “in the selection of the generic characteristics of landscape the geographer is guided only by his own judgment,” (301) an insight that, although Sauer does not develop farther, lets us intuit the subjectivity of geographical thought in the turn of the century, an insight deeply shared by Euclides da Cunha. Through Sauer’s positions it is possible to elucidate the way in which the conception of what geography meant was changing, and what could have similarly meant for someone like Euclides da Cunha.

Brazil’s history of geography, specifically, is linked to the colonial determination of the frontiers between the Spanish and Portuguese empires. Treatises like the Tordesillas, in 1494, and the San Idelfonso, in 1777, tried to divide and define the control that both Iberian kingdoms had over American territories. Much of the colonial expeditions and their subsequent written products in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries are somehow aimed at legitimizing control over the conquered space.<sup>66</sup> It wasn’t until the end of the eighteenth century that a modern geographical work appears. Brazil’s own Humboldt was the Brazilian Naturalist explorer and geographer Alexandre Rodrigues Pereira (1785-1788), who, sponsored by the University of Lisbon in the 1880s, conducted a study of Amazonia titled *Viajem Filosófica*. Historical accounts on the development of geography in Brazil seem to agree in highlighting Rodrigues Pereira within a pool of numerous European travelers who represent the core or positivistic geographical production.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> An example of such expeditions can be Cristoval de Acuña’s expedition from Ecuador to the Amazon River, lead in 1636, from which *Nuevo descubrimiento del gran Rio del Amazonas* was published, in 1641. One of the ways to understand this text is as a discourse of discovery and conquest of the Amazon River that claims the origin of the river within the space of the colonial government of the city of Quito, in what now is Ecuador. Locating the river under the jurisdiction of Quito, the local colonial government legitimates its control over the territory, undermining whatever form of possession the Portuguese colony had over it. Ultimately, then, it is a geographical struggle over who controls the wealth of the Amazon.

<sup>67</sup> *Amazonia Brasileira* edited in 1944 includes a list of 16 names and a brief description of the most important people in the development of Amazonian geography. At least 5 of them are Brazilian, including the Baron of Rio Branco, Euclides da Cunha, and other military men associated with the Portuguese crown set in Rio de Janeiro. Susana Hecht’s book on Euclides da Cunha also includes thorough discussions on Brazil’s geographic history, specifically if the Amazon region; her chapter “Maps, Texts, and History” provides valuable context around the topic, and places Euclides da Cunha within this context. The essays “Reflexões Sobre a Geografia e sua Historia” by Giuliano Coutinho, “As Idéias no Lugar: O desenvolvimento do pensamento geográfico no Brasil no início do século XX” by Lía Osorio Machado, and “A Figura do Intelectual e a Razão Universal na Fundação do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro” by Sérgio Campos Gonçalves provide a bibliography around the history of Brazil’s geographic development and its academia. The chapter “The Confines of the Colony: Boundaries, Ethnographic Landscapes, and Imperial Cartography in Iberoamerica” included in the book *The Imperial Map* edited by James R. Akerman (2009) provides an account of geography both in Brazil and the Amazon region.

It was in part by texts like this that a local interest on Brazilian geography found its place. In 1838 Dom Pedro II, emperor of Brazil, founded the *Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro*, aimed at centralizing the knowledge of the territory to the local government, and re-writing the history of a place always seen through the imperial desire of Portugal. It is not strange that in the nineteenth century, as it happened in other Latin American countries, much of the geography production was done in part by the military. In the nineteenth century, amid independences and anti-colonial movements, geography became a matter of national construction and security controlled by the state reaffirming the idea that geographical knowledge was a matter of power and control. In the Amazon this was twice as important, for the rapidly modernizing Brazil needed local control of the territory where one of the most important capitalist commodities was located: rubber. Susana Hecht explains: “Nineteenth-century Amazonia resided at the intersection of ambitious dreams of empires and new republics; it was embedded in old mercantile commodity circuits as well as an emergent globalized capitalism that relied on tropical raw materials for machinery, medicine, and industrial outputs for new markets of mass consumption” (88).

At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, Brazil turned into a more cultural and sociological approach to geography. In the essay “As Idéias no Lugar: O desenvolvimento do pensamento geográfico no Brasil no início do século XX” [Ideas in Place; The Development of Geographical Knowledge in Brazil in the Beginning of the 20th Century], Lía Osorio Machado gives an ample context of the direction geography undertook in the beginning of the century. She highlights the appearance of new trends that she categorizes as social geography, anthropological geography, or human geography, all in the first decade of the 1900s. The main trend was to include a liberal, social frame that would not only give account of spaces and territory, but of populations, cultures, and the way they interact and define the national territory. This is the context and the geographical debate in which Euclides da Cunha produced his geographical works and his texts. He consolidated this geographical trend taking geography to its social contexts and cultural basis. Further on, da Cunha and the Baron de Rio Branco (the political mentor who appointed da Cunha as the commissioner traveling to the Purús), stand at the inaugural point of twentieth century geography in Brazil. In the light of an economic expansion, the Baron’s work defended national interest over disputed lands, assuring that Brazil kept control over exploitable territories.

*À margem da história* was produced amidst this context. It is informed by sociological and cultural interests, and is in dialogue with the humanistic approach that defined the history of geography in the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries. It is a project fashioned by an interest in nationalistic appropriation and informed by the growth of mercantile commodities in the sphere of globalized markets.

Moreover, Euclides da Cunha and the Baron not only engaged in this kind of geographical production, but did much more: they were aware of the importance of national sentiment, and conscious of the national imaginary creations that shape a country and its people. They were aware of the importance of national pride as a means through which they would make clearer the statement of their geographical case –the idea that the Purús was a Brazilian territory. It is not a coincidence that the Baron chose da Cunha, the writer of *Os sertões*, member of the National Academy of Letters, to undertake one of Brazil’s most delicate frontier delimitations. Agreeing with this, Susana Hecht explains that “Euclides had to generate the intellectual

apparatus of the Brazilian boundary negotiations using the science, poetics, and politics of history and landscapes,” which included, among maps and supplements, “a series of essays on comparative cultural and diplomatic history;” essays that were ordered by the Baron and that “would be partisan and would analytically and ideologically shape the larger debate.” These essays, continues on Hecht, “were part of a public relations blitz to recast the understanding of the Amazon boundary question and argue the case overtly while Brazilian negotiators wrangled over it privately” (347-8). To this extent, the literary drive in da Cunha was also part of a rhetoric that would contribute in the articulation of a patriotic and nationalistic sentiment amidst the geographical dispute.

Seen under this light, it is possible to understand *À margem da história* as a ‘literary geography’. In *Modern Geographical Thought* (1998) Richard Pete defines geography as “the study of relations between society and the natural environment” (1). This is a broad definition that testifies to the instability of the definition of what geography has been and is today. Nonetheless, it serves the purpose of describing what da Cunha’s work in Amazonia was. *À margem da história* is a socially and culturally informed geographical text that, using literary rhetoric, constructs a narrative of nationalistic value.

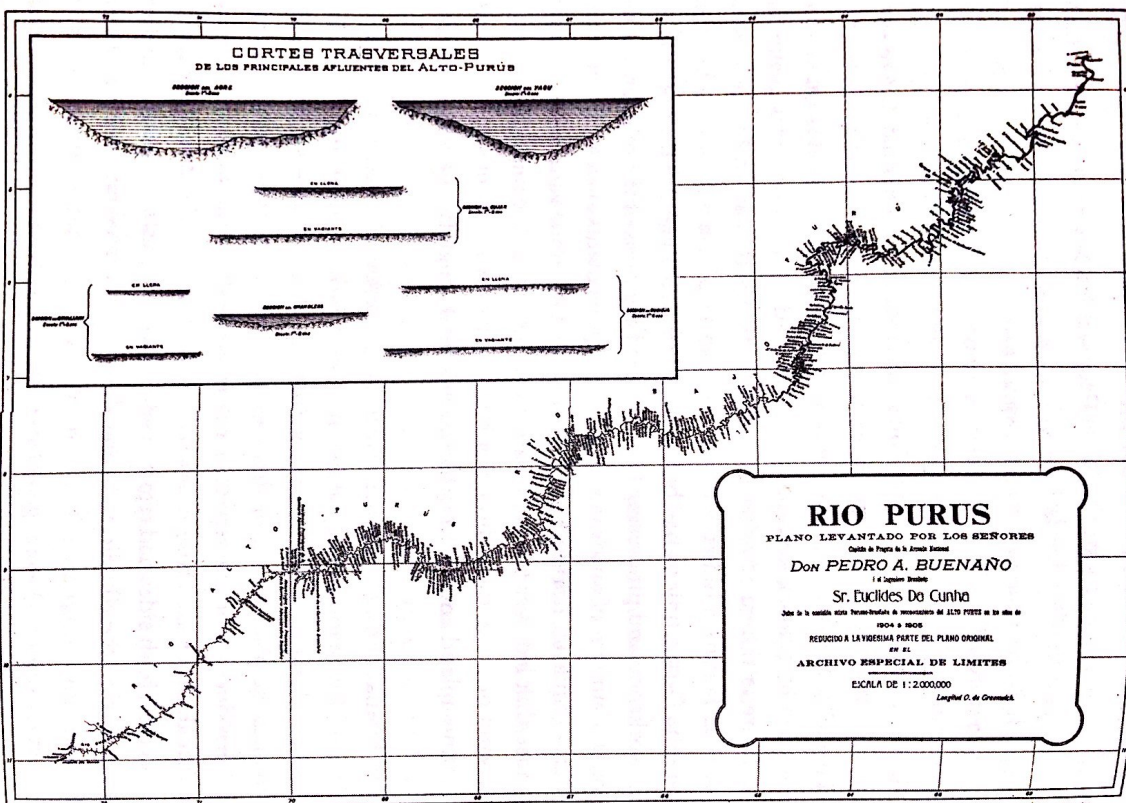
Euclides da Cunha’s geographical endeavor could be divided into two projects: one of them is composed by the practical work realized in the frame of the official commission, of which the maps and the written official report are the results. This project can be identified as the *practical* geographical endeavor. The other project is the one written throughout some of the essays on the side of the commission –the literary endeavor-, of which *À margem da história* belongs. The lines that separate these two works are thin: many of da Cunha’s essays, even though they were not part of the final report and were part of the preparation for *Um Paraíso Perdido*, were published in journals and aimed at the creation of an idea of nationalism that was very much encouraged by the Baron do Rio Branco. In spite of this, these different projects are aimed at different objectives and their pointing directions are contradictory: the practical geography is directed towards the justification of the Purús territory as a legitimate Brazilian land, while the literary is directed towards the sociological construction of the nation, but most importantly (and contradictorily) towards the creation of a discursive apparatus that both, undermines geographical practices as a tool of power and control, and make Amazonia inapprehensible for the state’s apparatus.

The commission to report on the frontier between Brazil and Peru in the Purús region must be understood within the desire of making the Amazon a productive region in Brazil’s modernization process. It required da Cunha to travel up the Purús River, determining the coordinates of its affluents, correcting and completing the map developed by William Chandless, verifying the nomenclature of the towns and including new ones, and producing a map and a descriptive memorandum of the expedition. The Chandless map, which served as a base for the expedition, was produced by William Chandless for the Royal Geographic Society in the 1860s and depicted, among other, “an inventory of land use from which more exact information on production might be derived” (Hecht 258). Euclides understood pretty well the politics behind the art of cartography and was absolutely aware of the rhetoric inscribed in them. In a letter to one of his friends, Euclides writes the following:

I live entangled with the old drawings of ancient cartographers, the most disloyal and dishonest characters who have ever appeared in Geography –in the midst of those scoundrels who sketch in rivers and who raise

mountain ranges at random in order to complement the overall aesthetic of the design, I am passing through cheerless and exhausting days... (Qtd. in Hecht 353)

The use of words such as ‘disloyal’ and ‘dishonest’ reveal da Cunha’s criticism towards the politics of empire and his judgment of unreliable cartographic information, and reveal a very similar concern to the one that drives the entire literary project: the creation of a “tabula rasa” to correct the previous discourses and invent new ones. His revision of the Chandless map meant an opportunity to re-elaborate the cartography of the empire and to cast his own political views. The result was a map coproduced with Peruvian Pedro A. Buenano that lacked any kind of decorative images, and that was composed by a grid traversed diagonally by the a representation in scale of the river, from which multiple names of locations could be read on each side. It included two boxed sets of information, one containing images of different transversal cuts that showed the depth of the river, and another box containing the information about its production: mapmakers (Dom Pedro A. Buenano and Sr. Euclides da Cunha), title of the commission, year produced (1904 to 1905), and scale.



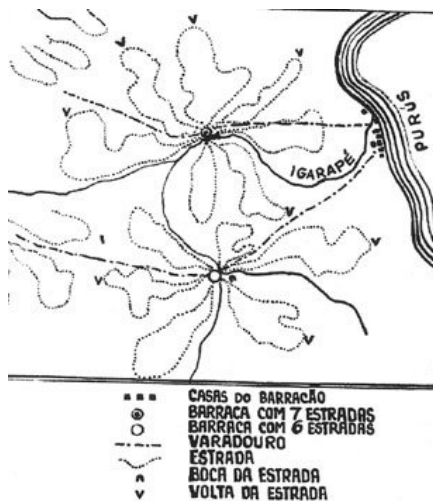
(Buenano / Da Cunha Map of the Purús River, 1905. Hecht 360)

Euclides’ job was to recast that map into a national idiom, and that’s exactly what he did. Susana Hecht’s eloquent analysis of the map explains the way in which he made that territory a Brazilian one (359-361). The abundance of places named in Portuguese speak of a history of Brazilian settlements that ultimately controlled the circulation of vessels and commerce on the river. Peruvians were a minority compared to the number of Brazilians that were depicted living in the region. The kind of “geopolitical presence” that Euclides depicted in his map “bore witness to a conquest not by rampaging armies but by the footsteps of legions of humble

northeasterners” (Hecht 361). The Purús River was occupied by the heart and soul of the nation’s people and thus it belonged to the nation. It was in the *sertanejos* that the occupation became more than a matter of what Lúcia Sá calls *uti possidetis* (“Voicing” xv), it became a matter of race, a matter of the true Brazilianness. Da Cunha unveiled a territory that had been barely explored, that was encoded in myths, and revealed it to the nation as the last piece of the country that needed to be integrated into the general map.

The apparent simplicity of the map –a river that traverses the grid of the page, completely disassociated from any other topographical mark- decontextualizes the river from Amazonia. When compared to da Cunha’s dense and unstructured literary representation of the region, rich in images of motion and instability, the map becomes a geographical abstraction. Although the focus of the map points at the idea of a densely Brazilian population on the river, the dislocation of the graph from its context signals a deliberate attempt to not include and represent the rest of the selva. From the perspective of literary analysis, it is hard not to associate da Cunha’s statement of the Amazon as the last unwritten page of Genesis with the blank unfilled spaces of the grid. To what extent can this be read as a resistance to give a cartographic –and thus a totalizing and rationalizing - account of the region?

Besides the main map of the river, da Cunha produced a sketch of paths and isthmuses (*estradas* and *varadouros*) which depict the way in which the settlers of the region have taken control over the territory. The *varadouros* were paths that were opened in the middle of the forest to communicate two main navigable rivers (what the film director Werner Herzog depicted in his classic 1982 film *Fitzcarraldo*). They created optimized circulation waterways for the mobilization of commodities and were proof of the developed economy that took place in the interior of the selva. The map reveals the sophisticated ways in which the settlers organized and managed space in the forest: an intricate system of paths used for the recollection of rubber, themselves connected to the *varadouros* and the rivers, in an octopus or flower-like arrangement that placed the recollection centers at the middle of the system. These paths show the ways of life and production in the region.



Map of Estradas and Varadourous. Published in Kosmos, 1906. (Hecht 368)

The two maps differ on the format and complexity they present. The first one is encoded in technical conventions (the grid, the information boxes, etc) and depicts an extraction of the



river within a scale. The second lacks many of the technical conventions that would inform dimension and location, and shows an abstraction of the circulation patterns of rubber tappers in the Purús region. The key to its difference lays on the fact that the latter map encompasses an experience of space that the first one resists to show. Although lacking the formality of the first one, this map represents the idea of spatial use: it informs the ways in which circulation, mobility, and life function in the *selva*. The circuits of mobility among the houses, the *barracas*, the rivers, and the *estradas* describe circles that start and end at the same place and that are repeated side by side five or six times. The movement that can be imagined from the scheme generates an experience of mobility and detention that is similar to the literary descriptions of the Amazonian space as an unstable territory.

Besides the cartographic work, da Cunha's practical geographical written work is seen in a number of essays like "O rio Purús" and "Geografia do alto Purús" that were part of the *Relatório oficial da comissão mista brasileiro-peruana do reconhecimento do alto Purús*, and even in letters he wrote to the Baron do Rio Branco. They consist of descriptions of the river that include scientific data about the specific information required by the government, such as coordinates, distances, topographical elements, and reports on population and settlements, including commentaries on their economy. One of the most salient elements in these narratives is the constant allusion to previous explorations of the region, like the ones done by Alexander Ferreira de Castro, William Chandless, and others. The constant mention of other explorers responds to the need of correction and verification that the commission had to undertake.

In conclusion, Euclides practical work responded to very specific governmental and political concerns related to the inclusion of the river as a Brazilian territory and to the systems of production. However, in spite of their political praxis in the delimitation of official frontiers, from the point of view of a critical analysis, Euclides' practical work is open to interpretation and is permeable to an examination based on the elements that structure his literary representation of Amazonia.

Contrasting his practical work, there is the geographic *literary* project, some of which has been previously analyzed. In *À margem da história*, specifically in the opening essay "Impressões Gerais," Euclides presents us with an Amazonia that contradicts the possibility of any geographical endeavor. Da Cunha's description of the region starts by stating that humans are impertinent creatures in the forests, for in it the human being

encontrou uma opulenta desordem... Os mesmos rios ainda não se firmaram nos leitos; parecem tatear uma situação de equilíbrio derivando, divagantes, em meandros instáveis, contorcidos em sacados, cujos istmos a reveses se rompem e se soldam numa desesperadora formação de ilhas e de lagos de seis meses... (2).<sup>68</sup>

The idea of rivers wandering aimlessly, in vain and in a disorganized manner, give the impression of a territory un-subjected to the laws of natural stabilization. On the contrary, they state a system of perpetual movement that defies any act of scientific deduction. More than that, rivers move the territory around, not only forming topographical formations that increase and

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<sup>68</sup> "here we encounter disorder on a lavish scale... the rivers are still not fixed in their courses. They seem to search vainly for equilibrium by wandering off aimlessly in unstable meanders that curve into the form of lakes called *secados* with isthmuses that repeatedly break down and recombine in the futile creation of islands and lakes of only six months duration" (4).

decrease without any geological reason, but also expatriating massive amounts of land out to the Atlantic and into international waters. The rivers carry immense quantities of earth that have the potential to build lands outside the country's limits, challenging any notion of national territoriality:

Naqueles lugares, o brasileiro salta: é estrangeiro: e está pisando terras brasileiras. Antolha-se-lhe um contra-senso pasmoso: à ficção de direito estabelecendo por vezes a extraterritorialidade, que é a pátria sem a terra, contrapõe-se uma outra, rudemente física: a terra sem pátria. E o efeito maravilhoso de uma espécie de emigração telúrica. A terra abandona o homem. (7)<sup>69</sup>

The idea of land abandoning man not only adds to the image of perpetual movement of the terrain, but also ignites a vision of resistance to any kind of subjection that is not the intrinsic forces of creation and destruction of the land. Even though da Cunha explains that the region is still under formation, what we see is the domain of that which resists formation and determination. The immature rivers that wonder aimlessly through the territory cause the randomness of the creation and destruction of land formations:

Sempre desordenado, e revoltado, e vacilante, destruindo e construindo, reconstruindo e devastando, apagando numa hora o que erigiu em decênios – com a ânsia, com a tortura, com o exaspero de monstruoso artista incontentável a retocar, a refazer e a recomençar perpetuamente um quadro indefinido. (9)<sup>70</sup>

In a world like this any kind of settlement seems unlikely. The efforts of colonization in Amazonia are made impossible by the instability of the terrain:

A Amazônia selvagem sempre teve o dom de impressionar a civilização distante. Desde os primeiros tempos da Colônia, as mais imponentes expedições e solenes visitas pastorais rumavam de preferência as suas plagas desconhecidas. Para lá os más veneráveis bispos, os más garbosos capitães-generais, os mais lúcidos cientistas. E do amanho do solo que se tentou afeiçoar as exóticas especiarias, à cultura do aborígine que se procurou erguer aos mais altos destinos, a metrópole longínqua demasiara-se em desvelos à terra que sobre todas lhe compensaria o perdimento da Índia portentosa. *Esforços vão*s. (my emphasis 9)<sup>71</sup>

The idea of disorder, instability, and relativity structures the representation of the land (and the text). There are no fixed or lasting formations, but just momentary and tumultuous phenomena that form and un-form repeatedly. Movement seems to be the only to the extent that a person who wants to travel through the Amazon must, in da Cunha's words, remain still, for

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<sup>69</sup> “in such places the Brazilian, albeit a foreigner, would be trading Brazilian land. Which leads to an astounding perplexity: to the fiction of extraterritorial law –country without land- is counterpoised another basic physical concept –land without country. Such is the marvelous effect of this other kind of telluric migration. Land abandons man” (9).

<sup>70</sup> “Ever disorganized, turbulent, vacillating, tearing down, building up, rebuilding and leveling, devastating in an hour what it spent decades building –with the eagerness, the agony, and the exasperation of a monstrous artist ever unsatisfied, taking it again, redoing, perpetually beginning anew a painting without end” (11).

<sup>71</sup> “The wild Amazonian region has always had the gift of impressing far off civilization. From the earliest years of the colony the most imposing of expeditions and most solemn of pastoral visits have sought its unknown lands preferentially. To it have come the most venerable bishops, elegant captains, and lucid scientists. From the tilling of a soil to cultivate exotic crops to developing the aborigine to raise him to the highest destiny, the distant metropole outdid itself in efforts to open up this land that above all others would compensate it for the lost, prodigious India. Efforts all in vain” (11).

the entire selva will come and transform in front of his eyes; that who moves around will only see stillness, and will have the impression of not moving in any direction (*À margem* 13).

What is striking about this idea is the fact that it undermines Euclides' undertaking as a whole. If da Cunha's geographical project is focused on the study of the land, its people, its socioeconomic dimensions, and its history, the depiction of Amazonia as a land unwilling to be seen through the structuring eyes of science and, also, as a place where settling becomes a futile and vane enterprise, then this vision becomes incongruous with the rest of his work. How can you argue the possession of a land that is impossible to attain? How do you claim as Brazilian a territory that flees away from the nation? How can a developed society, with its economic and cultural advances, ever survive in such instability? How can a system of transportation (the Transaereana, for instance) ever be built here? In other words, how can we understand or reconcile this hectic and wandering territory with the rest of da Cunha's vision of the region?

Susana Hecht explains that the way da Cunha depicts Amazonia in "Impressões Gerais" responds to the influence of geologists and paleontologists of his time (Charles Lyell, Frederico Hartt, Orville Derby, Frederich Katzer) that viewed Amazonia, and in particular the Purús region, as an instable zone formed by the rise of the Andes. While Euclides was informed by geological theories of his time, *À margem da história* must be understood as a literary representation that conflicts such discourses. Once again the text moves into a rhetorical register in which imagery, characterization, and the creation of an aesthetic paradigm of movement and flux –chaos- take over the scientific jargon. As he says, commenting on previous writings of the region done by naturalists, in Amazonia "as verdades desfeçam em hipérbolés" (4),<sup>72</sup> and that's exactly what he does: the land and the rivers are represented through hyperbolic images of randomness and unsteadiness.

In previous segments of this chapter I used Pedro Maligo's idea of chaos to give an analytical interpretation of the use of language in da Cunha's texts. Chaos was presented as a concept that described *À margem da história*'s aesthetic and ideological impulse. It was a "tabula rasa" that collapsed previous discourses of the region and rendered a new discursive style to recast Amazonia into a national discourse. I believe this same idea provides a way to understand the geographical endeavor written in essays like the one commented above. The images of movement, instability, formation and destruction build an image of chaos that points at a resistance of structure, and an incomprehensibility of the land to the eyes of geography. Pedro Maligo comments the following:

Euclides' depiction of Canudos and Amazonia reveal a conscious effort to open a symbolic, mythical space within the text: an ideal territory capable of providing the opportunity for a contrast between historical analysis and the suggestion of change, through which he would present his political views. His mastery of literary style becomes apparent as he manages to create that symbolic space, defined through the image of Chaos (i.e., the impossibility of classification) in a text that is otherwise entirely structured, as we have seen, around information found in scientific discourse (that is, the discourse of classification). Drawing upon the detailed travel narratives of several scientists who had visited the region, Euclides acquires both the objective information and the poetic inspiration which, together, yield the notion of paradoxical disorder that he uses to define Amazonia. (Maligo 40)

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<sup>72</sup> "truth can devolve into hyperbole" (5).

What becomes highly conflictive is the fact that this ideological undermining of science shares a space, within the same project, with a purely scientific task. How can these two divergent intensions be reconciled? There is not just one answer to this question; the conciliation between the two is not, ultimately, a problem. It is part of the chaotic movement of the text.

Euclides da Cunha's portrayal of Amazonia as an incomprehensible space, particularly from a geographical perspective, must be seen as part of the critique towards the imperial desire of possession of previous European discourses written in tandem with the production of geographical knowledge. In the same way in which da Cunha undermines the discourses of previous explorers on the region saying that they were disappointing and incapable of transmitting any truth, he depicts the land in a way that resists interpretation by the European forms of knowledge that facilitated imperialism. This would be the ideological "tabula rasa" that detaches the region from imperial control and opens a space for the appropriation of it by the nation. As Maligo smartly states, this incomprehensible territory is a symbolic and mythical space: symbolic in the sense that it becomes the realm of literary creation, and mythical to the extent that it creates a new beginning. It is interesting to note the coherence of Euclides' mythical structuring for a new Amazonian discourse: it starts with chaos, like God's creation, and ends with the image of a blank, unwritten page of Genesis. These mythical images would inaugurate a tradition of writing about the selva through the lens of the nation, as can be seen with Brazilian Modernismo and the works of Raul Bopp, Mario de Andrade, and Heitor Villa-Lobos (Slater, *Entangled*, 201).

Further more, the creation of an uncontrollable Amazonia speaks about da Cunha's tendency towards the literary. He creates worlds that go beyond the scientific rationalization:

A volubilidade do rio contagia o homem. No Amazonas, em geral, sucede isto: o observador errante, que lhe percorre a bacia em busca de variados aspetos, sente, ao cabo de centenas de milhas, a impressão de circular num itinerário fechado, onde se lhe deparam as mesmas praias ou barreiras ou ilhas, e as mesmas florestas e igapós estirando-se a perder de vista pelos horizontes vazios; o observador imóvel que lhe estacione às margens sobressalteia-se, intermitentemente, diante de transfigurações inopinadas. Os cenários, invariáveis no espaço, transmudam-se no tempo. Diante do homem errante, a natureza é estável; e, aos olhos do homem sedentário, que planeie submetê-la à estabilidade das culturas, aparece espantosamente revolta e volúvel, surpreendendo-o, assaltando-o por vezes, quase sempre afugentando-o e espavorindo-o. (12)<sup>73</sup>

In this Amazonia the laws of physics cease to exist, and space and time are redefined. It is a world of relative conditions where time happens through the experience of stillness, and movement is motionlessness. Directions and coordinates become obsolete, and surprise comes

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<sup>73</sup> "The changeability of the river infects the human being. In the Amazon, what generally takes place is the following: the observer who wanders the basin in search of its varied perspectives, at the end of hundreds of miles, derives the impression that they have circled about in a closed loop filled with the same beaches and walls and islands, the same forests and stagnant sloughs called *igapós* stretching out to empty horizons farther than the eye can see. By contrast, the observer who stays at the margins is intermittently astonished by unexpected transformations. Scenes that are repetitive in the realm of space change over time. To the eyes of a person in motion nature is stable; to the eyes of the sedentary person whose project it may be to subject that nature to the stability of human cultivation, it seems frighteningly changeable and fragile and the appearance of that mutability occasionally overwhelms him. It almost always ends up terrifying him and driving him away" (13-14).

not from the discovery of the new, but from the observation of the immobile. It is a world out of human order, which “infects” (*contagia* in Portuguese) the human soul, often expelling him away. Da Cunha’s tendency towards the powerful images through a poignant use of language is what ultimately locates him at the intersection of literature and many other fields of knowledge, like sociology and geography, in particular. Images like this one, original and ideologically powerful, ignite a new literary imaginary for the nation and inaugurate a literary Amazonia.

The undermining of positivistic geography launches a critique of the idea of nation building that structures the entire project’s appropriation of the Purús. Euclides da Cunha’s writings and geographical work about the Amazon are directed towards an integration of the region to Brazil, under the frame of nation building practices and discourses. However, da Cunha’s ideological project –the “tabula rasa” with which he presents a “blank page”- ends up coming back to him, like a scorpion that inflicts himself. To what extend, one should ask, is this critique of imperial rhetoric and practices condemning Brazil’s own national building rhetoric and practices? Euclides depicts the Amazon as an uninhabitable place at the same time he claims region’s Brazilianness.

Euclides’ integration of the Amazon to the nation was in reality the integration of Amazonia into the productive system of capitalism. However, throughout the text da Cunha’s criticism of the production of rubber and the atrocious debt system becomes more than evident. Essays like “Judas Asvero” reinforce the image of homelessness, despair, and subjugation that the unobserved and unlawful rubber system generates. One could read into these images an idea of alienation that points at a criticism of the capitalist system, at least in its first stages of production and when it is not under the state’s supervision. Together with the alienation of rubber tappers, *À margem da história*’s reticence to represent a space comprehensible to the geographic logic, or in other words, the creation of a literary Amazonia as a land governed by chaos that is unattainable by the discourses of space that aim at a rationalization, control, and consumption of the region, strive for a symbolic resistance of integrating the Amazon into a capitalist system.

Philosophers Félix Guattari and Giles Deleuze wrote about two different kinds of spaces that provide a conceptual apparatus to da Cunha’s literary representation of Amazonia: striated spaces and smooth spaces. The first one, the striated space, is the kind of space instituted by the state apparatus: it is measurable, optically perceived, it organizes matter and it is organized matter. It is compartmentalized and systematized, for it is the optimization of space for production. It is the territory, its map, and the grid in which it lays, imaginary or practical. The smooth space, on the other hand, is its opposite: it is a space not perceived optically, but haptically (the gaze is the extension of reason through the eye); it is filled with intensities and happenings rather than with organized processes: it is felt and perceived rather than explained.

Smooth space is filled by events or haecceities, far more than by formed and perceived things. It is a space of affects, more than one of properties. It is a haptic rather than an optical perception. Whereas in the striated forms organize a matter, in the smooth materials signal forces and serve as symptoms for them. It is an intensive rather than extensive space, one of distances, not of measures and properties. Intense *Spatium* instead of *Extensio*. A Body without Organs instead of an organism and organization. Perception in it is based on symptoms and evaluations rather than measures and properties. That is why smooth space is occupied by intensities, wind and noise, forces, and sonorous and tactile qualities, as in the desert, steppe, or ice. The creaking of ice and the sound of the sands. Striated space, on the contrary, is canopied by the sky as measure and by the measurable visual qualities derived from it. (Deleuze and Guattari 479)

Da Cunha's literary representation of Amazonia can be understood as a smooth space. In his literary depiction of the region, Euclides delivers an incommensurable and un-gridable space whose forces are un-structural and un-organized. It is interesting to note that one of the first elements that is in crisis in da Cunha's representation of Amazonia is the optical order: "e como [a Amazônia] lhe falta a linha vertical, preexistente na movimentação da paisagem, em poucas horas o observador cede à fadiga da monotonia inatural e sente que seu olhar, inexplicavelmente, se abrevia nos sem-fins daqueles horizontes vazios como os dos mares" (2).<sup>74</sup> There are several images of failed vision throughout *À margem da história*; upon arrival "o olhar morre no próprio quadro que se contempla," (29)<sup>75</sup> or the totality of the selva is invisible to the eye so literature must work as a microscope. The landscape is monotonous and unrevealing, and brings disillusion to those who contemplate it. Out of the optical order, Amazonia is not seen, but experienced, and usually through an unproductive experience of boredom and monotony amidst the changeability of the land and waters.

Smooth and striated spaces, although different in nature, are not opposed binaries: they need each other to coexist. In a similar way, the Amazon only becomes a smooth space upon the arrival of the striated force, which in the case of Amazonia stands for the transformation of the region into the site of consumable wealth. In this sense, the ideas of "smooth" and "striated spaces," help frame Euclides' Amazonia as a modern space within the nation, and an attempt to undermine –that is, in the domain of the literary- the subjugation of the Amazon into the state's enterprise.

Modernity in Latin America was consolidated through contradictions. The arrival of positivism, the establishing of productive capitalism, and the birth of massive urban centers coexisted with a profound nostalgia of a pre-productive era. Modern thought organized geographies and societies through systems of inclusion and exclusion. From the urban centers, peripheries were both urged to be integrated into modernization processes, but also mourned because of their integration into a changing system. Modernity installs, thus, a contradiction. Literature played a pivotal role in the visualization of this contradiction: since discourses that go as far as Faustino Sarmiento's (1845), literature became the symbolic place of nostalgia, resistance, and confrontation to the modern enterprise.<sup>76</sup> Da Cunha's literary Amazonia also

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<sup>74</sup> "because of its lack of vertical dimension, essential to imparting a sense of life to a landscape, within a few hours the observer tires in the face of an unbearable monotony and begins to notice that their gaze is less and less frequently directed to that endless horizon as empty and undefined as that of the sea" (4).

<sup>75</sup> "where his gaze is exhausted by the very scene he is contemplating" (31).

<sup>76</sup> Faustino Sarmiento and his book *Facundo. Civilization and Barbarism* (1845) stands as the most representative case. In the mid nineteenth century Sarmiento promulgated the civilization of the Argentinean plains so Argentina could achieve the status of a European nation. Profoundly critical of the non-urban peripheries of the nation, though, he wrote that it is precisely from those lands that a national literary tradition would flourish. "Si de las condiciones de la vida pastoril tal como la ha constituido la colonización y la incuria, nacen graves dificultades para una organización política cualquiera, y mucho más para el triunfo de la civilización europea, de sus instituciones y de la riqueza y libertad, que son sus consecuencias, no puede por otra parte negarse que esta situación tiene su costado poético, y faces dignas de la pluma del romancista. Si un destello de literatura nacional puede brillar momentáneamente de las nuevas sociedades americanas, es el que resultará de la descripción de las grandiosas escenas naturales, y sobre todo, de la lucha entre la civilización europea y la barbarie indígena, entre la inteligencia y la materia..." (75).

shows this dichotomy. This paradox is expressed in a desire, but also in an anxiety, of being placed on the map. The *selva* -the plains, the desert, the sertão- are regions placed on the map by the state's apparatus but removed, or relocated, by the literary discourse. Literature's enterprise is to keep them as a hiatus, to use da Cunha's term; an interruption to the construct of the nation that signals modernity as a juxtaposition of impossible contradicting desires.

Territories in and out of the map are *mirage territories*. They express desire and anxiety, and are themselves images of anxious desire. "Uma miragem de território," da Cunha's Amazonia, is a territory –a geography- that has been re-appropriated by literature and that, through the political acts of language, evade and resist the imposition of the state's desire.

## Chapter Two

### On Getting Lost: Re-Writing the Experience of Space in *La Vorágine*

#### Introduction

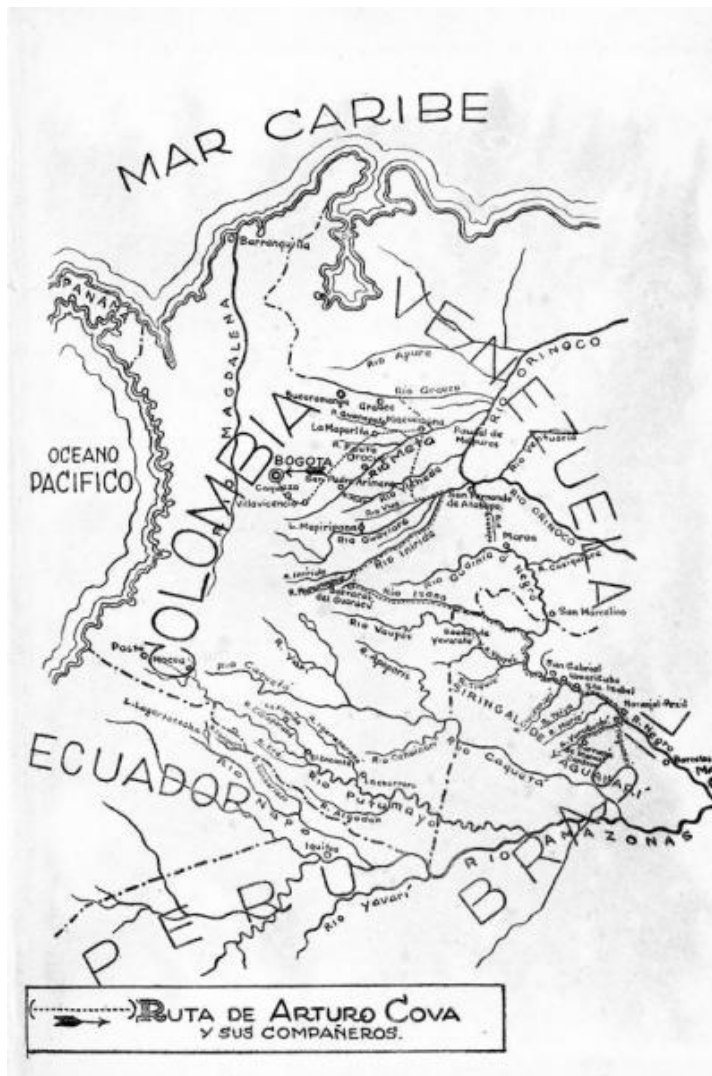
José Eustasio Rivera's *La vorágine* [The Vortex] (1924) is a story about the Colombian southern territories, about the rubber exploitation system that ruled in Amazonia at the beginning of the twentieth century, but also, in the most poignant way, a story about getting lost in the Amazonian jungle. The novel tells the story of a mediocre poet named Arturo Cova and his girlfriend Alicia, a couple of bourgeoisie lovers that escape Bogota threatened by the scandalous rumors of their love affair. They take refuge in an acquaintance's farm in the southeastern Colombian plains, a territory of rough cowboys and magical sunsets. For a while the plains become the scenery where Cova dreams of being a successful settler and a legendary poet, and he fantasizes of being a tough and mighty man in the indomitable landscape. Soon enough, however, Barrera, a recruiter that works for the rubber companies in the southern jungles, appears to disturb the postal card reality of the plains. After a business plan gone wrong and a couple of romantic misunderstandings, Alicia and her hostess are kidnapped by Barrera and taken into the jungles, possibly to work as slaves. When this happens, Cova's destiny radically changes: he decides to go into the jungle accompanied by Franco, his host, to a journey that would prove to be one of the most daunting, gripping, and obscure stories in Latin American literature. Cova wanders through the Amazon region of Colombia in search of Alicia and Barrera, experiencing the jungle's dangers and encountering the atrocities of the rubber extraction system. Through this journey he meets various voices that tell their story –Pipa, Silva, Estevénez (some of their stories as important as Cova's narrative)-, and soon enough *La vorágine* becomes the story of a broken text built with multiple voices and their stories. The book is a denunciation of the rubber extraction system, which remained hidden from the political gaze of Rivera's time, and a travel narrative through the Colombian south that uncovered the national territory to an urban modern class longing for images of the countryside.

Most importantly, though, *La vorágine* is a book about Cova becoming a real writer and changing the face of literature in his time. The book we read testifies a struggle with nature but, above all, a struggle with language. Confronted with what he sees, Cova, the mediocre poet, reinvents and renovates the language, style, and the literature of his time, and becomes a novelist. Confronted with a space that does not fit into the idea of a pastoral and tranquil nature, Cova's writing turns into a confrontation and a search for the proper way to write and represent Amazonia. In doing so, the text reflects on the process of writing, on what representation and fiction are, and in the genre of the novel at large. In this sense, Amazonia appears as site that challenges and transforms the act of writing, serving as a site for experimentation and renovation; a laboratory for fiction.

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One of the elements to start a reflection on space and representation is the map originally published in the fifth edition of *La vorágine* in 1928 by Rivera himself. This map can be interpreted as an inauguration of the conflicting desires that rule the depiction of space in the novel.





(Map included in the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of *La vorágine* showing Cova's route through the Amazon.)

This map is, over all, confusing and difficult to read. The rivers, a major feature of the image, -no other geographical features are represented- traverse the map creating a complicated web of dark thick lines that resemble a labyrinth. Within the lines of this intricate ramification, the names of the rivers and cities inscribe a local geography hidden within the lines. Above this, in a spiral curve around the lines, the names of the neighboring countries appear: Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, and Brazil. The words are sometimes fused with the lines of the rivers, and in order to read them the eyes must go from left to right, and from top to bottom, creating a confusing way of reading the image. Frontier lines are also marked: they are dotted lines that get lost in the maze of letters and rivers. To the east, in the limit between Colombia and Venezuela, the dotted line does not continue, probably denoting the frontier conflict between the two countries. Among this confusing cartography, starting from Bogota towards the south west, another thin and almost imperceptible line can be found, denoting the route of Arturo Cova, the protagonist of the novel, passing through la Maporita towards the Inirida river, from there to the Isana currents, the Rio Negro, then to Yaguanarí and Manuel Cardoso's "barracón" [hut].

One of the most intriguing elements of the map is the limits of the drawing on the paper. The coastal lines that extend to Venezuela, Panamá, and Ecuador, and that delineate the territory, are confined within an imaginary invisible frame in the drawing, leaving a space between the drawing and the limit of the page. Contrary to this, the lines that denote the rivers and the national territorial limits in Amazonia extend to the edge of the paper, over passing the limits that were set on the right upper part of the map. In this way, the Colombian map, which seems to be *contained* in the upper west side, is *uncontained* –spilled over- from the imaginary frame that coastal lines seem to respect.

The map symbolizes the route of the main character and represents the Colombian territory indicating some of the cities and rivers. Although it could provide an idea of the space where the novel will take place, the map is ambiguous, and has very atypical conventions for modern maps. On a symbolic level, the fact that the limits or the imaginary frame overpasses in the interior Amazonian jungles signals the dichotomy and paradox between a *regulated and apprehensible space* and *the uncontrollable space of the jungle*. This way of analyzing the map is relevant to the extent that poses the idea of Amazonia as something uncontained within the limits of the signifier, or as something exceeding the controlled and squared order of the map: the lines exceed the paper as the territory exceeds the map. Amazonia, the disorganized and unruly space *resists being organized and ruled*. The novel as a genre, and specifically *La vorágine*, I claim, becomes the site where this uncontainment is allowed and further developed.

This chapter reflects upon the politics of space in the representation of Amazonia in Rivera's book. It argues that the novel shows a desire to integrate regions like the plains and Amazonia into the political configuration of the state's apparatus, from which it had been long forgotten and secluded, and it does so by presenting the Colombian territory as a mapable, apprehensible space. However, in a contradictory manner, and as a response to the subjection of Amazonia into the neo-colonial exploitative capitalism –concentrated, at the turn of the century, in the rubber industry-, the novel contradicts its own territorial practices and depicts the jungle as a space incomprehensible to practices of space control, the kind of practices that facilitated the inclusion of the jungle into a global economy.

Moreover, this chapter argues that the depiction of Amazonian space responds and exemplifies a reflection of the ways the territory had been represented, and responds to a renovation of the language, style, and aesthetics of previous representations. In this sense, this chapter is interested in reading the ways in which the text inscribes and responds to a geographical and territorial desire, but specially in the ways in which literature –structure, language, and images- symbolically destabilize and deconstruct such a desire as a way of responding and resisting to the forces of modernity upon Amazonia.

This chapter reads Rivera's *La vorágine* as a text in dialogue with Colombian geographical and territorial disputes. The novel stages the anxieties of defining a territorial unity in the ambivalent pressure of consolidating an inclusive national modern project and, at the same time, protecting the nation from an exploitative neo-colonial economy. It does so, in part, by reading the novel in comparison to Rivera's previous publication, a series of poems published in 1921 under the title *Tierra de promisión* [Promised land]. These poems were informed by the political ambient of their time, defined by a patriotic celebration of the centenary of independence and by a call to forge an inclusion of isolated regions into a modern productive system. *Tierra de promisión*, as its title indicates, depicts the peripheries of the Colombian nation

(including Amazonia) as the promised land of a modern future. This ‘modern future’ implied the integration of the country to modern global economies and trading systems. However, the desire and need of adherence into these global systems also entailed the exposure to imperial schemes of exploitation from which the nation had to protect itself. The rubber economy that occurred in Amazonia from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century structured these ambivalent political and economic forces: the Colombian Amazonia was being productive, at last, but it was being so under the control of foreign markets. To this extent, the overall representation of space in Rivera’s novel –the disorienting jungle- functions as a symbolic way of resistance. On one hand, the novel is a denunciation and criticism of the rubber industry, and on the other, it represents Amazonian space as a territory unsusceptible of being controlled and apprehended. The conflicting desires of naming and defining the national territory and of making it, at the same time, opaque, point to the failure and crisis of the idea of national sovereignty at the face of neo-colonial enterprises.

In *Tell me the Story of How I Conquered You* (2011) postcolonial critic José Rabasa proposes a concept that illuminates *La vorágine*’s creation of a space that resists the modern norm: *elsewheres*. As Rabasa explains, *elsewheres* are spaces out of time, and as such, reveal modes, knowledges, and experiences of resistance and questioning of the impositions that force us to be included into the category of modernity. This chapter proposes to understand Amazonia as a space overseen and controlled by the imperial and global neo-colonial capitalist markets (like the one of the rubber extraction system), but represented through an experience that puts forth a new understanding of the space.<sup>77</sup> Unwilling and unable to fit into the paradigms of modernity, that is, *unable to be contained in the map*, Rivera’s novel and its representation of space “disrupt the assumption that Western thought exhausts what can be said and thought” about it (Rabasa *Tell me* 1).

In the following pages I will delve into Colombia’s political context and into Rivera’s first book of poetry *Tierra de promisión*. Following this, I will focus on *La vorágine* and its representation of Amazonian space, both as something that needs to be integrated into the nation’s scope, but most importantly as an entity that resists being fully comprehended. The transition from one text to another, or from one way of seeing space to the other, signals, above all, language and form as the two main categories that that determine their aesthetics and politics.

### **Colombia, A Promised Land**

Rivera’s *La vorágine* was published in the first quarter of the twentieth century, in 1924, a time where the strongest process of modernization of Latin American countries occurred. In the particular case of Colombia, three fundamental elements marked this period: the integration of the totality of the national territory into a system of modern production, the straightening of a productive capitalist economy, and the delimitation and definition of national frontiers. The novel presents these elements, and the way it does it determines the politics of space in the text. In the following paragraphs this chapter seeks to highlight some of the historical events and political tensions that inform Rivera’s work. As a part of this context, this section analyzes

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<sup>77</sup> In this sense, the analysis of *La vorágine* proposed in this chapter is in dialogue with recent critical work about postcolonial literature of the Amazon, like the one produced by Lesley Wylie and Jennifer. L. French.

Rivera's 1921 book of poetry *Tierra de promisión* [Promised Land], for it contains many of the modern preoccupations of its time, and sets an ideological and aesthetic precedence for *La vorágine*.

### Towards the Integration of a National Geography

Near the end of Cova's diary, while he and his group are about to encounter Alicia and Griselda, who have been under the power of Barrera, they send out Clemente Silva to the city of Manaus in Brazil with the hope of denouncing the atrocities of the rubber extraction system. Silva's mission consisted in going to the Colombian consul and exposing the situation of the rubber workers and hand him a letter written by Cova himself. Unaware of Silva's destiny in the intricate and dangerous jungles, Cova writes the following reflection:

¿En quién esperar? ¿En el anciano Silva? ¡Sábelo Dios si tal curiara habrá perecido! De juro que si bajan hasta Manaos, nuestro Cónsul, al leer mi carta, replicará que su valimento y jurisdicción no alcanzan a estas latitudes, o lo que es lo mismo, que no es colombiano sino para contados sitios del país. Tal vez, al escuchar la relación de don Clemente, extienda sobre la mesa aquel mapa costoso, aparatoso, mentiroso y deficientísimo que trazó la Oficina de Longitudes de Bogotá, y le responda tras de prolija indagación: “¡Aquí no figuran ríos de esos nombres! Quizás pertenezcan a Venezuela. Diríjase usted a Ciudad Bolívar.” Y muy campante, seguirá atrincherado en su estupidez, porque a esta pobre patria no la conocen sus propios hijos, ni siquiera sus geógrafos. (361)<sup>78</sup>

Cova's imaginary reaction from the Cónsul inscribes a criticism of the state's apparatus in relation to the national territory. The passage denounces the state's carelessness towards the regions considered 'peripheries' and points to the state's lack of integration and knowledge about them. It attacks the production of officially commissioned state maps as an obsolete practice, and criticizes the lack of interest from citizens and national intellectuals and scientists. Jose Eustasio Rivera was commissioned by the Colombian government to work on the delimitation of the limits between Colombia and Venezuela, making this denunciation an autobiographical element; Rivera new in first hand the abandonment of the Amazonian territories.

Colombia's turn of the century was marked by what came to be known as the 'Guerra de los Mil Días' [The Thousand Days War], a civil war fought between the conservative and liberal parties between 1898 to 1902. The war marked the transition from a federal system into a centralist government.<sup>79</sup> The weakening of the country's government by the expensive and cruel

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<sup>78</sup> All English translations are by Earle K. James, from *The Vortex*, translated in 1935. “On whom to pin any hope? On old man Silva? God knows if the dogout has been wrecked! And if the get to Manaos, our Consul, on regarding my letter, will most likely reply that his jurisdiction does not reach these regions –or, what is the same, that he's a Colombian only for certain parts of the country. Perhaps on listening to Don Clemente's story he'll spread out that costly, ornate, lying and deficient map that the Oficina de Longitudes of Bogotá drew up, and after searching he'll say: “There are no such rivers here. They must be Venezuelan. You'll have to go to ciudad Bolívar.” And, quite satisfied, he'll continue entrenched in his ignorance, because this poor country isn't known by its own sons, not even by its geographers” (296).

<sup>79</sup> The “Guerra de los mil días” [The thousand days war] culminates a conflict that had its origins in the 1886 constitution, which organized Colombia as a centralist state under the conservative party's power. Liberals fought for the establishment of a more autonomous regional system, and for the implementation of a liberal state separated from the church. In the aftermath of the war and because of a centralist politics, Colombia was weak against the negotiations with the United States on the construction of the panama Canal. For more on this see the book by Michael LaRosa and Germán Mejía, pages 48 and 200-202.

war, added to the new political and territorial arrangement, and an aggressive intervention from the United States, resulted in the loss of the Panama Isthmus in 1903. The passage from the nineteenth to the twentieth century was determined, thus, by the anxiety of territorial loss and by a keen attention to national frontiers.

In the midst of this political context, General Rafael Reyes became highly significant. Explorer, businessman, and a military man, General Reyes became Colombia's president in 1904. The defining element of his rise to power was his project to recover Panama and the implementation of a thorough modernization process for the country that included the development of transportation infrastructure, mine and resource exploitation, and the production of geographical knowledge and territorial control by the military forces.<sup>80</sup> One of Reyes' mayor focus was the modernization of the Amazonian jungle: throughout his writings and official statements he envisioned the region as an "agricultural export cosmopolis" that would help to integrate Colombia to the expanding global capitalist markets of the earlier twentieth century.<sup>81</sup> In this sense, the early twentieth century interest in the southern Amazonian forests is directly connected to the loss of the Panama isthmus.

In the intellectual arena the desire to uncover the national territory was also important. Marked by the centenary celebration of Colombia's independence, historian Miguel Triana published in 1907 his travels through Amazonia in a book called *Por el sur de Colombia* [Through Colombia's South]. Framed by the momentum of modernization, the text explores the Putumayo Amazonian region and the conflicting forces at stake in its integration to the national modern imaginary. Endeavors like this one, together with historical events like the loss of the Panama territory, reveal the desire to consolidate a modern country through the geographical integration of all of Colombia's territories, particularly its southern Amazonian region.

At large, the production of geographical knowledge had a close relationship with processes of national formation and the consolidation of modern economic systems. The consolidation of a state apparatus and the creation of a national imaginary were supported by the delimitation and definition of national territories. This geographical turn legitimated the social and economical viability of nonurban regions that needed to be integrated into productive policies. Following a legacy initiated by Humboldt, naturalist explorers and geographers wandered the Latin American continent trying to come up with maps and descriptions of their countries and inaugurating a practice and discipline of geographical production. Claudio Gay in Chile, Alcide d'Orbigny in Bolivia, Antonio Raimondi in Peru, and Colombia's Agustin Codazzi, just to name a few, made national territories known and controlled by the state apparatus, at the same time that they helped structure the overseen eye of the state's power.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> One of the policies that occurred during this time was the approval of Law 17 of 1905, which reorganized the national territory in departments, capital cities, and municipalities, dividing the territory in such a way that all departments had an equal distribution of population. This plan was aimed at establishing an efficient and equalitarian development process.

<sup>81</sup> Felipe Martínez-Pinzón's essay "Heroes of Civilization. The Amazon Region as Agricultural Export Cosmopolis in the Work of General Rafael Reyes" provides a thorough reading and analysis of the interactions between geography, territorial control, and Amazonia's integration into a global market in Rafael Reyes' political project.

<sup>82</sup> The imperial expansion – a process imitated by the national expansion- and its relationship with geography and cartography are fundamental for this chapter. Works as the ones by J. B. Harley "Maps, knowledge and power" o

By the turn of the century, cities like Bogota and Medellin became powerful urban centers and the country was ‘under construction’, both materially and symbolically. Eduardo Neale Silva defines this time as a key moment where a “political republic” was being transformed into a “financial republic” (9).<sup>83</sup> Nonetheless, in spite of all the projects and efforts to include the Amazonian region into a comprehensive project for the nation, the Amazonian territories remained isolated from the center of the nation’s modernization. While it was imagined as a fundamental region in the creation of a national imaginary, and perceived as the ultimate frontier, the lack of information, knowledge, and disregard for the Colombian south was remarkable. This is seen, for example, in the fact that some of the frontiers with neighboring countries were opaque, and in the fact that the rubber exploitation system was fairly unknown. It took many years and many public debates for the state to acknowledge the situation (in spite of the fact that some politicians in the southern region were highly involved with the extraction economy). It is in response to this context that in *La vorágine* Cova, while imagining Silva’s visit to the Consul, condemns the state’s disregard and disdain towards the national territory. Rivera strongly believed in the need to unveil Amazonia to the nation’s center, and his literary project and official work aimed strongly at it.

#### A National Landscape: 1921’s *Tierra de promisión*

Rivera’s *Tierra de promisión* (1921) is a literary project that should be read in the context of bringing the frontiers of the isolated regions towards a political and economical project centered in the urban sites. The book is an imaginary creation of Colombia’s territory through a poetical landscape that attempts to represent the entire nation. As the projects of Triana and Reyes mentioned above, this poetic representation of the Colombian territory is informed by the politics of internal colonization and regionalist integration that defined the modernization process of the nation. Composed of 56 poems, including a general prologue and divided into three parts corresponding to different geographical zones (Amazonia, the Andean mountains, and the Orinoco plains), the text manifests a desire to inscribe isolated regions into a national imaginary. The poetic voice delivers domesticated images of exotic and wild natural sceneries that, all together, compose a pictorial map of the country’s rural peripheries. A closer look into

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like Ricardo Padrón *The Spacious Word: Cartography, Literature and Empire in Early Modern Spain*, have already studied the ways in which geography and cartography became tools in the knowledge and control of new territories. For more on the relationship between geography and nation, Rafael Sagredo Baeza “Geografía y nación: Claudio Gay y la primera representación cartográfica de Chile” is an eloquent text that extends the text into other Latin American nations.

<sup>83</sup> The book *Colombia: A Concise Contemporary History* by Michael La Rosa and Germán R. Mejía explains the main factors that contributed to the formation of what Neale Silva calls a “financial republic:” Colombia’s modernization process was stimulated by the consolidation of the coffee exporting business that, together with foreign investment and the compensation by the loss of Panamá, created a prosperous economy known in history as the “dance of the millions.” North American industries found in countries like Colombia a site for industry that injected money into the financial development; the United Fruit Company and its tragic development in the country are an example of this type of foreign investment. During the 20s the petroleum industry, together with the textile industry, consolidated a national effective economy. Further reading on David Bushnell’s *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself*.

the poem that serves as a “Prologue” provides the keys to understand Rivera’s project and its relationship to the context mentioned above.

Soy un grávido río, y a la luz meridiana  
Ruedo bajo los ámbitos reflejando el paisaje;  
Y en el hondo murmullo de mi audaz oleaje  
Se oye la voz solemne de la selva lejana.  
Flota el sol entre el nimbo de mi espuma liviana;  
Y peinando en los vientos el sonoro plumaje,  
En las tardes un águila triunfadora y salvaje  
Vuela sobre mis tumbos encendidos en grana.  
Turbio de pesadumbre y anchuroso y profundo,  
Al pasar ante montes que en las nubes descuella  
Con mi trueno espumante sus contornos inundo;  
Y después, remansado bajo plácidas frondas,  
Purifico mis aguas esperando una estrella  
Que vendrá que mis cielos a bogar en mis ondas. (205)<sup>84</sup>

The first stanza of the poem inaugurates the book with the metaphor of a wandering river in whose journey the water reflects the landscape and in whose voice the distant jungle announces itself. The journey of the rivers serves as a metaphor for the travelling poetic voice that finds its way through the national geography. The image of the text as a journey that depicts landscapes structures the poetic project as a whole and, in this sense, Rivera’s poetry becomes a simulacrum of nature that codifies and represents the countryside through the specific cultural and political perspectives of the urban nationalist project aimed at the strengthening of Colombia’s modern identity and project. The images of an idealized nature present the countryside through ideas of grandeur and beauty that create an imagined nation, and as a conquerable space where a fulfilling and productive expansion could be executed. The landscape is, in other words, a *tierra de promisión - land of promise*: territories that Colombia must inscribe to plant the seeds of its modern future.

Poem VII of the third part provides an excellent example to comment on the use of language and images that define Rivera’s poetic project.

Revestido con púrpuras de ocaso,  
Voy, bajo un cielo de vibrante domo,  
Como un rajah, sobre el paciente lomo  
De un tardo buey de elefantino paso.  
Frajada nube de mullido raso  
Copia en las charcas su extenuado cromo;  
Y las llanuras, de color de plomo,  
Se van muriendo al resplandor escaso.  
Del buey solemne el asta inofensiva  
Con los celajes últimos aviva;

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<sup>84</sup> “I’m a river bountiful, and in light of noonday I roll below terrains the landscape mirroring; And in my swelling tide with its deep murmuring is heard the solemn voice of the jungle far away. The sun flows in my glow of lustful spume at play; And combing in the winds his plumes sound echoing, in afternoons a wild, fierce eagle conquering flies over my rough afire in scarlet ray. So deep and wide and roiled with heaviness of mud, on passing wooded hill limned on the clouds afar, with foaming thunder I all its environs flood; and then, becalmed beneath the fronds without travail, my waters I make pure while waiting for a star that will come from the skies on my waves to sail” (translated by Carl W. Cobb, 9).

Bórranse las palmeras suplicantes,  
Y lleno de feliz presentimiento,  
Como los Magos, en la noche errantes,  
Hacia la estrella del confin me Oriente. (78)<sup>85</sup>

The poem is about a sunset witnessed by the poetic voice while riding on a beast. It represents an idealized landscape where the plains are domesticated and an exotic beauty is beheld. The references to the “rajah,” the elephant, the palm trees, and even the Catholic reference to the star of the Orient and the “Magos,” speak of an orientalist imaginary not uncommon in late nineteenth Latin American literature, specially in *modernismo*. The aestheticized imagery of the sky as a “vibrante domo,” the clouds as “mullido raso,” and the mirroring waters, depict a sophisticated crafted scenery that aims at the creation of visual imagery and painted landscapes that recall romantic and symbolist creations of the earlier twentieth century. The musicality of the poem –its rhyme and rhythm- is created by syllable and vowel repetition, and by the break in syntax (as in “Del buey solemne el asta inofensiva / Con los celajes últimos aviva”), where the enjambment of the clauses creates a speed that relies in the repetition of the last sounds. However, the poem’s most interesting assets are not related to the representation of nature in itself, but with the stylistic and structural elements that it presents. The use of certain images, references, and musicality in this poem are examples of *modernismo*. It is relevant to point out the kind of literary aesthetic worked on *Tierra de promisión* because *La vorágine* willingly distances itself from this kind of rhetoric and, as a consequence, it affects the way space is represented. If the novel wants to reinvent a language to represent Amazonia, it is precisely as a response to this kind of orientalist and idealized representation of nature.

Carlos Alonso describes the poems as an “attempt to textualize the entire geography of Colombia in a series of carefully crafted sonnets... [that were] a reaffirmation of *modernista* theories of composition adapted to the new thematic environment” (153). He interprets the book of poems as the confrontation between language and nature, where the poet must control language and thus nature, in an act of domestication that is also a mastering of the literary act in itself. Seen like this, he concludes that *Tierra de promisión* is “the ritual performance of a statement on *poiesis* that conceives that confrontation as the controlling of an essential violence in language through the agency of the poetic act” (155). It is fundamental to highlight the idea of domestication and control, both of nature and language, which structure these poems. As seen in the first poem quoted above, Rivera’s poetic project is the creation of a geographic imaginary through the controlling and apprehensive act of landscaping. It is not strange, then, that *La vorágine* destabilizes the idea of spatial control at the same time it destabilizes language as a form of control and apprehension.

Rivera’s collection of poetry is also a response to the economic and political context of his time. Although highly influenced and immersed in the *modernista* tradition, *Tierra de promisión* belongs to the artistic group of the “Centenaristas,” a group of writers who, nurtured

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<sup>85</sup> “Decked out in purples of the sunset’s grace, I go, beneath the sky of vibrating dome, a rajah, on the patient back like home of this slow ox of elephantine pace. A cloud trimmed in a satin fluffed like lace upon the pools repeats its weakened chrome; and there the plains, in lead-hued monochrome go dying in the splendor just a trace. The solemn ox’s inoffensive horn in final cloudglow sees its life reborn; the supplicant palm trees are vanishing, and filled with jubilant presentiment, like those wise men, in that night wandering, I toward near star myself orient” (translated by Carl W. Cobb, 79).



by the *modernista* aesthetic but concerned with the political and economical changes of their time, responded in their literature to the modernizing forces that surrounded them. While *modernismo* was an aesthetic characterized by an escape from the alienating forces of modernity, the “centenaristas” embraced a similar aesthetic but responded directly to the creation of a modern Colombia. Neale Silva comments that “la generación del Centenario fue el puente de unión entre la *república política* y la *república económica*,” (168)<sup>86</sup> implying that the group’s most immediate concern was a representation of the nation’s project of becoming modern. In other words, they occupied themselves with the re-definition of Colombia as a nation that needed to unify and redefine its identity to be part of the growing economical context that defined modernity worldwide.

*Tierra de promisión* is a literary project that comes out as a direct consequence of a period of time defined by the desire to consolidate a national territory inscribed into the modernizing forces of the early twenties. In it, geographical imaginaries consolidate the idea of a territory that given its beauty and natural wonders, and its domesticated nature, make Colombia the perfect site for embracing the modern futurity. Language and aesthetics play a fundamental role in the rendition of this national geography: as Alonso suggested, the domesticated nature of Colombia’s geography is also an act of a consolidated linguistic style that is controlled by the poet, the same way nature and landscapes are controlled.

If *Tierra de promisión* is a literary project grounded on the idea of creating an imagery of the national territory, what radically changed between the writing of *Tierra de promisión* and *La vorágine*? The answer to this question is related with the rubber extraction system and the economy that it entailed.

#### The Rubber Extraction System: a Neo-Colonial Economy in the Jungle

In 1922 Rivera was appointed by the Colombian government to act as a lawyer in the definition of a disputed frontier between Colombia and Venezuela. Although he resigned to the official position due to political incompatibility with the way the process was being undertaken, Rivera stayed in the Amazonian region travelling by his own means. In his travels through the Inirida River and its surroundings, he encountered the stories and traces of the rubber extraction system that prevailed in Amazonia since the late nineteenth century. The rubber economy relied on a brutal, violent, and pervasive debt enslavement system that forced its workers, mostly indigenous people and *colonos* (resident foreigners), to extract rubber in the middle of the forests in harsh isolating conditions. People came to the jungle attracted by an economic prosperity that was transforming the region, but what they encountered at the lower levels of production was a system of work that forced the worker to continually extract rubber while his living expenses added up to extraordinarily amounts of debt, exceeding the possibility of ever being paid. In addition to this, the system often implied a coerced labor with physical and mental abuse where life had no value and torture and death were the mechanisms of power and control.

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<sup>86</sup> The Centenary Generation was a bridge that united the political republic with the economical republic (my translation).

By the time Rivera travelled to the Colombian Amazonian region the atrocities of the rubber extraction system were already exposed, though they didn't occupy a pivotal role in Colombian politics. Roger Casement's report on the abuses of the Casa Arana (the major rubber extraction company in northwestern Amazonia), all published in a book that came to be known as the *Blue Book*, was soon followed by other books, like Vicente Camacho Olarte's *Las crueldades en el Putumayo y en el Caquetá* [The Cruelties in Putumayo and Cauquetá] (1910) and Norman Thomson's *El libro rojo del Putumayo* [Putumayo's Red Book] (1913), among others.<sup>87</sup>

Besides the obvious denunciation of the abuse of power and coerced forms of labor, the debate around the rubber extraction system, at least in the case of Colombia, also entailed a geographic conflict. Among the neighboring countries, who was responsible for these atrocities? On which territory did they happen? Thomson's text makes this conflict clear when it states that "la lectura de estas páginas demostrará la prioridad de los derechos de Colombia. En ellas se verá que el territorio de Colombia ha sido usurpado por el Perú por la fuerza de las armas, y que se han llevado a Iquitos, como prisioneros, muchos de los colonizadores Colombianos del Putumayo" (VI).<sup>88</sup> Seen under this perspective, the delimitation of frontiers was a pivotal task to guarantee protection and to assign responsibility in the context of the rubber extraction system. It soon became clear that the problem of the rubber economy was a problem of territorial control. During the time of the publication of *La vorágine*, Colombia's frontier limits with Peru and Venezuela were dubious and undefined, and the expansion of neighboring countries, especially Peru, was fueled by the growing rubber economy, particularly the one controlled by the Casa Arana. When Rivera became familiar with the rubber extraction systems, he urged, as the character of his novel, the presence of an effective state to regulate what was going on. As Neale Silva adverts in his biography, Rivera urged the state, through the publication of articles that generated a public debate, the defense and sovereignty of the national frontiers by the state's presence and the ultimate definition and inclusion of long forgotten frontier territories (Neale Silva 285).

The necessity to define the Colombian territory and secure its sovereignty in the geographical scramble seemed to Rivera a pivotal endeavor. However, the rubber economy posed a superior problem to the consolidation of a national modern unity: what was really at stake was the emergence of a global neo-colonial system that threatened, not only the sovereignty of the national territories, but the control and stability of Colombia's resources against North American and European potencies. The rubber economy in Amazonia catered to the development of massive, powerful modern industries in the United States and England, and this productive capitalist endeavor was foreign to the state's control. After the wound created by

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<sup>87</sup> There is an extensive corpus of texts in the Twentieth Century about the exploitation of workers in the rubber period. It inaugurates the modern discourse of Amazonia, and the most common image is that of a Green Prison or Green Hell. In the introduction to the Cátedra Edition of *La vorágine*, Montserrat Ordonez gives a brief list of relevant texts: Rómulo Paredes (1911), Sir Roger Casement (1912), Carlos A. Valcarcel (1913) y G. S Paternoster and W. W Handenbug" (Ordonez 49).

<sup>88</sup> "A perusal of these pages will show that Colombia has a prior claim to the Putumayo. It will be shown that Colombian occupation has been usurped from Perú mainly at a cost of bullets and the imprisonment at Iquitos of Colombian settlers in the Putumayo" (X).

the loss of Panama, the threat of North American and European intromission in the consolidation of a sovereign nation signified a reason to be alarmed.

While Rivera urged strategies of national strengthening and resistance in the social and political arenas, it was through his literary project where his ideological criticism became powerful. The discourses that revealed the atrocities of the rubber neo-colonial system were weak when compared to the power of the novel, or so Rivera seemed to believe. He signaled this when, in his novel, Cova makes an intriguing remark: “Cuenta usted con que la novela tendrá más éxito que la historia” (250).<sup>89</sup> This points to the novel as a genre as a site of denunciation and debate of the discourses, politics, and practices around the integration of Amazonia into a national imagery. As a matter of fact, the book was often interpreted less as a fiction and more as a realist denunciation and exposure of the rubber system, and is still considered “a realistic tale of the exploitation of rubber workers in the Amazon forest” (Bushnell 163). Rivera’s protectionist concerns, I argue in this chapter, were not only about the strengthening and definition of Colombia’s sovereignty, but also the creation of a resistance to the forces of an unregulated global neo-colonial economy that had created so much damage in the history of the country. Through the text, the necessity to engage in comprehensive and apprehensive spatial practices responds to the necessity of protecting the Colombian sovereignty, but on the other hand, the experience of disorientation and incomprehensibility of space speak to a literary and symbolic resistance to a global neo-imperial system. It is in this symbolic reign that Rivera’s novel reaches its ultimate ideological locus, the jungle as an *elsewhere*, or in other words, as a site outside and against the forces of modernization.

### **The Plains: A Promised Land**

Taking into consideration the previous paragraphs that provide a political, historical, and literary context for *La vorágine*, this section addresses the ways in which space is represented in the first half of the text, which is occupied with the region that precedes the entrance into Amazonia, the Orinoco plains. Escaping from Bogota because of a bourgeoisie love affair scandal, Cova and Alicia seek refuge in Casanare, in the plains located south east of the capital. Arturo Cova, a poet best described as “un desequilibrado tan impulsivo como teatral,” (235),<sup>90</sup> arrives into the plains charged with the ego and impetus of a romantic colonizer: “Casanare no me aterraba con sus espeluznantes leyendas. El instinto de la aventura me impelía a desafiarlas, seguro de que saldría ileso de las pampas libérrimas y de que alguna vez, en desconocidas ciudades, sentiría la nostalgia de los pasados peligros” (81).<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Poorly translated as “[the lies] will be more effective than your true story” (181). A more effective translation would be *count on the fact that the novel will have more success than history*.

<sup>90</sup> “I was an unbalanced being, as impulsive as I was theatrical” (168).

<sup>91</sup> “Casanare, *that strange land of plain and jungle, of drought and flood, of cattle men and hostile Indians*, struck no terror to my heart. My love for adventure urged me to defy this wilderness. I was confident that I would emerge from the *indomitable* pampas unscathed; and I knew too that some day in unknown cities it would be *with pride* and a certain nostalgic *pleasure* that I would recall perils of the past” (18). Note: the English version quoted here adds words and meaning to the original version. Those added words appear in cursive. The word *indomitable*, for which “libérrimas” has been translated, change in meaning the sentence. The original sense is that of pampas without limit or free.

Cova's urban middle class subjectivity –his fearless and adventure seeking personality– recalls a nineteenth century adventurer stereotype whose world vision is anchored in Eurocentric and urban perspectives of the world. His plan to come out unharmed by the “pampas libérrimas” and then, years later, recall his adventures in a given city, mark his character as that of a colonizer who claims *veni, vidi, vici*. Lesley Wylie interprets this as a mode in which *La vorágine* re-writes the travel narratives of European imperial naturalists that came to the region in search of wealth and adventure, and, like those narratives of the mid nineteenth century, the space of the plains is a controlled entity that stands as a promise of development and future (9). Cova symbolizes the ‘national poet’ who partakes in the responsibility of the creation of a national and patriotic imaginary discourse. Throughout the narrative, Cova's task will be to write, re-write, and ultimately to question the very act of writing as a national endeavor.

The elements that serve as motifs to describe the plains are, besides the recently quoted “pampas libérrimas,” recurrent images of openness and extension: “inmensidad” [immensity,] (91) “intérminas” [infinite,] or “desierto” [desert] (82). Cova's representation of the plains through this imagery also invokes the national space of the “llanos” [the plains] as a vast space waiting to be conquered. This resonates in Cova's constant fantasies of becoming a wealthy settler in Casanare: “El pensamiento de la riqueza se convirtió en esos días en mi dominante obsesión, y llegó a sugestionarme con tal poder, que ya me creía ricacho fastuoso, venido a los llanos para dar impulso a la actividad financiera” (126).<sup>92</sup> Even more, Cova states the following:

Hasta tuve deseos de confinarme para siempre en esas llanuras fascinadoras, viviendo con mi Alicia en una casa risueña, que levantaría con mis propias manos, a la orilla de un caño de aguas opacas, o en cualquiera de aquellas colinas minúsculas y verdes donde hay un pozo glauco al lado de una palmera. Allí de tarde se congregarian los ganados, y yo, fumando en el umbral, como un patriarca primitivo de pecho suavizado por la melancolía de los paisajes, vería las puestas de sol en el horizonte remoto donde nace la noche; y libre ya de las vanas aspiraciones, del engaño de los triunfos efimeros, limitaría mis anhelos a cuidar de la zona que abarcan mis ojos, al goce de las faenas campesinas, a mi consonancia con la soledad. (161)<sup>93</sup>

Cova conceives the Colombian plains as a *promised land* where he will fulfill himself and where he would exercise a modernization and financial enterprise which resonates with the political modernizing context in which the novel is immersed. The vision of him as a patriarch speaks of a heterosexual masculinity associated with the dominant conqueror that subjugates the female land. He is the penetrator and producer that will fecund the territory, from which a modern future Colombia will be born. The fact that this kind of masculinity appears in Cova's fantasies speaks of a recurrent topic throughout the novel: Cova's doubtful masculinity. The protagonist's entire experience in the plains and the jungle are but a search of his failed “hombria” [masculinity.] Often, attempting to be an authentic man of the plains, he reflects about his own masculinity: he repeats to himself things like “...era yo el hombre para Casanare!”

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<sup>92</sup> “The thought of riches became an obsession. I began to believe myself a lordly plutocrat come to the plains to promote great enterprises.” (62) This version changes “financial activities” to “great enterprises”.

<sup>93</sup> “I even felt like imprisoning myself forever in those fascinating plains, living with Alicia in a smiling home, which I myself would build on the banks of a river of opaque waters, or on one of those verdant knolls where a sea-green pool sleeps in the shadow of a palm. There, in the afternoon, the cattle would gather, and I, smoking on the threshold, like a primitive patriarch with soul softened by the melancholy landscapes, would gaze at the sun setting on that distant horizon where night is born. Free from vain aspirations, from the disappointments of ephemeral triumphs, I would limit my desires to the care of the stretch that my eyes surveyed, the joys of country chores, my harmony with solitude” (99).

(90),<sup>94</sup> or even questions what others think of him, “¿[I]maginarían que era menos hombre que ellos?” (132).<sup>95</sup> The subject of Cova’s doubtful masculinity becomes meaningful in the sense that, later on, when he arrives into the jungle, the character will describe Amazonia as a perverse woman who devours men. To this extent, the *macho conquistador* is conquered by the woman, in an ironic subversion of the male dominated conquering of nature tale.

In his dreamed future he sees himself smoothed by the landscape and taking care of the zone that his sight covers. The triangular relationship between gaze, conqueror, and land determines a politics of territorial apprehension based on control and ownership. It is important to highlight the role of vision as a tool for the control of space: the optical regime determines the empowerment over the space and the transformation of the plains into a territory. Vision, as in *veni, vidi, vici*, precedes the conquest of space. Cova’s vision is an elongation of the state’s apparatus overseeing control and it integrates the region into a project of financial production and modernization. The importance of the relationship between gaze and space control becomes pivotal in the sense that in the jungle, as will be seen further on, the optical regime collapses and space apprehension becomes unachievable.<sup>96</sup>

As it happens in *Tierra de promisión*, nature in the plains is domesticated:

La laguneta de aguas amarillosas estaba cubierta de hojarasca. Por entre ellas nadaban unas tortuguitas llamadas galápagos, asomando la cabeza rojiza; y aquí y allí los caimanejos nombrados cachirres exhibían sobre la nata del pozo los ojos sin párpados. Garzas meditabundas, sostenidas en un pie, con picotazo repentino arrugaban la charca tristísima, cuyas evaporaciones maléficas flotaban bajo los árboles como velo mortuorio. Partiendo una rama, me incliné para barrer con ella las vegetaciones acuáticas, pero don Rafo me detuvo, rápido, como el grito de Alicia. Había emergido bostezando para atraparme una serpiente guío, corpulenta como una viga, que a mis tiros de revolver se hundió removiendo el pantano y rebasándolo en las orillas. (94)<sup>97</sup>

In spite of being depicted as semi-putrid and dangerous, nature is a ‘mis-en-scene’ that is effectively controlled by the masculine explorer. More than experienced, nature is contemplated and is represented through an imagery of passiveness: small red headed turtles swim aimlessly, the heron seems to meditate, and the snake’s attack is like a yawn. Besides this, there is the obvious fact that Cova rapidly kills the dangerous snake overcoming any risks and controlling nature.

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<sup>94</sup> “I was the proper kind of man for Casanare” (28).

<sup>95</sup> “Did they think I was any less a man than they?” (68).

<sup>96</sup> Martin Jay’s concept of “scopic regimes” and his analysis of ways of visibility connects certain ocular experiences, ways of observing, gazes, and looks, as forms that respond to ideological systems in which the world is seen, apprehended, and represented. Cova’s gaze represents a modern gaze of subject-object apprehension.

<sup>97</sup> “The lagoon of yellow waters was almost unseen beneath a mantle of fallen leaves. Diminutive turtles peered at us with their red heads upraised; while here and there the small *cachire* crocodile gazed through the floating scum with lidless eyes. Pensive herons, poised on one slender leg, suddenly interrupted their meditations with abrupt pecks that wrinkled the surface of the sorry pool. Over all hung the noxious vapors of the marshes, floating beneath the trees like a mortuary veil. / Breaking off a branch, I leaned over to sweep the vegetation aside, but Don Rafo seized me, quick as the startled cry of Alicia. A gigantic water serpent, thick as a two foot beam, had emerged, mouth agape. It sank as I fired at it with my revolver, stirring the swamp violently, pushing the water so the waves over floated the confines of the pool” (many variations from the original in this translation, 31).

As Carlos Alonso has stated, the domestication of nature is also the domestication of language. The representation of these natural sceneries as controlled nature imply that the narrative voice (and here the fact that Cova is a national poet becomes meaningful) has figured a style and rhetoric to represent it, thus mastering the act of writing itself. This control over language implies the founding of a national discursive style that will give shape to the idea of nation in literature, or at least it will celebrate it in the context of the centenary. This relationship was already formulated in *Tierra de promisión*, but it is here where it reaches its ultimate symbolic force. As Cova writes in his diary, the plains are not just a place for him to conquer, but to develop his poetry, which, ultimately, become two jointed acts:

¿Para qué las ciudades? Quizás mi fuente de poesía estaba en el secreto de los bosques intactos, en la caricia de las auroras, en el idioma desconocido de las cosas; en el cantar lo que dice al peñón la onda que se despide, el arbol a la ciénega, la estrella a las inmensidades que guardan el silencio de Dios. Allí en esos campos soñé quedarme con Alicia, a envejecer entre la juventud de nuestros hijos, a declinar ante los soles nacies, a sentir fatigados nuestros corazones entre la sabia vigorosa de los vegetales centenarios, hasta que un día llorara yo sobre su cadáver o ella sobre el mío. (161)<sup>98</sup>

Cova's colonizing enterprise is paired with his writing project. By conquering the plains he also finds a rhetoric, but most interestingly, a source: his poetry was, he says, in the secrets and languages of that domesticated nature. This also entails the idea that the national literary discourse is associated with a particular site and place, the site and place of nature itself. The importance of this relationship lays on the fact that in *La vorágine* Cova will encounter a nature violated, not by his own conqueror masculinity, but by the forces of a global neo-colonial force: the rubber extraction system. What this anticipates is a poetic fracture that will redefine the way language and style work. In other words, when confronted with Amazonia, Cova will have to experiment, reinvent, and transform the rhetoric and even the *form* of his discourse. If the rhetoric of a nationalistic literary discourse is associated with the domestication of nature, the apparition of the Amazonia as a consumed nature by the hands of other entities different from the national state apparatus will break the continuation between writing and space, and thus a new language, a new style, and with it, a new *form* (the novel), and a new spatial representation will emerge.

The epitome of the relationship between language and territory is seen in one of the novel's most quoted paragraphs, the quintessential landscape of the plains:

Y la aurora surgió ante nosotros: sin que advirtiéramos el momento preciso, empezó a flotar sobre los pajonales un vapor sonrosado que ondulaba en la atmósfera como ligera muselina. Las estrellas se adormecieron, y en la lontananza de ópalo, al nivel de la tierra, apareció un celaje de incendio, una pincelada violenta, un coágulo de rubí. Bajo la gloria del alba hendieron el aire los patos chillones, las garzas morozas como copos flotantes, los loros esmeraldinos de tembloroso vuelo, las guacamayas multicolores. Y de todas partes, del pajonal y del espacio, del estero y de la palmera, nació un hálito jubiloso que era vida, era acento, claridad y palpitación. Mientras tanto, en el arbol que abría su palio

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<sup>98</sup> "Why cities? Perhaps the source of all my poetry was in the secrets of the virgin forests, in the caress of the gentle breezes, in the unknown language of all things; in singing what the rock sings to the wave that bids it good-bye, what the flaming sky sings to the swamps, the stars to the vastness that holds the silence of God. There in those plains I dreamed of staying with Alicia, to grow old in the youth of our children, to decline before an ever rising sun, to feel our hearts weakening in the midst of the vigorous sap of centennial trees, until some day I should weep over her tomb or she over mine" (99).

inconmesurable dardeó el primer destello solar, y, lentamente, el astro, inmenso como una cúpula, ante el asombro del toro y la fiera, rodó por las llanuras, enrojeciéndose antes de ascender al azul.  
Alicia, abrazándose llorosa y enloquecida, repetía esta plegaria: ¡Dios mío, Dios mío! ¡El sol, el sol!  
Luego nosotros, prosiguiendo la marcha, nos hundimos en la inmensidad. (91)<sup>99</sup>

As the other landscapes that represent the space of the plains, this one entails an extended vision that territorializes –captures and controls- the land. Elements rise from earth’s surfaces – the sun, the birds, the gaze- and while this happens, a route towards ‘the immensity’ is traced. As light conquers the space, the trees, the animals, and even the atmosphere become impregnated with life. God, immensity, and light, unify in this romantic vision of the earth. Nature is represented by a chain of crafted images that present it as an imitation of art: the landscape is a violent red paintbrush trace, and animals are the ornaments of a painting. The imagery, typical of *modernismo*, conjures a highly aesthetized composition, where words such as “muselina,” “ópalo,” “rubí,” and “esmeraldinos,” among others, give the impression of a crafted jewel of orientalist tones. The transcendental and religious motif with which it is delivered, the glorious aspect and the impregnation with life, added to Alicia’s invocation of God and light, add the idea of *sublime* to the landscape, converting it into an idealization of men’s place within the earth. In this sense, romanticism becomes a form of positioning against nature and space and it determines, as it did for Humboldt, an idea of wonder and, at the same time, propriety over the territory. As it will be seen later on, Amazonia, on the contrary, will oppose this idea of a world sized by men: it is inhabitable, not only because of its uncontrollable nature, but because of the inhumane economical system that has established in its interior. Wonder turns into horror, appropriation into in-apprehensibility, and man loses its place becoming nothing else than an intruder.

*La vorágine* attempts to create and represent the plains through its “typical” imagery, including the representation of images, languages, and people that constitute the idea of “authenticity.” The elaboration of space becomes highly important in scenes where this happens:

Trepado en la talanquera daba desahogo a mi acritud, al rayo del sol, cuando vi flotar a lo lejos, por encima de los morichales, una nube de polvo, ondulosa y espesa. A poco, por el lado opuesto, divisé la silueta de un jinete que, desalado, cruzaba a saltos las ondas pajizas de la llanura, volteando la soga y revolviéndose presuroso. Un gran tropel hacía vibrar la pampa, y otros vaqueros atravesaron el banco antes de que la yeguada apareciera a mi vista, de cuyo grupo desbandábase a veces alguna potranca cerril, loca de juventud, quebrándose en juguetones corcovos... (117)<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> “And dawn came up before us. Without our being able to observe the precise moment of its arrival, a roseate vapor came floating over the long grass, quivering like tenuous muslin. The stars pale and faded, and in the opaline distance just above the broad horizon appeared a streak of fire, a violent brush-stroke of flaming pigment, a splash of coagulated ruby. Cutting the crystalline air in the glory of the morning swerved flocks of shrieking ducks, slow-moving egrets that seemed soaring cotton pods, emerald parrots of tremulous wing-beat, red, blue, and yellow macaws. And everywhere, in grassy plain and vast spaces, in lush pastures and in palms, was a breath of joy that was life, light, palpitation. Then, through the scarlet clouds sweeping open like mighty curtains, darted the first stabbing rays of the sun. Slowly it rose like a huge dome, pouring itself over the plains before the astonished bull and beast, glowing red before it climbed into the blue. / Alicia, tearful, stirred, embraced me repeating: “Dios mio! The sun, the sun!”/ Then, continuing our journey, we plunged into the sun-scorched stretch of sweeping grasslands” (29).

<sup>100</sup> “Seated on the rail fence, I gave vent to my bitterness, but soon I saw a cloud of slow-moving dust floating over the grove of the moriche palms. Shortly, on the opposite side of the grove, flashed the outline of a horseman, galloping swiftly over the grassy waves of the plain, swinging his lasso, turning his horse short, dashing on again. A

These kind of depictions attempted to show urban societies what other regions in Colombia were all about. They were often accompanied by a patriotic discourse that highlighted a nationalistic sentiment of identification and belonging. Alicia, on arriving to the plains, claims that “Es encantador Casanare. No sé por qué milagro, al pisar la llanura, aminoró la sosobra que me inspiraba,” to which Rafa, their guide and friend, responds: “Es que esta tierra lo alienta a uno para gozarla y para sufrirla. Aquí hasta el moribundo ansía besar el suelo en que va a pudrirse. Es el desierto, pero nadie se siente solo: son nuestros hermanos el sol, el viento y la tempestad. Ni se les teme ni se les maldice” (89).<sup>101</sup>

*La vorágine*, along with novels like *Don Segundo Sombra* (1926) by Ricardo Güiraldes, or *Doña Bárbara* (1929) by Rómulo Gallegos, have been called “novelas de la tierra” [novels of the land / telluric novels], and they have been placed in the Latin American tradition as depictions of an “authentic” rural scenery. As Carlos Alonso has noted, the term “novela de la tierra” invokes the concept of geography itself: “Etymologically, the word “geography” could be considered a synonym for the expression *novela de la tierra*; one could argue that to write the ground, to textualize it, would serve adequately to describe the implicit intention of the [novel]” (74). Alonso proposes that the “novela de la tierra” “resulted from a profound anxiety experienced by Latin American intellectuals in their consideration of the United States; a crisis that originated during the last years of the nineteenth century and continued unabated well into the next” (47). He understands the creation of an “autochthonous” discourse as a response to this crisis. The idea of generating an “autochthonous” imagery, though, according to Alonso, implies the recognition of its artificial and crafted nature that only reveals its nonexistence.<sup>102</sup>

Moreover, the recognition of the constructiveness of the ‘autochthonous’ discourse implies the emergence of a nostalgia: the idea of that which cannot be, or isn’t there, anymore. Beatriz Sarlo, in her study of another “novela de la tierra,” *Don Segundo Sombra* (1926), has commented that the representation of the “tierra,” with all its modernizing and geographical ideology, inscribes a nostalgia for a rural imagery and culture that, attempting to be integrated into capitalist forms of production, is threatened to disappear. Based on this notion of nostalgia, it is important to highlight that the plains region in *La vorágine* –and its politics of space– are only the preceding scenery of what is yet to come: the jungle and the extractive neo-imperial economy. It is possible to understand the representation of the plains as a nostalgic reaction to the unstoppable and threatening wave of change.

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distant throbbing shook the pampa, and other cowboys appeared on the flat stretch. Finally the herd of horses came into view. Occasionally, a wild colt darted from the group, bucking, kicking its heels in youthful freedom...” (54).

<sup>101</sup> “‘Casanare is fascinating!’ Alicia repeated. ‘I don’t know what the charm is, but I felt somehow released, just as soon as I stepped on the plains.’ / ‘It’s that this land encourages one to enjoy it and suffer it’ answered Don Rafo. ‘Here even the dying man yearns to kiss the ground in which he is to rot. It’s a wilderness, but no one feels alone. Sun, wind, and tempest are our brothers. They are neither feared nor hated’” (26).

<sup>102</sup> According to Carlos Alonso, the concept of autochthony poses “an unflinching logic;” the desire to produce an autochthonous text implies that there is no original and “real” notion of authenticity. Seen like this, the production of such a narrative reveals the void that constitutes the desire to produce it, and thus, “the attempt to produce a text of autochthony places the writer in an eccentric perspective with respect to his or her own cultural circumstance” (6). This crisis, which produces, ultimately, a cultural discourse, constitutes, for Alonso, the Latin American modern discourse structure.



In conclusion, the opening section of the novel represents a space that needs to be inscribed as a territory to the nation, and included into its productive and modernizing project. The ideas of domesticated nature and spatiality with which the narrative configures the plains are a form of writing the national cartography, and thus appropriating it. As a modern *geo-graphical* discourse, this section of the novel attempts to comprehend and apprehend, delimit and define, the coordinates of the national space and the project with which it will be integrated. However, presenting this landscape through a nostalgic vision, the novel inscribes the threat that menaces the sovereignty of the national territorialization, and to which the novel will have to respond.

## **Dis/Orientation in the Amazonian Frontier**

### The Amazon as a Contested Territory

Drunk, his pride hurt, and full of arrogance, Cova abandons the house that hosted him in the plains and seeks refuge at a neighboring farm. In the meantime, Barrera, the evil rubber recruiter, forces Alicia and Griselda to go with him into the Amazon. At his return, finding out that the women have been taken by his nemesis, Cova and Franco see everything they had fall apart. Furious and desperate, Franco sets fire to his own farm and they gallop away in the indeterminate search for their women. Seeing the fire extend over the savannas, Cova sees “desplomarse la morada que brindó abrigo a mis sueños de riqueza y paternidad” (186).<sup>103</sup>

El traquido de los arbustos, el ululante coro de las sierpes, el tropel de los ganados pavóricos, el amargo olor a carnes quemadas, agasajáronme la soberbia; ¡y sentí deleite por todo lo que moría a la zaga de mi ilusión, por ese océano purpúreo que me arrojaba contra la selva aislándome del mundo que conocí, por el incendio que extendía su ceniza sobre mis pasos!

¿Qué restaba de mis esfuerzos, de mi ideal y mi ambición? ¿Qué había logrado mi perseverancia contra la suerte? ¡Dios me desamparaba y el amor huía!...

¡En medio de las llamas comencé a reír como Satanás! (186)<sup>104</sup>

Cova’s final moments in the plains and his expulsion into the jungle are also the symbolic destruction of a politics of space. The landscapes of idealized territories where his financial fantasies should have taken place are destroyed and the plains become a mess where fire and chaos take place. With it, his ambitions and ideals vanish and the text inaugurates a crisis. This shift in the story points to much more than just Cova’s fate: it can be read as a the collapse of a nation wide territorial order that fails to install a state’s apparatus control, specially in the face of the neo-colonial forces that crawl up from the Amazon. In this sense, the end of the first part of the novel –the part that takes place exclusively in the plains- shows the limitations of the nation’s project of territorial apprehension. The plains are the last territorialized space for the nation, its limit. Beyond rests the ambiguous land that threatens the notion of nationality itself: the Amazonian frontier.

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<sup>103</sup> “I saw the walls that had sheltered my dreams come crashing down” (123).

<sup>104</sup> “The crepitation of the shrubbery, the howling chorus of the wild beasts, the thundering of terror-stricken herds, the acrid smel of burning flesh – all regaled my pride, and I felt gratified for what for what perished with my dreams, wheather palm tree, house, or beast; thankful for that ocean of fire that threw me towards the jungle, isolating me from the world I knew; thankful for the flames that scattered their ashes over my path! What remained of my efforts, my ideals, my ambitions? What had my struggle against fate brought me? God had forsaken me, and love had fled... In the midst of the flames I laughed like a devil” (123-124).

In order to understand the politics of space that takes place in the Amazon it is necessary to understand the idea of frontier not from a notion of *far from the center* but of frontiers as *contested spaces*. The modernization processes of Latin American countries concentrated their national formation enterprises in highly centered urban sites where the intellectual, political, and financial forces sprung. This created a territorial imaginary that structured national territories according to their proximity or distance from urban centers. Spaces like the plains and the jungle, thus, were understood by the elite as regions whose identity and productivity depended on their relationship with the cities. The case of the Amazon, however, proves that this imaginary territorial construction was nothing else than a false notion of national territorial sovereignty. Amazonia was not, and has never been, a territory void of modernizing forces, but in fact one of the centers of worldwide modernity.

As scholars like Susanna. B. Hecht and Francisco Foot Hardman have eloquently shown, Amazonia has been a constantly contested space desired by many, and that has played a pivotal role in the conformation of imperial powers. In this sense, Amazonia as a frontier does not posit a problem of proximity or distance from the centers. Paul E. Little, in his book *Amazonia: Territorial Struggles on Perennial Frontiers*, gives a better understanding of the notions of the Amazon as a *contested space*. He highlights the fact that the existence of frontiers is determined by the idea of a claimed territory: the desire of possession and apprehension of a particular territory by various parties, nationalities, or systems. In Amazonia, this is determined by the desire to possess natural resources and to control the technologies that exploit them. Understood like this, frontiers are spaces where confronted fields of power engage with one another. In the case of Amazonia, “territorial disputes within [...] fields of power revolve around the play for hegemony between competing cosmographies with distinct ideological, social, and material bases and are generally founded in highly asymmetrical power relations between the different social groups involved” (7). Frontiers, then, as Little defines them, “can be defined as a highly unstructured field of power (i.e., a contested space) where the rules of interaction are not clearly established” (Little 8).

*La vorágine* is a novel about the encounter between different forces that claim a territorial control over Amazonia: the text is less about the integration of peripheral regions, and more about the staging of the conflicting forces that threaten the national sovereignty. Taking this into consideration, it becomes easier to understand the two-way endeavor in the representation of space in Rivera’s text. There is a strong desire to represent Amazonia as a place apprehensible to the state’s apparatus: a desire to, one could say, complete or correct the “obsolete” maps of the state, and to secure national sovereignty over the contested frontier lands. But, as this happens, there is also the desire to make Amazonia illegible through a rhetoric that renders the space incomprehensible and inapprehensible, precisely because it is a space contested by neo-colonial enterprises.

#### Routes Through the Jungle: Completing the Amazonian Map

As quoted some pages ago, when Don Clemente Silva is sent to the city of Manaus in Brazil to denounce the atrocities related to the extraction of rubber, Cova imagines the encounter with the Consul as a failed attempt and comments on the poor and obsolete quality of the maps,

stating that “a esta pobre patria no la conocen sus propios hijos, ni siquiera sus geógrafos” (361).<sup>105</sup> From one perspective, *La vorágine*’s rendition of the Amazonian space corrects the nation’s failed cartographic situation. The novel responds to a need of defining the national territories and integrating them into a modernizing project. This was important, not only because it was Rivera’s specific endeavor, but also because the times demanded it so –the still recent loss of Panama was an open wound. In this sense, as soon as the characters find themselves in the jungle, the text elaborates an intricate and complex cartographic narrative that inscribes routes, distances, locations, and hydrographic plans that configure a textual cartography aimed at completing the obsolete one from the state’s center.

Perhaps the first sign that highlights this endeavor is the inclusion of the map previously mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. The map was only included as part of the novel in its fifth edition, roughly five years after its initial publishing date. After the novel’s success in Colombia, Rivera moved to New York City to prove his luck. Once there, he decided to re-publish his book, and it was then that he decided to include a map.<sup>106</sup> The map was put in place of a series of photographs that supposedly showed rubber tappers working in the fields. The reasons for having done this can’t be anything else than speculations, since we lack a concrete explanation from Rivera or his publishers. However, it’s possible to guess that the map provided a more comprehensible visualization, both of the national space in which the narration happened, and a visual symbolic aid for Cova’s journey. As said earlier, the inclusion of a map speaks of a cartographic desire that runs in the narrative, though, as was also commented before, the map is susceptible of being read as an ambiguous text that blurs the conventions of cartographic legibility. Maps and literature are two forms of representing the world and producing knowledge about it. Their existence together in *La vorágine* poses a dynamic of transference between the two systems and codes. Maps give narratives a spatial and geographical configuration that narrative lacks, while they also provide a symbolic way of representing literature. On the other hand, literature gives maps a narrative that they are incapable of structuring without the readers’ gaze. In this sense, maps and literature establish a system of transference of their codes of representation in the recognition of their own representational limits.<sup>107</sup>

Besides the map, the appearance of routes is a key aspect in the ways in which the novel configures a cartographic visualization and textuality of the jungle geography. Routes, or “derroteros,” as the novel repeatedly calls them, become ways of inscribing space subjected to location and distances, which ultimately become cartographic marks. This element also signals a difference between the way in which the plains and Amazonia are represented in the text: while there is no need to narrate “derroteros” in the plains for its space is easily consumable and apprehended, the jungle is a space that urges such a cartographic practice. The moment the characters step into the jungle –Cova, Franco, Pipa, and the others- they decide on a route: they go to a region (also a state department) called Vichada. Guided by Pipa, an opportunist trickster that navigates both in the indigenous and *colono* societies, they start their travel through the forests. Cova writes in his diary: “El Pipa nos condujo a los platanares silvestres de Macuana,

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<sup>105</sup> “...because this poor country isn’t known by its own sons, not even by its geographers” (296).

<sup>106</sup> To see more on the editorial history of Rivera’s text refer to “Teratología, piratería y clonaje” by Hernán Lozano.

<sup>107</sup> *World Views* by Jon Hegglung and *Novels, Maps, and Modernity* by Eric Bulson provide insightful reflections on the relationship between maps and narratives.

sobre la margen del turbio Meta, después de la desembocadura del Guanapalo” (193).<sup>108</sup> The route decided by Pipa can be followed in the map that accompanies the novel’s fifth edition: the thin line that symbolizes Cova’s “derrotero” crosses the Guanapalo river into the Macuana, just by the Meta riverside.

These routes constantly appear throughout the narrative. At the risk of sounding repetitive, it is important to highlight them, for they constitute a fundamental way in which the text engages with space. Once again, while deciding what route to pursue, Pipa comments: “Remontaremos el río, cruzándolo frente a Caviona, un poco más arriba de las lagunas. Por allí va una senda terrestre hacia el Vichada y el recorrerla se gastan siete días. Hay que llevar auestas el equipo, mas ninguno de estos cuanos quiere ir de carguero. Yo estoy trabajando para decidirlos. Pero es urgente la compra de algunos corotos en Orocué” (202).<sup>109</sup>

And another example:

En la ranchería autoctona de Ucué nos regaló un cacique tortas de cazabe y discutió con el Pipa el derrotero que debíamos seguir: cruzar la estepa que va del Vichada al cano del Vúa, descender a las vegas del Guaviare, subir por el Inirida hasta el Papanagua, atravesar un istmo selvoso en busca del Isana bramador, y pedirles a sus Corrientes que nos arrojaran al Guainía, de negras ondas. (223)<sup>110</sup>

Further ahead, Pipa, who becomes Cova’s first guide through the jungle, decides to abandon the group leaving the characters at the mercy of getting lost. Having no form of orientation, they encounter another character that becomes more than fundamental in the narrative: Don Clemente Silva. Interestingly enough, Silva is precisely a “rumbero,” a person whose knowledge of the region is so profound that he can find his way through the jungle. It’s important to note that Cova’s experience in Amazonia is always dependent of a voice that guides him through the forests. It is significant, too, that Silva, in the midst of territories whose nationality is undefined, is Colombian. In this sense, the appearance of Silva’s voice implies the inscription of a voice whose expertise is the knowledge of Amazonian space, but from a Colombian perspective (“somos paisanos suyos y venimos solos,” Cova tells him, to which he joyfully replies “!Sois colombianos! Sois colombianos!” (247)<sup>111</sup>). The fact that the “rumbero” is Colombian reinforces a nationalistic enterprise in the configuration of space through routes: the “derroteros” described serve a purpose of widening the knowledge of the Colombian Amazonia and its circuits of financial circulation.

The difference between the cartographic narrations made by Pipa and by Silva, though, are the fact that the latter ones imply routes taken in the past, and that are not inscribed in the

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<sup>108</sup> “Pipa led us to the wild banana groves of Macuana, on the banks of the turbid Meta, below the mouth of the Guanapalo” (130).

<sup>109</sup> “We’ll follow the river, crossing it in front of Caviona, a little above the lakes. From there a land trail crosses over to the Vichada. It will be a week’s trip. We’ll have to lug our baggage on our banks, as some of these fellows want to go as pack-carrier. I’m still trying to persuade them. But it is important to buy some provisions in Orocué” (138).

<sup>110</sup> “In the native village of Ocué a cacique gave us cassava cakes and discussed with Pipa the route we should follow: across the plain between the Vichada and the Vúa rivers, downstream to the mouth of the Guaviare, up the Inirida to the Papanagua, across the jungle isthmus to the roaring Isana, and have its currents bear us to the black waters of the Guainía” (156).

<sup>111</sup> “We are countrymen of yours and need a guide” / “You are Colombians! You are Colombians!” (179).

accompanying map of the novel. Telling the story of how he traveled in the search of his lost son, Silva claims the following:

Era posible que hubieran ido por tierra al cano Guineo, para salir al Putumayo, un poco arriba del Puerto de San José, y bajar el río hasta encontrar el Igaraparaná; tampoco era improbable que hubieran tomado la trocha de Mocoa a Puerto Limón, sobre el Caquetá, para descender por esa arteria al Amazonas y remontar este y el Putumayo en busca de los cauchales de la chorrera. Yo me decidí por la última vía.

Por fortuna, en Mocoa me ofreció curiara y protección un colombiano de amables prendas, el señor Custodio Morales, que era colono del río Cuimaní. Indicome el peligro de cometer los rápidos de Araracuara, y me dejó en Puerto Pizarro para que siguiera, a través de los grandes bosques, por el rumbo que va al puerto de la Florida, en el Caparaná, donde los peruanos tenían las barracas. (254-255)<sup>112</sup>

Although many more examples could be cited, while narrating one of his most poignant adventures in the jungle, Silva comments the following: “¿Y cuál era el rumbo que perseguían? El del río Curícuriarí. Por allí entrarían al Río Negro, setenta leguas arriba del Naranjal, y pasarían a Umarituba, a pedir amparo” (305).<sup>113</sup>

These quoted “derroteros” inscribe routes, reveal the names of places, inform about distances, pinpoint essential characteristics of the locations, and trace mobility paths in the region. Rivers and populations have a predominant importance for they constitute tangible geographic markers, but also because they denote the presence of economic centers and prosperity. As with Euclides da Cunha’s inscription of towns and populations on the Purús River, *La vorágine*’s constant depiction of the territory as a populated space helps claim as Colombian the territories in dispute, and they provide an image of the Amazonian land as a legitimate part of the nation. On the other hand, the fixation on rivers serves to reveal which ones are navigable and which are not (like in the case of Silva being warned that the rapids of the Araracuara River are dangerous). Often, through the voice of Silva, readers are informed of specific technical information about the rivers: “el Río Negro tiene una anchura de cuatro kilómetros. Hay que descartar los afluentes de su banda izquierda. Más bien, aguas arriba por este caño Yurubaxí, a los sesentaytantos días de curiara, dizque se encuentra un igarapé que desemboca en el Caquetá” (302).<sup>114</sup>

Neale Silva affirms that the preoccupation with the navigability of rivers was a pivotal concern for the author. Rivera and a government appointee from Venezuela, Mr. Hermes García, were engaged in a debate about the navigability of the Amazonian rivers. Mr. García, talking on behalf of his nation, claimed that Colombia’s southern rivers were not viable for navigation and

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<sup>112</sup> “They might have gone overland to Cano Guineo, to reach the Putumayo a little above the river port of San José then to follow the river until they met the Igaraparaná; but it was also not improbable that they might have taken the trail from Mocoa to Puerto Limón, on the Caquetá, to descend by this river to the Amazon, and then by the Amazon and by the Putumayo to the rubber groves of La Chorrera. I decided to go by the latter route. / Fortunately, in Mocoa a Colombian of sterling qualities, Señor Custodio Morales, who was a settler on Cuimaní, offered me his dugout and his protection. He left me at Puerto Pizarro so that I might follow the trail that cut through the great forests to the port of Florida, on the Caparaná, where the Peruvians have a settlement” (186).

<sup>113</sup> “And which route did they sought? The Curí-curiarí River. From there they would go up the Río Negro, seventy leagues above Naranjal, passing to Umarituba to seek shelter” (240).

<sup>114</sup> “Rio Negro is a couple of miles wide and it would be next to impossible to cross it without being seen. The tributaries of the left bank must also be disregarded. A better plan would be to go up this Yuxubarí River; it’s said that two months canoeing will get one to a small river that flows into the Caquetá” (237).

unexplored. In response to this public claim, Rivera published a series of articles titled “Falsos postulados nacionales” [False National Postulates] in which he contradicted, demystified, and informed the Colombian public about the navigability of Colombian rivers (Neale Silva 291-293).<sup>115</sup> This debate cannot be understood outside the context of territorial disputes between the neighboring countries, and Colombia’s own neglect of the Amazonian territories. More than that, debates like this one contextualize, as has been said before, the novels cartographic desire.

The informational character of the narrative in *La vorágine* –the way it realistically informs about routes, distances, and other geographical technicalities– invites to a revision of the relationship between the literary artifact and political practices, seen in the production of geographical knowledge in this case. On the one hand, the inclusion of information of political and economic value in the narrative entails a political agenda through fiction, that in Latin America recalls the role of literature in the national foundation processes: literature aided at the configuration of a national imagery and politics. Rivera’s novel is certainly shaped and informed by this kind of endeavor. However, the inclusion of this geographical information can be read from another point of view. This information is also a mark for the rhetoric of *the literary*; it materializes the narration as a route –the writer is always a cartographer of worlds. It structures a space for the literary world and its narrative existence. As political and as close to realism as its content may be, the information of routes highlights the crafted nature of the artifact. Wayne. C. Booth says that “to give [realism] with intensity, to make the imagined picture of reality glow with more than a dim light, requires the artist’s finest compositional powers. And, since any sense of composition or selection falsifies life, all fiction requires an elaborate rhetoric of dissimulation.” (44) In this sense, these routes, which apparently are purely practical information, are also the re-vindication of the literary *form* in itself: they dissimulate reality and by doing so, they are purely craft, artifice, and literary rhetoric. This reaffirmation of the literary form is related to the editorial games, the inclusion of the photographs and the map, and the reflections on language itself, which all aim at making ambiguous the relationship between reality and fiction, and that, ultimately, highlight the character of a vanguard artifact of *La vorágine*.

The textual cartography that informs a national geography in *La vorágine* is rendered though a polyphony of narrative voices, and this has to be remarkably underlined. The series of “derroteros” and all the information they provide appears in the text through the voices of Pipa and Don Clemente Silva. In Sylvia Molloy’s essay about Rivera’s novel “Contagio narrativo y gesticulación retórica en *La vorágine*” (1987), the Argentine critic analyses the ways in which the rhetoric unity of the novel is disarticulated by the inclusion of varied voices that Cova includes in his diary, and that, most importantly, contaminate Cova’s voice. Rivera’s text is constantly open to other narratives that inscribe in the story different languages and experiences that make the novel, in Bakhtinian terms, heteroglossic, polyphonic, and dialectical. Pipa’s story, the legend of the Mapiripana, Rodrigo Estévez’s experience and, most importantly, Don Clemente Silva’s voice, are included in the text as ways to open Cova’s narrative into a series of world views, testimonies, and idioms that add up to a sophisticated narrative texture. As Molloy explains, *La vorágine* is a text of “entrecruzamiento y desplazamiento de voces” (506)<sup>116</sup> that

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<sup>115</sup> These articles were published on September 1924 in *El Nuevo Tiempo*, a newspaper from Bogotá.

<sup>116</sup> A crossing and displacement of voices (my translation).

have many symbolic consequences. On the one side, they signal the novel's groundbreaking *form* and position the text as a vanguard literary artifact. On the other, they add a testimonial complexity that thickens the book's denunciation of the atrocities occurred during the rubber extraction system.

The appearance of multiple voices also has consequences when it comes to the representation of space. The completion and inscription of a national cartography is informed by voices peripheral to the state's center. While Cova's route follows a displacement from the center of Colombia towards the southeastern territories, it is Silva's route the one that inserts in the text a bigger geography. As Montserrat Ordonez notes, Silva's story starts in the southwest and ends in the far southeast, inscribing a route that comprehends not only the majority of the jungle space of the nation, but also inscribing the spaces and experiences of the rubber extraction system under the Casa Arana (Ordóñez "Introducción" 50). The completion of a cartographic discourse about the nation generated by a polyphonic narrative of local knowledge launches a critique to the state's centered cartographic production. A real understanding of the southern territories will come, not from the gazing eyes of urban elites, but from the inclusion of *other* voices into the discourse of nationality. In this sense, it is possible to understand *La vorágine* as an attempt to forge a polyphonic imagination of the country.

My own analysis of *La vorágine*'s cartographic desire owes much from Jennifer L. French's essay "La vorágine: Dialectics of the Rubber Boom" in *Nature, Neocolonialism, and the Spanish American Regional Writers* (2005). As she affirms, by engaging in a cartographic narrative, the text "corrects this governmental negligence" and "verbalizes the spatial configuration of the land, capturing in its intricate structure and baroque, wandering narrative the geographic complexity of an obscure corner of the Amazon jungle." She concludes that "the result is a new, verbal map to replace the antiquated government maps of which the characters repeatedly complain" (133). I agree with the fact that, as she points out, in the novel, both the way in which the plains are inscribed, and the cartographic narrative of Amazonia, respond to an attempt of internal conquest and expansion that aimed to integrate the region into a modernizing urban project, and in the fact that they secure the nation's sovereignty in the southern territories. I also agree with French's understanding of the Amazon as a region "dominated by neo-colonial economies," (141) contrary to a modern capitalist productive economy typical of early twentieth century Latin America.

The neo-colonial economy that ruled in the Amazon differed from the early centered state's economical project in many ways. Neo-colonial economies implied the exploitation of foreign resources, picking up on colonial relationships of power that were not overseen, or did not go through, the regulation of the state. The labor force relied on similar-to-slavery systems highly hierarchical, often constructed upon the idea of white supremacy over the indigenous or *mestizo* communities. Besides from this, the exploited wealth generally circulated and profited, and was controlled by, markets in Europe and in the United States. In other words, it was an economic practice of that fed foreign markets, while relying on a coerced labor force that circulated outside the systems of national markets controlled by either the state's "interior" investors. The Casa Arana or a.k.a Peruvian Amazon Company, a major trading company owned by the Peruvian Julio Cesar Arana, is one of the most renowned examples of such a system: not only did it have its stocks in the London trading market, but was ruled by a board member

committee integrated by mostly British men, including Sir John Lister Kaye, a rich English naturalist.

However, my own analysis differentiates from Jennifer L. French's analysis in the following way: I believe the apparition of the neo-colonial economy generates a contradictory way of representing Amazonian space. Together with the cartographic, inclusive, comprehensive narrative of territorial Amazonia, the text represents the region as an illegible space where disorientation becomes the ruling spatial experience and, above all, it implied the necessity of transforming *writing* as a practice. The presence of a neo-colonial economy prompted the desire of protection and integration of the jungle territories, and thus the production and inclusion of knowledge about it in the narrative, but I also believe this same element created the literary and symbolical response of a narrative where space itself is, also, illegible and incomprehensible. The key to the transition between these two was of representing space relies, I argue, on Amazonia's challenge to language.

### Deconstructing Space: Making Amazonia Illegible

In 1928, when Rivera found out that Henry Ford was planning to build a rubber production site in the middle of the Brazilian Amazon, he wrote a letter to the American businessman encouraging him to build a production plant under favorable and legal terms. His encouragement letter, however, included some ambiguous remarks about the economy that lay behind his project. He wrote the following: "Trascendental batalla van a reñir el dólar avasallador y la naturaleza omnipotente, y será vencedor el que resista mayor tiempo" ("Carta" 152).<sup>117</sup> Going even further, he claimed:

El banquero ostentoso, la dama elegante, el obrero satisfecho que guían sus automóviles por paseos, plazas y calles ignoran que si el caucho de sus llantas pudiera hablar exhalaría la más acusadora queja, formada con los ayes de la carne que arrancó el látigo, con el gemido de los cuerpos desfallecidos por el hambre e hinchados por el beriberi, con el grito de las tribus explotadas y perseguidas. ("Carta" 155)<sup>118</sup>

Rivera's references to a dollar based economy and his description of foreign prosperity based on a cruel Amazonian economy denote his full understanding of an emergent global neo-colonial economic system. Rivera's fascinating sentence stages powerful tropes that have defined the enterprise of capitalism over nature. The dollar –not the local currency– stands for a globalized world controlled by a northern economy whose power over nature is "relentless/destructive." Nature, on the other hand, is qualified as "omnipotent;" the encounter of an omnipotent nature with a relentless economic system configure a scheme of violence that endures through time and whose winner is determined by resistance and time, not by force. From these two entities, however, only one of them is consumable and exhaustible through time: nature. What surfaces, then, is the action of consumption and exploitation that structures the economic principle of neo-colonialism. The "banker," the "dame," and the "worker," with their

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<sup>117</sup> A transcendental battle will be fought between the over destructive dollar and the omnipotent nature, and who ever resists longer will win (my translation).

<sup>118</sup> The portentous banker, the elegant dame, the satisfied worker that drive their cars through avenues, plazas, and streets ignore that, if the rubber of their wheels could speak, it would exhale the most accusatory claim, formed with the laments from the meat taken by the whip, the whimpers of the bodies weakened by hunger and by beriberi, and by the scream of persecuted and exploited indigenous tribes (my translation).



elegant, ostentatious, and successful lives denote an image of prosperity and wealth that is not only fed by the exploitation of nature, but that revolves around rubber as a commodity and as a sign of status. Unseen and invisible –a masterful trick of exploitative economies- the rubber signals the exact opposite end: an exploited body –that of the worker and of the jungle- lacerated, bleeding, and exploited. The “northern” economy and its urban scenery, structured around the commodity, appear in opposition to a wounded, invisible, and persecuted body in the jungle.

The rubber extraction market was a conflicting type of economy that threatened Colombia’s sovereignty. In the first decades of the twentieth century, the young Colombian Republic was, as Neale Silva wittingly puts it, consolidating its financial character. This implied the consolidation of stable internal markets, the development of infrastructure, and the consolidation of a prosperous middle class based economy. It implied, as well, Colombia’s participation in a global international economy: the coffee agro-industrial expansion of the northwest is an example of this, and it can be traced as far as General Rafael Reyes’ export fantasies. However, Colombia’s participation in the global markets was anchored, mainly, in a patriotic empowerment of both the state and the local private sectors. This is supported, for instance, in the economical project that informed the “Centenaristas,” texts like *Tierra de promisión*, and it is even seen in Arturo Cova’s fantasies as a settler and developer of the Colombian plains. On the contrary, the rubber extraction system implied an economy of exploitation that was not anchored in any national modern project, but that, instead, responded directly to foreign European centers like London’s stock market and Detroit’s car industry. It was an extraction system that relied on colonial hierarchies, which, at the celebration of the centenary of independence, were highly dangerous. To this extent, the rubber extraction not only implied a conflicting economical order, but also something from which Colombia had to be protected. In the political arena this was seen by Rivera’s ignition of a public debate of both the rubber atrocities, and the call for more and better state presence in Amazonia. In a symbolic and literary level –that is, in *La Vorágine*’s inscription into Amazonia’s discursiveness - this is seen in the textual illegibility of the Amazonian space.

The opening paragraphs of the second part of the novel, which inaugurate the characters’ entrance into the jungle, determine many of the ways in which Amazonian space is represented:

¡Oh selva, esposa del silencio, madre de la soledad y de la neblina! ¿Qué hado maligno me dejó prisionero en tu cárcel verde? Los pabellones de tus ramajes, como inmensa bóveda, siempre están sobre mi cabeza, entre mi aspiración y el cielo claro, que sólo entreveo cuando tus copas estremecidas mueven tu oleaje. ¿Dónde estará la estrella querida que de tarde pasea las lomas? ¡Cuántas veces suspiró mi alma adivinando a través de tus laberintos el reflejo del astro que empurpuraba las lejanías, hacia el lado de mi país, donde hay llanuras inolvidables y cumbres de corona blanca, desde cuyos picachos me vi a la altura de las cordilleras! ¿Sobre qué sitio erguirá la luna su apacible faro de plata? ¡Tu me robaste el ensueño del horizonte y sólo tienes para mis ojos la monotonía de tu cénit, por donde pasa el plácido albor, que jamás alumbra las hojarascas de tus senos húmedos. (Rivera 189)<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> “Oh, jungle, wedded to silence, mother of solitude and mists! What malignant fate imprisoned me within your green walls? Your foliage, like an immense vault, is between my hopes and the clear skies, of which I see only glimpses, when the twilight breeze stirs your lofty tops. Where is the loved star that walks the hills at evening? Where are those cloud-sweeps of gold and purple? How often have I sighed as I pictured the sun-far beyond your tangled labyrinths-steeping the distant spaces in purple, there where my native land lies, where the unforgettable plains stretch, where rise mountains on whose foothills I could feel as high above the world as their white-crowned peaks. Where is the moon hanging her silver lantern? You stole from me the dreams that spring from the broad

If the space of the plains was represented through landscapes and it entailed expansion and extension, this changes radically in the jungle. The predominant image is that of a “green prison,” and the experience is based on entrapment and closure. If skies and sunsets were a predominant feature of the plains, here skies are unseen, light is scarce, and horizons are nonexistent: “tu me robaste el ensueño del horizonte” (189).<sup>120</sup> Instead of an overseen expansion that configures a *territory*, the jungle is a “labyrinth” in which the optical order fails to territorialize, comprehend, and apprehend the space. Within the jungle’s closure, Cova recalls the open spaces as lands of “mi país” [my country] pointing out Amazonia as an extraterritorial land that is not an extension of the rest of the country. To this extent, stepping into the jungle is also stepping out of a known and inscribed territory, in which not only the nation’s project has no presence, but where, furthermore, the characters are suddenly lost, physically and metaphorically. This paragraph inaugurates what will be seen further on in this section: the jungle is presented as a space hard to apprehend and to decipher, almost an impossible space where confusion and disorientation take over. In other words, the jungle becomes opaque and oblique, making it incomprehensible from the point of view of a modern gaze.

The opening paragraphs, known by critics as the “hymn to the jungle,” continue in this way:

Déjame huir, oh selva, de tus enfermizas penumbras, formadas con el hálito de los seres que agonizaron en el abandono de tu majestad. ¡Tu misma pareces un cementerio enorme donde te pudres y te resucitas! ¡Quiero volver a las regiones donde el secreto no aterra a nadie, donde es imposible la esclavitud, donde la vida no tiene obstáculos y se encumbra el espíritu en la luz libre! ¡Quiero el calor de los arenales, el espejo de las canículas, la vibración de las pampas abiertas! ¡Déjame tornar a la tierra de donde vine, para desandar esa ruta de lágrimas y sangre que recorrí en nefando día, cuando tras la huella de una mujer me arrastré por montes y desiertos, en busca de la Venganza, diosa implacable que sólo sonríe sobre las tumbas! (190)<sup>121</sup>

Cova’s voice (although due to the novel’s polyphonic contamination the origin of the voice is highly uncertain) characterizes the jungle as a region where secrets, slavery, and death rule the space. The overall general description fuses a discourse of nature with the socioeconomic apparition of the rubber system. *La vorágine*’s statement of the jungle as a “green prison” is in dialogue with other representations of Amazonia that came out at the time, all profoundly rooted in the atrocities of the rubber extraction system. Alberto Rangel’s *Inferno verde* and Euclides da Cunha’s *A margem da história*, discussed in Chapter One, together with *A selva* (1930) by Ferreira de Castro and *Heart of Darkness* (1899) by Joseph Conrad, constitute texts that inaugurate and consolidate a vision of nature through a politics of extraction and

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horizons. You offer my eyes nothing but the dull monotony of your green roof. Over it flows the peaceful down, but never lightning de depths of your humid bosom” (127).

<sup>120</sup> “You stole from me the dreams that spring from the broad horizons” (127).

<sup>121</sup> “Let me flee, oh jungle, from your sickly shadows, formed by the breath of beings who have died in the abandonment of your majesty. You yourself seem but an enormous cemetery, where you decay and are reborn. I want to return to the places where there are no secrets to frighten, where slavery is impossible, where the eye can reach out into the distance, where the spirit rises in light that is free! I want the heart of the sand dunes, the sparkle of stars, the vibrating air of the open pampas. Let me return to the land from which I came. Let me unwalk that path of tears and blood, which I entered on an evil day, when, on the trail of a woman, I plunged into jungle and wilderness, seeking vengeance, the implacable goddess who smiles only over tombs” (128).

consumption: the paradisiacal nature only becomes a hell when its extraction is not as easy and pleasurable as in the Edenic world.

In *Tierra de promisión* the opening poem speaks of a river whose waters reflects the landscapes of Colombia's peripheral regions. The river runs from the jungle into the interior of the country in a movement that integrates the far frontier with the center's unifying force: "Soy un grávido río, y a la luz meridiana / ruedo bajo los ámbitos reflejando el paisaje; / y en el hondo murmullo de mi audaz oleaje / se oye la voz solemne de la selva lejana" (205).<sup>122</sup> However, this fecund river entails something opposite in *La vorágine*:

La curiara, como un ataúd flotante, siguió agua abajo, a la hora en que la tarde alarga las sombras. Desde el dorso de la corriente columbrábase las márgenes paralelas, de sombría vegetación y de plagas hostiles. Aquél río, sin ondulaciones, sin espumas, era mudo, téticamente mudo como el presagio, y daba la impresión de un camino oscuro que se moviera hacia el vórtice de la nada. (195)<sup>123</sup>

The fecund river turns into a current described through images of quietness, stillness, and death. Its reflection does not depict any kind of landscape, but is rather enclosed in obscure vegetation and hostile plagues. Its course does not describe a trajectory whose echoes inscribe the jungle into the country's landscapes, but rather continues into the unknown vortex of nothingness.

The metaphorical use of the idea of route reappears when Cova, after being abandoned by Pipa, decides to continue the journey without any idea of spatial orientation or recognition. The appearance of these "routes" contrasts with the use of geographical "derroteros" explained in the preceding section. Cova warns his friends about following him, for his destiny, like the one the river describes, is uncertain: "Dejadme solo, que mi destino desarrollará su trayectoria. Aun es tiempo de regresar a donde queráis. El que siga mi ruta, va con la muerte" (238).<sup>124</sup> Moreover, the strong desire of territorial apprehension and the urge to inscribe space into the narrative by the constant description of routes becomes an impossible practice under the experience of a space defined by the closure of the jungle and the emergence of obsolete, meaningless routes. As a consequence, the idea of routes is counteracted with the idea of traveling subjects as 'vagabond wanderers' who excursion through space without grounded spatial coordinates (Rivera *La vorágine* 77). Cova is not the only character whose jungle experience is described in these terms; Pipa is also described as a person who "errante y desnudo"<sup>125</sup> (197) wandered years through the forests.

Nonetheless, it is Don Clemente Silva's story that summons one of the novel's most emblematic episodes related to space. Interested in pursuing the search for his lost son, Silva agrees to escape a rubber extraction center with other workers. He was trusted as one of the best

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<sup>122</sup> "I'm a river bountiful, and in light of noonday I roll below terrains the landscape mirroring; And in my swelling tide with its deep murmuring is heard the solemn voice of the jungle far away" (translated by Carl W. Cobb, 79).

<sup>123</sup> "The dogout, like a floating coffin, moved down the river in the afternoon hours when the shadows are lengthening. From the center of the wide stream we watched the parallel banks, of somber vegetation and hostile insect plagues. That river, waveless, foamless, was still, sullenly still like a thing of ill omen. It seemed a darkening road that moved towards the vortex of nothingness" (131).

<sup>124</sup> "Don't feel you have to go with me. Along my route lurks death" (171).

<sup>125</sup> "[A]lways nomadic, often naked" is the English translation. However, a more precise one would be wandering and naked.

“rumberos” of the region, and it was said that when Don Clemente Silva walked through the jungle he could stick his knife on the ground and could walk in any direction for twenty days and still get back to his knife: he knew the jungle as none did (Rivera, *La vorágine* 303). However, trying to avoid a plague of deadly ants, the group of escapees changes the route with fatal consequences:

Mientras tanto, el rumbero había perdido la orientación. Avanzaba a tientas, sin detenerse ni decir palabra, para no difundir el miedo. Por tres veces en una hora volvió a salir a un mismo pantano, sin que sus camaradas reconocieran el recorrido. Concentrando en la memoria todo su ser, mirando hacia su cerebro, recordaba el mapa que tantas veces había estudiado en la casa de Naranjal, y veía sus líneas sinuosas, que parecían una red de venas, sobre la mancha de un verde pálido en que resaltaban nombres inolvidables: Teiya, Marié, Curí-curiarí. ¡Cuánta diferencia entre una región y la carta que la reduce! ¡Quién le hubiera dicho que aquel papel, donde apenas cabían sus manos abiertas, encerraba espacios tan infinitos, selvas tan lóbregas, ciénagas tan letales! Y él, rumbero curtido, que tan fácilmente solía pasar la uña del índice de una línea a otra línea, abarcando ríos, paralelos y meridianos, ¿cómo pudo creer que sus plantas eran capaces de moverse como su dedo? (306)<sup>126</sup>

“Losing orientation” becomes the novel’s key spatial experience. Silva’s case inscribes the experience of getting lost tied to a critique of cartography that echoes other instances in which the text ambiguously comments on maps. Maps re-appear as obsolete and incomplete representations of the space. The map that comes to Silva’s mind, with its intricate lines and names is incapable of containing the jungle: space resists inscription into cartographic codes, the same way the opening map is unable to contain the vastness and complexity of Amazonia. As Silva declares, his inability to orient himself on the map responds to a deliberate attempt of the jungle to confuse its travelers. While being lost, Silva advises his group not to let the jungle distract their purpose:

El les aconsejó no mirar los árboles, porque hacen senas, ni escuchar los murmurios, porque dicen cosas, ni pronunciar palabra, porque los ramajes remedan la voz. Lejos de acatar estas instrucciones, entraron en chanzas con la floresta y les vino el embrujamiento, que se transmite como por contagio y él también, aunque iba delante, comenzó a sentir el influjo de los malos espíritus, porque la selva principió a moverse, los árboles le bailaban ante los ojos, los bejuqueros no le dejaban abrir la trocha, las ramas se le escondían bajo el cuchillo y repetidas veces quisieron quitárselo. (309)<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> “But the guide was lost. He advanced doubtfully, feeling his way, yet without stopping or saying anything in order not to alarm the others. Three times within an hour he found himself back at the same swamp, but fortunately his companions did not recognize it. concentrating all his being on his memory, he saw before him the map he had studied so often in the varanda at Naranjal. He saw the sinuous lines, spreading like a network of veins over a spot of palish green. Unforgettable names stood out: Téiya, Marié, Curí-curiarí. But what a difference this wilderness and the map that shrinks it in reproduction! Who would have thought that that piece of paper, scarcely large enough to be covered by his open hands, embraced such vast stretches, such dismal jungles, such deadly swamps! And he, experienced trail breaker, who so easily passed his finger from one line to another, spinning rivers and jungles, parallels and meridians –how could he ever have been fooled enough to believe his feet would move as lightly as his finger!” (241).

<sup>127</sup> “Had he not warned them not to look at the trees, because they beckon to one; not to listen the murmurings because they whisper things; not to speak, because the heavy foliage echoes back the voice? Far from following these instructions, they jested with the forest, and its witchery fell upon them, spreading from one to another, as if by contagion; and he, too, although walking on ahead had started feeling the influence of the evil spirits; the jungle began to move, the trees to dance before his eyes, the undergrowth to resist his efforts to blaze a trail; the branches hid from his knife, or sometimes sought to wrest it from him with a mighty grip” (243).

Both the apparition of an animated and vengeful jungle, and the representation of a space that moves and resists a stable logic, are images of Amazonia that appear in the discourses of other writers of the time, such as Alberto Rangel and Euclides da Cunha. They entail a way of relating to the space in which the subject's perception and control is lost: Amazonia appears as an entity unwilling to be dominated and organized –unable of being contained. The rational and grid-making gaze that configures a landscape loses its power.

Being lost, thus, becomes the epitome of losing control over space:

<<Andamos perdidos.>> Estas dos palabras, tan sencillas y tan comunes, hacen estallar, cuando se pronuncian entre los montes, un pavor que no es comparable ni al <<sálvese quien pueda>> de las derrotas. Por la mente de quien las escucha pasa la visión de un abismo antropófago, la selva misma, abierta ante el alma como una boca que se engulle los hombres a quienes el hambre y el desaliento le van colocando entre las mandíbulas. (307)<sup>128</sup>

While at the beginning of the novel the plains are thought of as a feminine entity that needs to be penetrated and dominated by the masculine force, in the jungle the gendered stereotypes are inverted: Amazonia, echoing the founding myth of its name, becomes a *feme fatale* that devours men. Being lost, then, equals being eaten by the nature of the jungle, just as it happens to Cova at the end of the narration: “los devoró la selva.”<sup>129</sup>

After two months of wandering the jungles “animalizado por la floresta, ausente de sus sentidos, despreciado hasta por la muerte, masticando callos, cáscaras, hongos, como bestia hervívora,” (314)<sup>130</sup> Silva had a revelation: standing up in front of a “cananguche” palm tree he remembered that the specie turned its axis around, following the sun, in a 180 degree turn throughout the day. He waited for the hidden sun to cross the skies and observed the imperceptible movements of the palm tree. Realizing that the plant was moving, Silva found its way out: “Y por el derrotero del vegetal comenzó a seguir el propio” (315).<sup>131</sup> The failure of cartography in Silva's experience is counteracted with the use of local knowledge. The strategies for orientation and the navigation of space come not from the grid that represents and controls the space, but from the resurgence of specific forms of apprehension that claim the validity of local experience and tradition. The importance of local knowledge against the tool of imperial expansion implies a critique of cartography aimed at representing the jungle as a space that resists the imposition of the map. It is the surfacing of experience against science and its reason.

The legitimation of Silva's local knowledge finds echo in another story included in Cova's diary, and that comes from local oral traditions: the legend of the Mapiripana. The legend tells the story of the magical indigenous entity named Mapiripana. She wanders through Amazonia leaving one footprint on the floor, and in the opposite direction of her route, as if she

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<sup>128</sup> “We are lost! Simple and common words –yet uttered in the jungles they strike the terror of the heart. To the mind of the person who hears them comes the vision of a man-consuming hell, a gaping mouth swallowing men whom hunger and disappointment place in the jaws” (242).

<sup>129</sup> “The jungle has swallowed them.”

<sup>130</sup> “...animalized by the jungle, despised even by death, chewing roots, husks, mushrooms like an herbivorous animal...” (249)

<sup>131</sup> “And from the course the tree palm followed, he plotted his own” (249).

“avanzara retrocediendo” (226).<sup>132</sup> Long time ago, the story says, a colonizer missionary with doubtful ethics came into the region wanting to capture her and subject her to his power. Angered and vengeful, though, Mapiripana gave him two offspring, a vampire and an owl, which eventually infused so much fear into the missionary that he escaped. To his misfortune, however, he wandered the region “desorientado” [disoriented] (227) until he returned to his vengeful lover defeated and almost dying. The Mapiripana legend, a major polyphonic asset of the diary, is an allegoric tale of colonial exploitation. One of its most interesting aspects is the spatial metaphor that it introduces and its reaffirmation of disorientation as a form of resistance of colonial enterprises. The entity’s reversed footprint, which confuses the direction of her journey, and the fact that the colonizer’s destiny is getting lost and subjugated to the power of the jungle, highlights a decolonizing politics of space.

The Amazon’s claim to expropriate its space is a way to eliminate any control over the territory. This is reinforced in the opening section of the third part of the novel, in what critics have called the “hymn of the rubber tapper,” where an unidentified voice –Cova’s? Silva’s? Cova contaminated by Silva?- offers the following lament:

Esclavo, no te quejes de las fatigas; preso, no te duelas de tu prisión: ignoráis la tortura de vagar en una cárcel como la selva, cuyas bóvedas verdes tienen por fosos ríos inmensos. ¡No sabéis del suplicio de las penumbras, viendo al sol que ilumina la playa opuesta, a donde nunca lograremos ir! ¡La cadena que muerde vuestros tobillos es más piadosa que las sanguijuelas de estos pantanos; el carcelero que os atormenta no es tan adusto como estos árboles, que nos vigilan sin hablar. (288)<sup>133</sup>

As in other depictions of the Amazonian space, elements of expansion and vision are eliminated to provide an idea of closure. The idea of wandering –“vagar”- reappears as the dominating experience of space, at the same time that the jungle is presented as a vengeful entity that controls its exploitative colonizers. The text represents space as an entity out of control from the dominating colonial subject and as an experience that subverts the relationships of power between the subject and the landscape that he aimed to behold. The forms of representing and experiencing space such as wandering, getting lost, disorientation, and miss-orientation are also ways of intercepting production of space. In this sense, the relationships of power are also the subversion of productive structures and thus an entire neo-colonial economy.

The voices that configure an Amazonian space against the idea of an apprehensible and conquerable space are voices subjected to neo-colonial power. Either because they represent an indigenous voice (Pipa and the Mapiripana legend), or because they represent the laborers of the system (Silva’s narrative), they tell the story of their conquest from within. This voice is the counter voice of the domination discourse that, as Rabasa has explained in *Tell me the Story of How I Conquered You* (2011) reveals an experience and a perspective of the world that claims to be an alternative version to the dominant neo-colonial discourse. Their voice is the voice of the conquered, and their story is the story of their subjugation. Telling us a story from within, their

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<sup>132</sup> “She trod the forest walking backward” (159).

<sup>133</sup> “Slave, do not complain of your fatigue! Prisoner, do not regret your jail! You know nothing of the torture of wandering unfettered in a prison like the jungle, a green vault walled in by immense rivers. You don’t know the torment of the shadows, when one may see a glimpse of sunshine in the opposite shore of a river, but a distant bank that one can never reach. The chains that knew your ankles are more merciful than the leeches in these swamps. The keeper who torments you is not so cruel as these trees, who watch you without ever speaking” (222).

discourse is the counterforce of the dominating ideology. This alternative version, displaced and autonomous from the dominating discourse, builds Amazonia as a locus that does not fit in the scope of the colonial ideology: it is outside of it, it constitutes itself a discursive *elsewhere* that resists the ideological imposition that has been bestowed upon it. I will return to the idea of Amazonia as an elsewhere later on.

Throughout the narrative, the jungle claims and takes control over Cova. While walking through the forest, he suddenly seems to be walking alone. Confused and desperate, he started running in random directions, unaware of what was happening to him. His companions reached for him and tried to calm him down. Silva, though, knew what had happened, and explained it: trees mess with the mental sanity of humans inside the jungle, “algo nos oprime,” says Silva, “y viene el mareo de espesuras, y queremos huir y nos extraviamos, y por esta razón miles de caucheros no volvieron a salir nunca” (294).<sup>134</sup> Being possessed by the jungle, Cova starts seeing the space for the first time with different eyes. The jungle *unveils* for him:

Por primera vez, en todo su horror, se ensanchó frente a mi la selva inhumana. Árboles deformes sufren el cautiverio de las enredaderas advenedizas, que a grandes trechos los ayuntan con las palmeras y se descuelgan en curva elástica, semejantes a redes mal extendidas, que a fuerza de almacenar en anos enteros hojarascas, chamizas, frutas, se desfondan como un saco de podredumbre, vaciando en la yerba reptiles ciegos, salamandras mohosas, arañas peludas.

Por doquiera el bejuco de matapalo –rastrero pulpo de las florestas- pega sus tentáculos a los troncos, acogotándolos y retorciéndolos, para injertárselos y transfundírselos en metempsicosis dolorosas. Vomitan los bachaqueros sus trillones de hormigas devastadoras, que recortan el manto de la montaña y por anchas veredas regresan al túnel, como abanderadas del exterminio, con sus gallardetes de hojas y flores. El comején enferma los árboles cual galopante sífilis, que soplara su lepra suplicatoria mientras va carcomiéndoles los tejidos y pulverizándoles la corteza, hasta derrocarlos, súbitamente, con su pesadumbre de ramazones vivas.

Entre tanto, la tierra cumple las sucesivas renovaciones: al pie del coloso que se derrumba, el germen que brota; en medio de los miasmas, el polen que vuela; y por todas partes el hálito del fermento, los vapores calientes de la penumbra, el sopor de la muerte, el marasmo de la procreación. (296)<sup>135</sup>

What unveils in front of Cova’s eyes is, ironically, the jungle’s absolute closure and inhumanity. Trees, leaves, branches, vines, fruits, reptiles, insects, and putrid waters are knit in an impenetrable cluster: they are structured in chaos one over the other, falling and elevating themselves at the same time. Words like “cautiverio,” “ayuntan,” “descuelgan,” “extendidas,”

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<sup>134</sup> “Something oppresses us;” “and then jungle giddiness turns our head, and we want to flee, and we get lost –and because of this thousands of rubber workers never emerge from the jungle” (230).

<sup>135</sup> “For the first time I saw the inhuman jungle in all its horror, saw the pitiless struggle for existence. Deformed trees were held imprisoned by creepers. Lianas bound them together in a death grip. Stretched from tree to palm in long elastic curves, like carelessly hung nets, they caught falling leaves, branches, and fruits, held them for years until they sagged and burst like rotten bags, scattering blind reptiles, rusty salamanders, hairy spiders and decayed vegetable matter over the underbrush. / Everywhere the *matapalo* –the pulpy creeper of the forests- sticks its tentacles on the tree-trunks, twisting and strangling them, injecting itself into them, and fusing with them in painful metempsychosis. The *bachaqueros* vomit forth trillions of devastating ants. These mow down the mantle of the jungles and return to their tunnels over the wide swaths they cut, carrying leaves aloft like the banners of an army of extinction. The *comején* grub gnaws at the trees like quick-spreading syphilis, boring unseen from within, rotting tissue and pulverizing bark, until the weight of branches that are still living bring the giants to the ground. / Meanwhile the earth continues its successive renovations: at the foot of the colossus that falls, new germs are budding; pollen is flying in the midst of miasmas; everywhere is the creek of fermentation, steaming shadows, the sopor of death, the nerving process of procreation” (230).

and “almacénar,” among others, generate an image of intrinsic dependency of uneven physical forces where humanity has no place. Nature is subjected to death and violence making the interconnected dependency a struggle for survival; words like “acogotándolos,” “retorciéndolos,” “injetárselos,” “transfundírselos,” and “vomitan” create a system aggression and hostility where one living creature sucks and sickens its neighboring creature. It is a cycle of putrid, poisonous, and toxic things living, falling, and conquering over the space of each other. There is no possible order, there is no extension, no gaze that beholds the horizon, no subject dominating this nature.

What is important about this change in the representation of the jungle is, no doubt, the transformation of the spatial configuration. However, the principal transformation occurs at the level of language. Like nature, it becomes convoluted. The aesthetic of *modernismo* is radically transformed: no *modernista* musicality is possible. Rather, words imitate the cluster and chaos of living things competing with each other, where accentuation, syllabic tonality, and word complexity generate a-rhythmic enunciations that are hard to articulate: “Por doquiera el bejuco de matapalo –rastrero pulpo de las florestas- pega sus tentáculos a los troncos, acogotándolos y retorciéndolos, para injertárselos y transfundírselos en metempsicosis dolorosas” (296).<sup>136</sup>

Cova’s poetic drive, which imagined a poetic project in the plains, collapses against this nature. How to represent Amazonia? How to convey what is being seen and experienced? How to give an account of that which resists to be put into a map? In a pivotal moment of the text Cova asks himself about the validity of the *modernista* aesthetic with which he and his generation identified themselves and, in doing so, he signals the caducity of its representational power: “¿Cuál es aquí la poesía de los retiros, dónde están las mariposas que parecen flores translúcidas, los pájaros mágicos, el arroyo cantor? ¡Pobre fantasía de los poetas que sólo conocen las soledades domesticadas!” (296).<sup>137</sup> Against this nature, language has to be changed and renovated. *Modernismo*, Cova claims, was for naïve poets who believed that nature could be subjected to a human scope. The new language, the one just quoted above, changes the musicality of *modernismo* for a radical musical discomfort, and aims to represent reality not as an ideal continuity between the gazing subject and its object, but as a problematic and ruptured connection with the world outside.

Carlos Alonso understands this crisis as a failed attempt to master language: “Cova’s ultimate defeat and annihilation by the forces of nature can be translated into an implicit statement on poetic creation: language is a perilous and violent entity that must be mastered by the poet, lest he be mastered by it” (154). The apparition of this struggle, he proposes, signals the ignition of the “poetic principles and artistic practice of the avant-garde” (154).<sup>138</sup> Lesley Wylie adds to this that “the incommensurability of language with land” creates a “fractured realism, where the jungle can only be ever glimpsed in a succession of snapshots” (149).

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<sup>136</sup> “Everywhere the *matapalo* –the pulpy creeper of the forests- sticks its tentacles on the tree-trunks, twisting and strangling them, injecting itself into them, and fusing with them in painful metempsychosis” (230).

<sup>137</sup> “Where is that solitude that poets sing of? Where are those butterflies like translucent flowers, the magic birds, those singing streams? Poor fantasies of those who know only domesticated retreats!” (231).

<sup>138</sup> The novel’s proximity with the vanguards comes not only from the staging of a crisis in language, but also by other radical elements such as the fractured polyphonic structure of the text, and its ambiguous proximity with testimonial and biographical narratives.



I adhere to Alonso's and Wylie's reading, but I also add two other elements. On the one hand, by inquiring the validity of a *modernista* aesthetic through the de-structuring of the language of *modernismo*, the text is making a critical claim about the ways in which nature is depicted through the idea of and idealized, contained, and domesticated nature. To this extent, Rivera's critique of *modernismo* entails a critique of imperial rhetoric over nature. Rivera himself used many of these rhetorical tropes both in *Tierra de promisión* and in the representation of the plains. However, against the encounter with the neo-colonial economy posed by the rubber extraction system, there is a need to re-think such rhetoric. Like this, the rupture and crisis of language in *La vorágine* signals the resistance to reproduce an aesthetic that would habilitate the apprehension of Amazonia by imperial powers. The change of style and language is, thus, a form of post-colonial resistance.

On the other hand, the fracture of language is a moment in which the text calls attention onto itself, signaling the act of representation and the act of writing or, in other words, the act of *literary* practice. To this extent, it is also a reflection of *form*: Cova is a poet (as Rivera also was), but in spite of this, the jungle only finds a form in the form of the novel, whose openness and flexibility make it the only medium where that which is uncontained can find a place. The portion of the map that appeared as spilling over the margins can only be represented in the form of the novel. Moreover, it is the genre capable of including the voices of the *other* characters, inscribing their experiences under the rubber exploitation system, and inscribing their experience of space in the narrative. The capability of inclusion of diverse versions of Amazonia, and its capability of debating the languages, styles, and rhetoric of the imperial desire and its representation of space, sheds light on the idea that, as Cova says, "la novela tendrá más éxito que la historia" (250).<sup>139</sup> This implies, I believe, that fiction and, specifically, the genre of the novel, have the potential to destabilize and dismantle the continuation between *writing* and *reality* that has enabled and authorized the inscription of Amazonia as a site and as a nature that has to be contained, apprehended, owned, and consumed.

In addition to this, another element that is being disrupted is the idea that there is such a thing as an aesthetic literary project to name or claim the nation that can withstand the implications of being modern. The "national poet," consequently, has to succumb for there is no place for him, and the novel as the narrative of such a poet cannot be anything else but destined to collapse and only survive as a remaining gesture of that which is irrevocably lost. In this regard, it is important to highlight that Cova's poetic character is subtly mocked throughout the entire novel. It starts at his arrival to the plains, where Barrera, the rubber recruiter, greets him carefully exaggerating his success and fame. In addition to this, certain images or instances reinforce the idea of a poet in crisis: language, as seen before, has to be re-invented, and writing becomes a complicated act only possible as a subtext of financial numbers (the diary is written on an accounting notebook, a fact that will be discussed later on), and the poet, the literary hero, vanishes in the end. What he leaves behind, though, is a testament of a new literary project and style: Cova changes literature in his time. *La vorágine* stands for a new way or writing that complicates the idea of a national literature in the midst of growing global contemporary economies.

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<sup>139</sup> Poorly translated as "[the lies] will be more effective than your true story" (181). A more effective translation would be *count on the fact that the novel will have more success than history*.

As a result of the crisis and renovation of language, a new Amazonian landscape emerges –or what could be called a non-landscape:

¡Nada de ruiseñores enamorados, nada de jardín versallezco, nada de panoramas sentimentales! Aquí, los resposos de sapos hidrónicos, las malezas de cerros misántropos, los rebalses de caños podridos. Aquí, la parásita afrodisiaca que llena el suelo de abejas muertas; la diversidad de flores inmundas que se contraen con sexuales palpitaciones y su olor pegajoso emborracha como una droga; la liana maligna cuya pelusa enceguece a los animales; la pringamoza que inflama la piel, la pepa del curujú que parece irisado globo y sólo contiene ceniza cáustica, la uva purgante, el corozo amargo.

Aquí, de noche, voces desconocidas, luces fantasmagóricas, silencios fúnebres. Es la muerte, que pasa dando la vida. Oyese el golpe de la fruta, que al abatirse hace la promesa de su semilla; el caer de la hoja, que llena el monte con vago suspiro, ofreciéndose como abono para las raíces del árbol paterno; el chasquido de la mandíbula, que devora con temor de ser devorada; el silbido de alerta, los ayes agónicos, el rumor del reguelo. Y cuando el alba riega sobre los montes su gloria trágica, se inicia el clamoreo sobreviviente; el zumbido de la pava chillona, los retumbos del puerco salvaje, las risas del mono ridículo. ¡Todo por el júbilo breve de vivir unas horas más! (296-297)<sup>140</sup>

The denial of “ruiseñores,” “jardines,” or “panoramas” critiques any notion of a controlled, territorialized, and productive natural land, such as the ones the *modernista* rhetoric constructed. Instead of an organized and compartmentalized space, the new one is identified by a constant repetition of the adverb “aquí” (here), which signals a space but inscribes it as an unidentified location; a disoriented space. What follows is a detailed and squalor description of micro-systems within the jungle that fail to provide the characteristics and dimensions of a coherent space. Instead, with its dead and putrid images, it delivers an image of an un-spatial nature that cannot be consumed or apprehended: the jungle that lays “aquí” is not part of a nation or even a desirable space for colonial enterprise. If impossible to be seen, it can only be perceived by its sounds and smells –“oyese el golpe,” “suspiro,” “chasquido,” “silbido,” “ayes,” “rumor,” “clamoreo,” “zumbido,” etc.<sup>141</sup> making it a space only perceivable through a haptic experience and not through a visual order. In other words, the jungle becomes, according to Deleuze and Guattari, a “smooth” space.

This is a space that has ultimately collapsed in itself (like a vortex) and that is geographically illegible. Within such a place the subject is not a separate entity that beholds and controls its object, the jungle. On the contrary, he goes from being an observer into experiencing the space from within. Often, the embodied perception of the space, when not controlled by an organizing gaze, appears as a chaotic experience where rationality is completely lost. As it happens in Silva’s experience, the jungle affects the comprehensibility of the space:

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<sup>140</sup> “No cooing nightingales here, no Versailles gardens or sentimental vistas! Instead the croaking of dropsical frogs, the tangled misanthropic undergrowth, the stagnant backwaters and swamps. Here the aphrodisiac parasite that covers the ground with dead insects; the disgusting blooms that throb with sensual palpitations, their sticky smell intoxicating as a drug; the malignant liana, the hairs of which blind animals; the *pringamosa* that irritates the skin; the berry of the *curujú*; a rainbow hued globe that holds only a caustic ash; the purging grape; the bitter nut of the *corojó* palm. / At night unknown voices, phantasmagoric lights, funeral silences. It is death that passes giving life. Fruits fall, and on falling give promise of new seed. Leaves come to earth with a faint sighing, to become fertilizer for the roots of the parent tree. Crunching jaws are heard, devouring with the fear of being devoured. Warning whistles, dying wails, beasts belching. And when dawn showers its tragic glory over the jungles, the clamor of survivors again begins: the zoon of the shrieking guan; the wild boar crashing through the underbush; the laughter of ridiculous monkeys. All for the brief joy of a few more hours of life” (231).

<sup>141</sup> All words that describe noises or distinct sounds.

Esta selva sádica y virgen procura al ánimo la alucinación del peligro próximo. El vegetal es un ser sensible cuya psicología desconocemos. En estas soledades, cuando nos habla, sólo entiende su idioma el presentimiento. Bajo su poder, los nervios del hombre se convierten en haz de cuerdas, distendidas hacia el asalto, hacia la traición, hacia la acechanza. Los sentidos humanos equivocan sus facultades: el ojo siente, la espalda ve, la nariz explora, las piernas calculan y la sangre clama: ¡Huyamos, huyamos! (297)<sup>142</sup>

Logic and rationality are lost to hallucination and intuition, and the jungle becomes a threatening space. Senses confuse their roles and fear gets a hold of the characters. At the end of the novel, Cova's body becomes part of the jungle: he feels his leg paralyzed by "beriberi" (a tropical disease) but describes the experience as a *becoming space itself*: he becomes a tree and his blood the rubber juice.

¿Era una alucinación? ¡Imposible! ¿Los síntomas de otro sueño de catalepsia? Tampoco. Hablaba, hablaba, me oía la voz y era oído, pero me sentía sembrado en el suelo, y, por mi pierna, hinchada, fofa y deformada como las raíces de ciertas palmeras, ascendía una savia caliente, petrificante. Quise moverme y la tierra no me soltaba. ¡Un grito de espanto! ¡Vacilé! ¡Cái! (374)<sup>143</sup>

On her post-colonial reading of *La vorágine*, Leslie Wylie comments that most of the twentieth century "jungle narratives" can be read as a post-colonial re-appropriation of imperial rhetoric, where often the distinctive separation from *subject* and the *other* tend to disappear, dismantling the Eurocentric and hierarchical system that such a perspective implies.<sup>144</sup> As a result, these novels aim at the creation of a new ideological apparatus that destabilizes the subject's appropriation, control, and consumption of the *other*. As she explains, "[t]he replacing of conventional categories of European landscape aesthetics such as the sublime with a poetics of the ugly and the unrepresentable ironically draws upon the imperial trope of Otherness" (9). As the critic comments, "far from confirming man's supersensible rationality over the jungle, the jungle insistently overwhelms the traveler and his ability either to comprehend or to describe the tropics" (9). This change in the subject-object relationship and perspective—which is, above all, an ideological displacement—conveys the loss of control of the space and renders, as its only possible outcome, an experience of disorientation.

The ultimate experience of disorientation is the one lived by Cova himself at the end. Cova recovers his lover Alicia and their newly born baby and they decide to wait for Silva to

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<sup>142</sup> "This sadistic and virgin jungle casts premonitions of coming danger over one's spirits. Vegetable life is a sensible thing, the psychology of which we ignore. In these desolate places only our presentiments understand the language it speaks. Under its influence man's nerves become taut and ready to attack, are ready for treachery and ambush. Our senses confuse their tasks: the eye feels, the back sees, the nose explores, the legs calculate, and the blood cries out: Flee! Flee!" (231)

<sup>143</sup> "Was this some hallucination? Impossible! I could talk, talk. The voice was mine, the ear was mine. But I felt myself rooted to the earth; and up my leg, swollen, spongy, deformed like the tubers of palms, I felt a hot, petrifying sap creeping. I wanted to move, but my leg wouldn't let me go. A cry of fear! I fell!" (310)

<sup>144</sup> Leslie Wylie's book is a foundational critical work that reads *novelas de la selva* through a post-colonial glass. She claims that this genre "parodies European discourses of the tropics and initiates a new way of writing about tropical space, celebrating the perceived Otherness of the jungle and its native inhabitants as the foundation for a distinctive Spanish-American literary identity." (2) This parody ultimately created, in Wylie's reading, "a powerful postcolonial counter-narrative, appropriating and re-semanticizing tropes" that were inherited by a long tradition of imperial writing (149). *Colonial Tropes and Postcolonial Tricks* informs much of the ideological position from where my analysis of space and language departs.

rescue them and lead them out of the jungle. Threatened by the possibility of being contaminated by a group of wandering sick people that are looking for help (contamination and sickness are always a threat to Cova),<sup>145</sup> they decide to seek refuge away from the “barracón” and into the forest. To provide information of his new location to be used by Silva when he gets back, he leaves his diary manuscript behind:

Don Clemente: Sentimos no esperarlo en el barracón de Manuel Cardoso, porque los apestados desembarcan. Aquí, desplegado en la barbacoa, le dejo este libro, para que en él se entere de nuestra ruta por medio del croquis, imaginado, que dibujé. Cuide mucho esos manuscritos y póngalos en manos del Cónsul. Son la historia nuestra, la desolada historia de los caucheros. ¡Cuánta página en blanco, cuánta cosa que no se dijo!

Viejo Silva: Nos situaremos a media hora de esta barraca, buscando la dirección del Cano Marié, por la trocha antigua. Caso de encontrar imprevistas dificultades, le dejaremos en nuestro rumbo grandes fogones. ¡No se tarde! ¡Sólo tenemos víveres para seis días! (384)<sup>146</sup>

These are the last words that Cova writes on his diary. As Cova himself comments, the book left behind tells the route that the characters decided to take. This route, however, is “told” through a sketched cartographic image (“croquis”) that he drew. In its last words, then, the narrative not only goes back to the idea of orientation, routes, and maps, but also makes the narrative an orientation device –a map. It is the text, left behind and opened, which includes the keys and clues to finding Cova. But the text, as a map, fails: Silva sends a telegram to the Consul, finally closing the book and saying the dreaded lines: “Hace cinco meses búscalos en vano Clemente Silva. Ni rastro de ellos. ¡Los devoró la selva!” (385).<sup>147</sup>

This failure of the text as map is rooted both in the politics of space that the novel develops from the second part onwards, and also in the crisis of language that re-structures Cova’s understanding of the jungle. Added to this, the text is written at the margins and on the spaces left clear of an old accounting notebook of the rubber system. As critics like Beckman and French have wittingly noted, Cova’s narration is written as a palimpsest of a financial enterprise and the diary illustrates the horrors that the numbers silence.<sup>148</sup> Moreover, this

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<sup>145</sup> To read more on contamination, besides Sylvia Molloy’s essay, Charlotte Roger’s chapter on *La vorágine* in her book *Jungle Fever* provides more insights.

<sup>146</sup> “Don Clemente: We are sorry we cant wait for you in Manuel Cardoso’s shack, because those sick wretches are coming ashore. Here, open on the cane table I’m leaving you this book, so that through it you may know where we’re going, helped by this rough map I’ve drawn from my head. Take good care of this manuscript and place it in the Consul’s hands. It holds our story, the desolate story of the rubber workers. How many blank pages, haw many things that haven’t been said” (319).

<sup>147</sup> “Five months Clemente Silva has sought them in vain. Not a trace. The jungle has swallowed them” (320).

<sup>148</sup> Erica Beckman’s reading of the fact that Cova’s text is written on an accounting book provides insights on how *La vorágine* is inscribed in what she calls “fictions of capital,” narratives that explore Latin America’s financial modernization. She explains that “inscribing his story in a book of counts – the novel offers itself as the site from which falsity can be exposed. The whole novel tells the story that accounting ledgers –as numerical registers- *can’t* tell and reintroduces narrative excess shorn from accounting in the pursuit of precision and elegance. The ledgers, on the other hand, take on a fictional quality precisely because of what their numbes hide: the brutal exploitation though which the rubber economy reproduces itself.” (184) Beckman goes on to affirm that this fact obscures the novel’s denunciation of the rubber extraction system, because the whole image is rooted in “deceptive practices of representation,” which ultimately connects to Cova’s language crisis. More on this in the section “Accounting” on her chapter on *La vorágine* in *Capital Fictions: The Literature of Latin America’s Export Age*.

palimpsest between the novel and the accountant's notebook signals the genre of the novel as the form capable of speaking through, for, and against capitalism.

It is relevant to note two other elements in the closing paragraphs of the text. The first of them is the reference to Cova's intention to proceed towards the "Caño Marié," which is geographically located in Brazilian territory. One of the possible ways of reading this is as a reminder of Colombia's unprotected and undefined territorial frontiers: because of this negligence Colombia's poet is lost in Brazil. The second aspect that is worth noticing is the transformation of Cova's voice into a plurality: the pages left behind "son la historia nuestra" [are our history] he says. This marks the fully contamination process of the polyphony that articulates Cova's voice: the text becomes a collective claim for history, which finally makes Cova's voice the voice of alterity.

The illegibility of the jungle, its resistance to fit and to be comprehensible by a practice of space apprehension, is *La vorágine's* ultimate rendition of Amazonia. It works both as a subversion of the representation of space as a consumable entity, and as a counteracting symbolic image of the dominated site of imperial desire. The result of this is the novel that we hold in our hands. Amazonia as a laboratory for fiction.

### **The Amazonian Jungle as an *Elsewhere***

The final paragraphs of the so called "plegaria del cauchero" end like this:

Mas yo no compadezco al que no protesta. Un temblor de ramas no es rebeldía que me inspire afecto. ¿Por qué no ruge toda la selva y nos aplasta como a reptiles para castigar la explotación vil? ¡Aquí no siento tristeza sino desesperación! ¡Quisiera tener con quién conspirar! ¡Quisiera librar la batalla de las especies, morir en los cataclismos, ver invertidas las fuerzas cósmicas! ¡Si Satán dirigiera esta rebelión!...  
¡Yo he sido cauchero, yo soy cauchero! ¡Y lo que hizo mi mano contra los árboles puede hacerlo contra los hombres! (289)<sup>149</sup>

The fragment's claim is a desperate call for the destruction of the world order that operates in the jungle; it urges a revolution, subversion, and even a fatal annihilation of the exploitation system. The jungle is summoned to roar and punish, and the narrative voice claims a vengeful conspiracy that subverts the cosmic forces. The claim is in itself a protest and a threat, and in many ways it summarizes the way in which the jungle is presented in the text: as a violent, closed, confusing place that subverts the modes of domination and exploitation. It is through language that this revolutionary violence takes place: at the core of the novel language and style stand as the pivotal mechanism through which nature and space go from a domesticated object to an indomitable and incomprehensible locus. In other words, it is language that transforms a promised land into a chaotic, collapsing, and swallowing vortex.

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<sup>149</sup> "I cannot pity the organism that does not protest. Tremorous branches are not a sign of rebellion that will inspire me with affection. Why doesn't the entire jungle roar out and crush us, like reptiles, in order to punish this vile exploitation? I feel no sadness-only desperation. I would like to have somebody with whom to conspire! I'd like to start a gigantic battle of the species, die in cataclysmic struggles, see the cosmic forces inverted! If Satan would lead this rebellion... / I have been a rubber worker, I am a rubber worker. And what my hand does to the trees, it can also do to men" (223).

It is through the representation of space where the symbolic literary resistance takes place. By subverting the control over space, by signaling an experience of loss of distance between the subject and the object, and by making the jungle a locus of disorientation, space becomes the epicenter of an ideological reflection aimed at resisting the forces of neo-imperial control. The ways in which space is represented generate a conflict in the practice of geography as a tool of knowledge, apprehension, control, and consumption of the land. *La vorágine* is a novel in which, borrowing Jon Hegglund's words, the "skepticism about geography manifests itself through an increased attention to the language and discourse of geography within literary narratives" (2).<sup>150</sup> The constant allusions of maps, landscapes, routes, and other geographical signifiers, together with the specific reflection on language that deconstructs the aesthetics of a controlled space, make *La vorágine* a text that reflects about space. In Hegglund's words, then, Rivera's text can be described as a metageographical fiction. "Metageography... is the conceptual framework that presents the possibility for geography, the architecture within which various geographies are housed... Metageography... defines the very orders and categories of space that we use to plot locations, itineraries, and distances in the world" (Hegglund 6). The reflection on the discourse of geography itself is delivered from *within*, becoming "what might be thought of as 'ironic' geography" (7). In other words, as Hegglund explains, "metageography interrogates a broader system that makes the particularities of place and position possible" (11).

As a meta-geographical text *La vorágine* delivers a criticism of the rhetoric and practice of space representation and apprehension, while at the same time creating an alternative literary space. Borrowing it from José Rabasa and displacing it from the specific colonial context from where it sprung, the concept of *elsewheres* serves to reflect on the representation of the jungle in Rivera's novel. In *Tell me the Story of How I Conquered You* (2011), Rabasa proposes a conceptual *locus* that, within a rhetoric, locates experiences of resistance, questioning, and dislocation of imperial practices of subjugation. When asked to tell the story of their ethnosuicide, the Aztec *tlacuilo* told the story as *he saw it and understood it*, and in doing so subverted the "epistemological certainty of the missionaries," (195) immediately dislocating him or herself as an Other that could be fully conquered by the Imperial subject. In Rivera's text the Other becomes space itself: a space that is nature, of course, but that is also a space inhabited by voices that speak in its behalf.<sup>151</sup> The experience of space described in *La vorágine*, achieved

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<sup>150</sup> In this point I establish a dialogue with other literary criticism that has reflected upon the relationship between cartography, geography, space representation, and literature. In *World Views: Metageographies of Modernist Fiction*, Jon Hegglund analyzes the ways in which certain modernist literature creates "an enunciative space within literary discourse that ironizes the notion of geographical space itself." (6) Hegglund claims that at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century "nation states increasingly derived their primary identity from a cartographic existence." (2) Amidst this insistence in geography as a form of national inscription, some fiction, says the critic, "can be read against the emergence of territorial nationality as the normative condition of political sovereignty in the world." (2) While Hegglund bases his literary study of a resistance to geography in the face of nationalism, I state that in the case of Colombia's Amazon representation this resistance is not against the forces of nationalism, but against the forces of a neo-imperial system such as the one the rubber system flags.

<sup>151</sup> It is appropriate to note that there is a difference in considering the jungle space as the "Other", in comparison to the colonial's positioning of the Aztec as the "Other". The latter one has a means of voice and reason that, in the case of nature, can only be achieved by considering the jungle space as both a site and an inhabited place, occupied and rendered by the voices of those who experience it. In this sense, the jungle is never only a place, but also the many ways in which that space is inhabited and incorporated.

through a polyphonic narrative, ruptures the epistemological separation between the Other (the jungle) and the Subject (the imperial machinery) rendering the space as something that escapes control and apprehension. In escaping this apprehension, the novel creates the jungle as an *elsewhere*. “The space of *elsewheres*” says Rabasa, “remains indeterminate, if not empty of positive characteristics. It’s haunting because it sets the limits of empire, whether understood as a domain of reason or as the space of a gaze that by definition remains inaccessible and troubling” (195). Under this analytical model, the jungle, overseen and threatened (consumed) by the neo-imperialist machinery, becomes “indeterminate,” uncomprehended by the domain of consumption practices, and unseen by the territorializing gaze. The maps fail, the routes become obsolete: the jungle cannot be mapped or translated into geographical practices that makes it susceptible of domination.

If the jungle becomes an elsewhere in an attempt to escape the “reason” or “gaze” of imperial desire, or in other words, to escape being apprehended by the geographical practices that enable its consumption, what to do with the strong desire to map and integrate regions like the plains, which constitutes an important discursive desire of “autochthonous” narratives like *La vorágine*? How to reconcile a desire to make the Colombian land legible to the modernizing forces, and at the same time opaque to a neo-colonial enterprise? How to create a discourse that both denounces the atrocities of the rubber exploitation and, at the same time, celebrates Colombian modernity? What is at stake in these questions is the viability of a discourse of national sovereignty against the forces of a growing neo-colonial system. Contemporary narratives of Colombian history highlight the country’s prosperity in the times when the novel takes place and in the times of its publication: they describe the nation’s growing coffee, textile, and agro industrial exporting markets as signs of promising economical autonomy.<sup>152</sup> However, they fail to analyze the economical system that functioned in the Amazonian region, which was not related to either the nation’s economical growth or the engagement in enriching export practices. They fail to recognize that the country’s south was being exploited by a business system whose center was to be found in European or North American industries, and that escaped any kind of regulation and control of the state. Rivera’s *La vorágine* stages an encounter with these two competing systems and, in doing so, highlights the fragility of the discourse of national sovereignty in the face of a new world order. Seen from this perspective, the novel reveals one of the crises typical of post-colonial nations: its everlasting situation of exploitation by imperial powers.

“Déjame tornar a la tierra de donde vine, para desandar esa ruta de lágrimas y sangre que recorrí en nefando día,” (190) says Cova, in the middle of the Amazonian jungle. But such a route cannot be undone, nor it is possible to return to the land of where he came from. Such a land cannot exist but in the fantasies of bourgeoisie and, anyhow, he’s already lost. In the struggle of a sovereign nation against a cruel rubber economy the national poet cannot win. It was well anticipated in the first sentence of the diary which, ironically, while inaugurating the novel, also anticipates the ultimate ideological consequence of the novel: violence wins - “Antes

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<sup>152</sup> Examples of such historical narratives are the classic 1993 book *The Making of Modern Colombia. A Nation in Spite of Itself* by David Bushnell and *Colombia: A Concise Contemporary History* by Michael J. La Rosa and Germán R. Mejía published in 2012.

que me hubiera apasionado por mujer alguna, jugué mi corazón al azar y me lo ganó la  
Violencia” (79).<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> “Long before I ever felt passionately in love with any woman, I had gambled away my heart and Impetuousness won it” (17) The word Impetuousness replaces the word Violence in this translation. A lot is lost.



## Chapter Three

### The Jungle as an Act of Fiction: Or How the Jungle Became Literature in

#### *Los pasos perdidos*

#### Understanding Quotation as the Problem

*Los pasos perdidos* (1953) [The Lost Steps] is Alejo Carpentier's third novel and the text that initiates his literary maturity. Preceded by *Ecue-Yamba-O* (1933) and *El reino de este mundo* (1949) [The Kingdom of This World], novels in which his search for a Latin American identity develops from an exploration of surrealism into the development of his notion of "lo real maravilloso" [the real marvelous], his 1953 text can be read as a final evolution into what will constitute his final signature aesthetic, the baroque. This chapter analyses how Carpentier's novel quotes José Eustasio Rivera's *La vorágine* (1924) to represent the jungle, and in doing so consolidates the trope of the jungle and the sub-genre of the "novelas de la selva."

The novel tells the story of a Latin American intellectual that lives in a city in the north (most likely New York), working as a composer and musicologist. Trapped in the routine of modern life, where the artistic product of his work is nothing more than a commodity, and unhappy in his marriage with a famous actress who performs the same tiring role over and over, his life has no meaning and is perceived by himself as the senseless repetition of a Sisyphus trapped in modern life. Accepting an offer from an academic institution to travel into the southern jungles in search of some indigenous instruments, the intellectual travels with his French mistress Mouche to an unnamed Latin American country. Set in the midst of a spectacular nature, the protagonist undertakes his expedition as both a transition from civilization into the "uncivilized," and as a symbolic regressive journey through time in search for the origins of human kind. He makes it into the "heart" of the jungle and finds the instruments, but something else happens: he decides to leave everything behind and settles in the jungle to start a new life with his new lover, an indigenous woman named Rosario. A re-born man with a new consciousness, escaped from the life of a Sisyphus, at what he believes to be the ground zero of history, and in touch with what is considered by him as the most genuine and original forms of life, he embarks in a new writing project, his musical masterpiece. Soon, though, this is interrupted by the arrival of a crew that has been searching for him believing he was lost and in danger in the indomitable jungles. Although he has decided to settle down in the jungle, he sees this trip back home as a chance to gather more materials for his writing project (namely, paper and ink), and as a chance to give closure to his previous life and marriage. However, once he returns for the second time to the jungle after his trip back to the city, nothing goes as planned; he can't find his way back and he learns that he is not welcomed in the jungle anymore. Further more, his indigenous lover, Rosario, has continued life with another man. This failure constitutes the novel's fundamental realization: he, the intellectual, the city dweller, was not, and will never be, part of the jungle. Everything was an illusion, a desire deeply rooted in the fantasy of escaping modern western life and becoming a native, but he will never escape his urban intellectual identity.

The novel is narrated by a first person, the intellectual, whose name we never learn. The text follows the structure of a diary, divided into six chapters, each one preceded by an epigraph, and a final "Note" that serves as a geographical commentary on the location of the novel. *Los*

*pasos perdidos* copies the form of a travel narrative, and in doing so it echoes the rhetorical structure of the texts produced by imperial travelers or scientific explorers who leave their western home and go into the jungle in search of a precious something or a life changing experience. Travel narratives are one of the most repeated forms through which the jungle regions have been represented and apprehended. They have contributed to the construction of the region as frontier to “the civilized” and as a place of estrangement –as the *other* space. The product of the travel –always a geographical and individual journey- has as its most precious product the production of a narrative, the precise site where the *other* is constructed, the *self* is defined, and the cultures are negotiated. This also happens in *Los pasos perdidos*.

It is perhaps because of this that when the narrator travels back to the city in search of paper and ink he feels the desperate need to write a story of his experience. When the narrator is on board the plane that is taking him back to civilization, he finds out that his wife, the academic institution for which he traveled, and the news media, have been anxiously waiting for him. He becomes aware that he has been compared to travelers who have tragically gotten lost in the jungles, and that he is part of an old narrative of brave explorers who have survived wilderness. He realizes that telling the truth -that is, that he willingly decided to stay in the jungle- will be considered an absurdity in the face of the spectacular fiction that has been created of him, and that, by the way, has cost the government a great amount of money. He cannot tell the truth. However, he has the solution to *the problem of his narrative*:

Lo que venderé, pues, es una patraña que he ido repasando durante el viaje: prisionero de una tribu más desconfiada que cruel, logré fugarme, atravesando, solo, centenares de kilómetros de selva; al fin, extraviado y hambriento, llegué a una <<misión>> donde me encontraron. Tengo en mi maleta una novela famosa, de un escritor suramericano, en que se precisan los nombres de animales, de árboles, refiriéndose leyendas indígenas, sucesos antiguos, y todo lo necesario para dar un giro de veracidad a mi relato.” (*Los pasos* 300)<sup>154</sup>

The novel (or novels) to which he is alluding, and perhaps intentionally miss describing, is either *La vorágine* (1924) by José Eustasio Rivera, or *Canaima* (1935) by Romulo Gallegos, the two most canonical and famous preceding novels about the jungle.<sup>155</sup> This moment, easily lost within the narrative, constitutes a pivotal center of the text. On the one hand, it highlights the idea of a *narrative* as a necessary byproduct of the trip, an element that will ultimately constitute

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<sup>154</sup> “What I would sell was a tall story to which I had been putting the finishing touches during the trip: I was held prisoner by a tribe that was suspicious rather than cruel; I finally managed to escape, crossing, all alone, hundreds of miles of jungle; finally, lost and hungry, I reached the ‘mission’ where they found me. I had in my suitcase a famous novel by a South American writer, giving the names of animals, trees, native legends, long-forgotten events, everything needed to lend a ring of authenticity to my narration” (242-243). All English translations come from Harriet de Onís’ 2001 translation *The Lost Steps*. Onís’s translation has omitted two decisive elements: the English version is written in its entirety in the past tense, eliminating certain temporal ambiguities of the text in Spanish. Added to this, the English version assumes that the text was written a posteriori the experience (as it certainly was), but thus eliminating certain ambiguity of the moment in which the diary became a novel that is still present in the Spanish version. Carpentier’s paragraphs in Spanish are long and complex, an element related to the use of a baroque narrative aesthetic. In the English version Onís has tried to give a simpler, less baroque, version of the text. Some words that Carpentier has capitalized to emphasize the importance of them in his book, like for example “Conquistadors,” appear without this emphasis.

<sup>155</sup> Many others could be named. Some of the examples are *A selva* by Ferreira de Castro (1930), the short stories by Alberto Rangel (1909) and Horacio Quiroga (1930), or even Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899) that, although not written by a Latin American author, had a immense impact in jungle narratives.

the apparition of a *novel*, as it will be seen further on. And, on the other hand, the appearance of a “famous” Latin American text about the jungle should be seen with extraordinary alert. In a book that happens within the jungle and that has so many references to other literary texts, why does this one only appear as a quick and small reference? Not even the title is mentioned. What is even more, why has it been hidden from the reader? Some pages before this announcement has been made, the narrator has declared that he has limited access to literature, but that “aquí donde [estoy] solo hay tres libros: la *Genevieve de Bramante* de Rosario; el *Liber Usualis*, con los textos propios del ministerio de fray Pedro, y *La Odisea* de Yannes” (*Los pasos* 277).<sup>156</sup> The inconsistency between the fact that he has had this “famous” book within his belongings, and the list of books at hand, is not a mistake but a purposeful trick. I believe this intertextual act of quotation structures and reveals *Los pasos perdidos*’ meaning in its entirety, as will be seen in this chapter.

So the question is: why is this novel so important in understanding *Los pasos perdidos*? Because *Los pasos* is a novel about the origins and Carpentier saw *La vorágine* as some kind of “original” text about an “autochthonous” Latin America. *La vorágine* belongs to a group of novels that Latin American literary tradition has called “novelas de la tierra” [telluric novels, or novels of the earth].<sup>157</sup> Carpentier himself alluded several times to the importance of these books in his work. In multiple texts he specifically talks about their importance from a varied point of view.<sup>158</sup> He described these texts and their writers as the “mentors” [“maestros”] of the Latin American literature and saw them as moments of true “originality,” an idea of nuclear importance in Carpentier’s own literary project. He claimed that these novels “son de una importancia capital pues significan una búsqueda de nuestras esencias profundas, por una suerte de regreso a la *condición fetal*” (“La novella” 225).<sup>159</sup>

As seen in the discussion of *La vorágine* in Chapter Two, these novels constituted the first attempts to produce an “autochthonous” literature for the continent: a literature that revealed the true cultural and geographical identity of Latin America. In the midst of national modernization processes, these novels looked into the peripheral regions of America (the jungle, the “pampas,” the plains, the deserts) with an attempt to integrate them into national imaginaries. They gave images of the nation’s non-urban places, and they portrayed scenes of the social and cultural life of these regions. One of the radical elements that characterized these novels was the renovation of the literary language of their time by the integration of new voices and vocabulary.

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<sup>156</sup> “There were only three books there: Rosario’s *Genevieve of Brabant*, Fray Pedro’s *Liber Usualis* and such texts as his ministry called for, and *The Odyssey* of Yannes” (218). Interesting to note that while the Spanish original means “there are three books *here*” the English translation shows “*there*.”

<sup>157</sup> As they have been mentioned before, these novels are *Don Segundo Sombra* by Ricardo Güiraldes (1926), *Doña Bárbara* by Rómulo Gallegos (1929) and Riveras’ *La vorágine* (1924), among others.

<sup>158</sup> The references to *La vorágine* and *Canaima* –or the “nativist” texts, as he sometimes calls them- appear, for example, in the following texts by Alejo Carpentier, mostly written in the final years of his career in the 1970s: *Tristán e Isolda en tierra firme*, *De lo barroco y real maravilloso*, *Problemática del tiempo y el idioma en la moderna novela latinoamericana*, *Problemática actual de la novela latinoamericana*. Although at the beginning of his career he expressed the need to differentiate the new Latin American literature from the narratives of the 20s and 30s, by the end of his career, having a much more complex notion of the history of the Latin American novel, he returned to these texts as the origin of the Hispanic tradition.

<sup>159</sup> Are of capital importance because they signify a search of our profound essences, as a sort of return to a *fetal condition* (my translation).

The literary project of “novelas de la tierra” saw in regional forms of speech and language a radically distinct linguistic identity. For an urban reader (very much used to Europeanized forms of literature) these novels presented a different and new linguistic texture that conveyed a sense of originality and identity. Novels like *La vorágine*, for example, included glossaries at the end of the text that underlined the linguistic endeavor that was being shaped. In Carpentier’s perspective, these novels’ true revolution consisted in the search for a *proper language* that would come to resolve the colonial trope of the lack of words to describe the American continent. *La vorágine*’s language was, he said, although not exempt from problems, “exact” and “authentic” (“Problemática” 196).

The idea of a literature that transformed language is important because language constitutes one of *Los pasos perdidos*’ most significant preoccupations. On the one hand, built around the idea of the search for what is “genuine,” the novel reflects on the idea of a proper language to denote the Latin American jungle. This is where *La vorágine*’s “authentic” language becomes so important for Carpentier. On the other hand, *Los pasos perdidos* not only embarks on the search for a ‘proper and truer’ language, but also reflects on the (in)capacity of language to truly represent and summon its object, the jungle. It is precisely because of the novel’s reflection on representation and language –the impossibility of language to really apprehend the object- that quoting *La vorágine* becomes the structuring principle of the novel. Rivera’s 1924 novel will enter Carpentier’s creation as a way to suffice the impossibility of language to apprehend the object. This, however, will have deep consequences in the way literature creates a relationship with the jungle, as it will be seen in this chapter.

The reference to a “famous” text in *Los pasos perdidos*, then, becomes more than an intertextual reference. Included in a book about the jungle that explores the idea of “originality” and of going back to a “ground zero”, the reference to this “famous” novel that represents a *fetal condition* must be interpreted carefully: *the act of searching for an original identity becomes an act of quotation*. This superimposition of novels –texts within texts- that never fully denote anything out of themselves constitutes the novel’s most important reflection on the act of representing the jungle. By attempting to write about the “origins” through a mechanism of representation in which a novel quotes another novel, *Los pasos perdidos* stages a baroque aphasia from which emerges, not the jungle itself, but the jungle as an act of words –the jungle as a space of literature. Or once again, Amazonia as a laboratory for fiction.

The importance of these novels, and in general, the importance of intertextuality in the making and meaning of *Los pasos perdidos* is a major topic in the analysis of the book. This is triggered, in part, by the unapologetic and intentional quoting of texts that appears in the novel. The narrator, as an archetype of the intellectual, is formed and informed by a wide range of texts and cultural products that constitute western European culture. In addition to this, in *Visión de América*, a book that groups short essays and commentaries about the Latin American continent (some of them dated from 1947, before the publication of the novel), Carpentier identifies certain readings that inform his travels to the Orinoco region, but specifically identifies Richard Schomburgk’s (1840-1844) *Travels to British Guiana* as a pivotal source.<sup>160</sup> Roberto González

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<sup>160</sup> *Visión de América* groups texts from 1947 to 1975 about different regions in Latin America, including the Caribbean and greater Amazonia. They are autobiographical or essayistic recounts of his travels and ideas of the continent, and they trace the development of a reflection on the Latin American tradition and identity. Roberto

Echevarría traces the intertextuality between Schomburgk's text and *Los pasos perdidos*, and claims that besides this book, many other travelogue texts inform the novel (*Pilgrim at home* 175-178). Besides the work of González Echevarría, Carpentier's novel has prompted a great number of critical essays that have sought to reveal the kinship of *Los pasos perdidos* with other narratives. Ricardo Castels, for example, states a connection with Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, while Mercedes Lopez Baralt and Ramón Felipe Medina seek much more productive affiliations with *Tristes Tropiques* by Lévi-Strauss and with *La vorágine*, to which I will be referring to later on. Lúcia Sá, commenting on this topic, affirms that the narrator of the novel "moves painfully through a labyrinthine jungle of quotations" (*Rainforest* 88), and both Charlotte Rogers and Lesley Wiley interpret the novel as a "palimpsest of tropical narratives" (Rogers 146). So, as a matter of fact, intertextuality is a major and obvious topic of consideration in the interpretation of Carpentier's novel. My interpretation of the novel through a focus on its intertextuality varies from the ones mentioned here in the sense that I am not interested in intertextuality as a form to trace a source of creativity, but in it as a mechanism of representation.

The intertextual relations of *Los pasos perdidos* lead to a major interpretative conclusion: the act of naming and writing about the jungle from a fresh or uncontaminated perspective is a failed attempt. In other words, going back to the "condición fetal" is always a return to other texts. The enterprise of writing is always already an act of re-writing, and any form of revelation of a text "is a correlation of a given text with other texts" (Bakhtin *Speech Genres* 161).<sup>161</sup> The narrator (and Carpentier himself) cannot escape the structure of western discourses to which he belongs. My analysis of the novel is grounded on this, but takes the problem further. I read the novel through its intertextuality with *Tristes Tropiques* (1955) and *La vorágine*. I claim that the mention of the "famous" novel from which the narrator will invent his own fiction (a fiction that will be a commodity, for he will *sell it*) is an actual reference to a quoting mechanism in which *Los pasos perdidos* quotes (almost literally) the jungle in *La vorágine*. I argue that Carpentier's novel is a travel narrative intended to write about the jungle as the *other*. However, there is a realization that the traveler and observer cannot leave his westerner identity behind, and that there is an unavoidable gap between the object and the language with which it is summoned. This realization creates a strong dialogue and partnership between *Los pasos perdidos* and *Tristes Tropiques*.

I claim that representing through an act of quotation of another text consolidates the appearance of the jungle as an artifice, a simulation generated through a literary inflation where

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González Echevarría (*Pilgrim at home*) has identified some of these texts as the first attempt to develop an idea of the continent that will be further developed in *Los pasos perdidos*. Further than that, he claims that the evolution from these essays into the novel reveals the realization that Carpentier cannot, as much as he wants, leave behind the texts that inform his discourse about America.

<sup>161</sup> Interpreting *Los pasos perdidos* through its act of quoting *La vorágine*, and the way in which this comments on the impossibility of attaining something original, recalls Bakhtin's essay "Toward a Methodology of the Human Sciences" in the book *Speech Genres and Other Essays* (1979). In this essay Bakhtin states that all writing/reading only achieves understanding "as [a] correlation with other texts and reinterpretation" (161). He explains that "[T]he text lives only by coming into contact with another text (with context). Only at the point of contact between texts does a light flash, illuminating both the posterior and the anterior, joining a given text to a dialogue" (162). He calls this a dialogic relationship. It is precisely in this dialogic relationship that a genre –through the repetitions and re-contextualizations- is formed. In other words, the dialogic relationship between these novels form the subgenre of *novelas de la selva*.

language summons language, and novels summon other novels. In doing so, *Los pasos perdidos* engages in meta-discursive reflection that points to the creation of the artifice –*the novel*– as the only possible outcome of his quest. The resulting novel, ironically, goes back to where the novel started: the novel is also a commodity and a product of a stereotypical travel narrative. However, something is gained. The return to the city, to art as a commodity, and to a stage where a sense of authenticity and originality are lost, are not at all in vain: the novel carries within a deep reflection of the act of representation and, in a very post-colonial way, the novel renounces to its own discursive appropriation of the jungle as an act of possession. In other words, it redefines and interrupts the continuation and authorization between writing and possession in Amazonia.

This reflection on the impossibility of appropriation –the possession of the jungle through a discursive act– is tightly related to the baroque aesthetic developed in the novel. The baroque, defined here as the circumvention of words, the accumulation of texts, and the folding that obscures the object, generates what Irlemar Chiampi has called an aphasic representation where excessive language (and intertextuality) attempts a description of the jungle, but ultimately fails to summon it, emerging as a renunciation of the act of verbal apprehension. From here, as it will be seen, emerges an idea of representation as simulation and artifice that is in itself connected with the idea of the impossibility of an “original” within the reproductive and productive forces of capitalism.

Through my analysis, it is possible to conclude that the jungle is consolidated as a site of the literary –it transforms into fiction– and the sub-genre of the “*novelas de la selva*” is constituted as a space of reflection of the act of representational in itself. In the following pages I will provide an interpretation of the novel as a text problematically situated between the desire for authenticity and originality, and the recognition of its impossibility, leading to the apparition of the idea of artifice and simulacrum –the act of writing a novel. I will engage on a reflection on language and discourse that will unveil an epistemological relationship between Lévi-Strauss’ *Tristes Tropiques* and Carpentier’s novel. After this, I will study the way in which *Los pasos perdidos* quotes *La vorágine* in its depiction of jungle spaces, identifying the repetition of words, images, and meaning that link these two novels together. Finally, I will focus on *Los pasos perdidos*’ post-colonial nature.

### **The Search for the Genuine**

Although Alejo Carpentier is mostly identified with Cuba and the Caribbean, his work is an exploration of Latin America than transcends borders and nationalities. Both as an intellectual and writer, his work can be described as an ongoing search for the continent’s identity and its forms of artistic expression. In other words, Carpentier’s aim was to seek a “genuine” literature that reflected a unique and distinct American reality, even though this was sometimes perceived by him as a problematic search. In the next paragraphs I address the search for the “genuine” as a category that serves to organize both his production as a writer, but most importantly *Los pasos perdidos*.

Carpentier began his career affiliated to the European surrealist movement and in the midst of Cuba’s cultural exploration of blackness and race, known as *negritud*. His first novel, *Ecue-Yamba-O* (1933), positioned him as a precursor of a literature that bridged European traditions and questions of authenticity sparked by the search of a post-colonial identity. This first novel functions as a *bildungsroman* of a black character named Menegildo Cue, who moves

from the country side into La Habana. The text makes visible the history and place of slavery in the constitution of the Cuban and, by extension, the American identity. It shows the social conditions of slave workers in the context of sugar plantations, but above all, it stages the complexities of the cultural and religious syncretism of African and Catholic traditions in contact. The representation of Cue's world is highly influenced by surrealism and by the overall aesthetic of the vanguards, and it structures the representation of the character's world as a superimposition and fragmentation of despairing realities that coexist. What is at stake in this first novel is the attempt to address blackness as a defining trait of Cuban identity through a post-colonial lens, and finding an aesthetic that would give an account of the multiplicity and diversity that make up the continent's history. *Ecue-yamba-O* is directly tied to Cuba's 1930s exploration of race as seen in the works of, for example, Lidia Cabrera, Nicolás Guillén, and Fernando Ortiz, who, initially influenced by ethnography, undertook a thorough re-discovery of Cuba's black identity.

By 1949, with the publication of his second novel, *El reino de este mundo* [The Kingdom of This World], Carpentier distanced himself from the European surrealist aesthetic and started developing his own perceptions of a 'truer' mode of expression. This led him to the proposal of the concept of "lo real maravilloso" [the marvelous real], where he claimed that the juxtaposition of American histories (the indigenous, the black, and the colonial) created a new form of altered reality that was the genuine nature and mode of expression of the continent. In the famous prologue to the novel, Carpentier claims that the *marvelous* reality that surrealists tried to pursue was not to be found in the easy trick of putting together despairing realities, but that it comes, instead, "de una iluminación inhabitual o singularmente favorecedora de las inadvertidas riquezas de la realidad" (*El reino* 10).<sup>162</sup> He proposes that the marvelous is a defining presence of American identity that does not have to be produced but only carefully observed. Multiple and contradictory realities coexist together given the multiple cosmogonies of the peoples and cultures brought together by the colonial enterprise.

This novel is also the fiction in which Carpentier fully integrated the topic of blackness and race into his work. The novel tells the story of the Haitian revolution through the eyes of Ti Noel, a black slave that is a witness to the entire process. The marvelous comes in the novel through the presence of *vudou*, a magical reality through which slaves plan and execute the revolution. The novel constantly tells both stories, that of a rational white perspective, and that of a *vodou* perspective, where, for example, characters turn into animals instead of dying. What is at stake in *El reino de este mundo* is, on the one side, the defining presence of slavery in the history of the Latin American continent and the pivotal presence of black people in its identity. On the other hand, the presence of a layered marvelous reality as the structural principle of Latin American culture.

Constantly evolving and re-thinking his own trajectory, by the mid 1950s Carpentier's work fully developed what became his signature aesthetic: the baroque. Beginning with *Los pasos perdidos*, Carpentier's literature tried to answer the question of the Latin American uniqueness, but it also reflected on the rhetorical limits of his own search. His literature seemed to pose the following question: is it really possible to provide one unifying and comprehensive

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<sup>162</sup> "from an unexpected alteration of reality (a miracle), from a privileged revelation of reality, from an unusual insight that is singularly favored by the unexpected richness of reality" (translation by Zamora and Faris).

narrative of the American identity? If so, what are the limits of writing it? A key factor for this shift is the re-appropriation of Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of language by philosophy, linguistics and anthropology in the 1950s, which led to the consolidation of structuralism as an epistemological paradigm. In this sense, from an overarching perspective, Carpentier's late work not only kept on asking about the 'origins and true nature' of the continent, but also, and paradoxically, complicated the possibility of an authentic mode of expression and of a comprehensive identity narrative.

Following this line of thought, González Echevarría identifies the main core of Carpentier's literature as the problematization of the structures from which the question of an American identity is launched, and its limitations. He explains that in Carpentier's late work "it is the rhetorical function of the question [for an identity] that is at stake" (*Pilgrim* 20). How is it possible to write of an American identity from within a language and with a cultural knowledge that comes from Europe? How to give an account of a "genuine" identity that is defined by a colonial encounter? And, above all, how to represent an object that exists beyond language itself? In the following paragraphs I will provide an analysis of *Los pasos perdidos* as a text that shows the struggle for a genuine and original Latin American reality and the recognition of the artifice, the simulacrum, and the copy –the *re*-presentation- as the only possible outcome of this quest.<sup>163</sup>

The opening of *Los pasos perdidos* gives important clues on the interpretation of the entire text. The first sentence opens the novel like this: "Hacía cuatro años y seis meses que no había vuelto a ver la casa de columnas blancas, con su moldón de ceñuda moldura que le daba una severidad de palacio de justicia, y ahora, ante muebles y trastos colocados en su lugar invariable, tenía la casi penosa sensación de que el tiempo se hubiera revertido" (*Los pasos* 67).<sup>164</sup> Although the novel is narrated in first person, the verb "había," which could signify a first or third person, introduces a fundamental ambiguity. The confusion generated by the first and third person singular points to a subjective fragmentation that will haunt the main character-narrator: throughout the development of the story the subject will believe to have found a new form of consciousness and identity only to realize in the end that he has never stopped being the

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<sup>163</sup> Roberto González Echevarría has written several articles and book chapters on Alejo Carpentier's work. Some of the most notable are "Canaima y los libros de la selva," the "Introduction" to the Catedra edition of *Los pasos perdidos*, and his chapter on his book *Myth and Archive: A Theory on Latin American Narrative* titled "A Clearing in the Jungle: From Santa Mónica to Macondo." However, the most important critical work is his book entirely dedicated to Carpentier's work, *Alejo Carpentier: A Pilgrim at Home*, a canonical and obligatory reference in the writer's bibliography. His critical study of the Cuban writer is thorough and comprehensive, and it's a fundamental source for all critical attempts on the topic. He has influenced the reading of many of Carpentier's critics, many of which I either quote or I am in dialogue with in this chapter. In many ways, a reading of *Los pasos perdidos* after so much criticism (both by González Echevarría and others) is a sort of repetition. For these reasons, I have chosen to write the following initial pages of this chapter acknowledging the presence of a strong critical bibliography, but also letting my own analysis stand for itself. To do so, I have opted for concentrating my reading of the text around the idea of "the genuine," which will appear in this section. However, as to avoid giving the impression that I am ignoring the critics with whom I am in dialogue, I have decided to include some footnotes that trace some (but not all) of the most recent publications on the text. I do not attempt to give a complete list of references in these footnotes. They are meant to be an expansion of the topics I mention in the corpus of bibliography.

<sup>164</sup> "Four years and seven months had passed since I had seen the white pillared house, with the austere pediment that gave it the severity of a couthouse; now, among the furniture and decorations, whose positions never varied, I had the distracting sensation that time had turned back" (3). The original implies *turning back* in time.



westerner intellectual that he is. This duality is one of the structural and conceptual keys of the novel: it shows the limitations of the protagonist to leave behind his own world and mentality and fully experience the “genuine” Latin America outside his realm of subjectivity. In addition to this, the mention of the sensation of reverted time predicts the metaphorical temporality of the novel. The entire story is a journey into the jungle that is metaphorically described as a regression in time that leads him into a “primordial” state of being. There is, as it will be seen in the next pages, a repetition of the trope of travelling backwards as a search for the origins. The first sentence, thus, anticipates the travel narrative that will inform the structure of the novel. Furthermore, the house of white columns in which the scene starts is a theater stage, described as “prisión de tablas y artificio, con sus puentes volantes, sus telarañas de cordel y árboles de mentira” (68).<sup>165</sup> The fact that the novel starts in a theater, and the appearance of the word “artificio” [artifice], points to the idea of artifice, copy, and simulacrum that will inform the novel’s resolution. That is, it anticipates the representation of the jungle as an artificial copy.

The narrator-protagonist, who lives in a big northern city, moves in a modern world void of meaning and purpose, disconnected from his body, trapped in the routine of work, production, and consumption. His marriage is also trapped in the routine and coldness of repetition, and his work seems to be meaningless. This lack of meaning is mostly seen in the loss of the value of art as a sublime expression and its contamination by the capitalist system. He is, in his own perception, a modern Sisyphus lacking excitement and purpose. What seems to be lost in this character’s world is the idea of art as a pure form of expression, as a reality unmediated by the conditions of productive interests. He is a musicologist who has lost the interest in research, and whose work is reduced to corporate needs in the advertisement world. The protagonist’s disenchantment with his own world and work, triggered by the irrelevance of art outside the market, points to the commoditization of art. Capitalism and the production of culture as commodity are essential aspects of the novel. They trigger the protagonist’s search for something “genuine” with which he can reconnect. As Benjamin explains, in the age of art as commodity, precisely what is jeopardized is art’s authenticity, and it is this authenticity what the journey to the jungle will remediate (“The Work of Art” 221). However, as it will be explained later on, the corruption of art by capitalism is not only present in the protagonist’s disenchantment and subsequent search for something genuine, but in the novel’s decision to represent the jungle by an act of quotation, a signal of the loss of what Benjamin calls “aura” –the experience of authenticity- and in the circulation of the novel through a cultural market.

In the midst of this crisis, it is Mouche, his French mistress, who alleviates the depressive mode in which the character exists. Their relationship is based on a sexual attraction that takes the protagonist out of his routine, and in the fact that she represents a pseudo-intellectual environment that provides a sense of home for the protagonist. The “pseudo” comes from the fact that Mouche has a strong relationship with intellectuals, like the narrator himself, and participates freely in their cultural and political environment, but lacks a true commitment. She impersonates the idea of intellectuality as simulacrum. She believes and lives off of astrological readings, which the narrator judges. Although their sexual bond is strong, their connection is shallow. Mouche is affiliated with the surrealist movement from Paris and represents the

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<sup>165</sup> “Prison of lumber and contrivance, with its air-swung bridges, its string cobwebs, its artificial trees” (4).

Interesting to note that what the original word for “contrivance” could be translated better into “artifice” and what has been translated as “artifice” literally means “fake.”

European intellectual elite from which the narrator will try to escape in the development of his journey. This is a significant fact that points to Carpentier's biographical participation and subsequent rejection of the surrealist artistic movement.<sup>166</sup> In addition to this, when the narrator tells her about the possibility of going to the southern jungles in the search of primitive instruments, she immediately suggests to take the trip as a luxurious vacation, and proposes to get falsified copies of the originals. This suggests, once again, how capitalism leads to the commoditization and lack of authenticity of culture (*Los pasos* 99).

The trip that the narrator has been offered consists in going to the southern Latin American jungle in search of primitive instruments to be added to a university's collection. Given the fact that he is a Hispanic musicologist who has worked on theories on the origin of music makes him the perfect candidate to undertake the job. Travelling to a South American country and to the jungle become embellished with an aura of re-connection with reality that contrasts his urban life in the north. The second chapter, then, inaugurates both the trip and the form of the travel diary in the narrative, and as soon as it starts, the traces of that which is considered "genuine" start to appear. The body and the senses acquire an unprecedented importance as a form of encounter with reality, and it provides a first step into the encounter with the "genuine". Underlined by the epigraph taken from Shelley, "Scent life!" (103), the narrator starts to feel, smell, touch, and see, as if discovering for the first time a reality that had been denied in the entrapment of modern northern life; "hay como una luz recobrada, un olor a espartillo caliente, a un agua de mar que el cielo parece calar en profundidad, llegando a lo más hondo de sus verdes" (108).<sup>167</sup> This becomes more evident after his entrance into the jungle, the space considered the true center of the "genuine" reality that the narrator is searching for:

[estoy asombrado] de que sea tan grato sentir la brisa y la luz en partes del cuerpo que la gente de *allá* muere sin haber expuesto alguna vez al aire libre. El sol me ennegrece la franja de caderas a muslo que los nadadores de mi país conservan blanca, aunque se hayan bañado en mares de sol. Y el sol me entra por entre las piernas, me calienta los testículos, se trepa a mi columna vertebral, me revienta por los pectorales, oscurece mis axilas, cubre de sudor mi nuca, me posee, me invade, y siento que en su ardor se endurecen mis conductos seminales y vuelvo a ser la tensión y el latido que buscan las oscuras pulsaciones de entrañas caladas a lo más hondo, sin hallar límite a un deseo de integrarme que se hace añoranza de matriz. (259)<sup>168</sup>

The experience of the body becomes a basic aspect that differentiates the narrator from the people *over there*, in the western world. The authenticity of the experience comes from a sensual and sexual interaction with nature, where the body finds itself free. The sun penetrates the body in an act of possession that invigorates his masculinity and strength. The intensity of

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<sup>166</sup> Charlotte Roger's chapter "Surrealism, Science, and Sanity in The Lost Steps," on *Jungle Fever* and Anke Birkenmaier's book *Alejo Carpentier y la cultura del surrealismo en America Latina* offer in-depth analysis of Carpentier's association with surrealism, an influence that can be traced all through his literature.

<sup>167</sup> "there was something like a recovered light, the smell of hot sparto grass, that the sky seems to permeate to the depths of its green" (40).

<sup>168</sup> "[I am] amazed at finding that the breeze and the light fell so pleasantly on parts of the body which people *there* die without ever having exposed to the touch of the air. The sun darkened that strip from hip to thigh which is white among the swimmers of my country, even though they have bathed in sun-drenched seas. The sun got between my legs, warmed my testicles, ran down my backbone, broke against my breast, darkened my armpits, covered my neck with sweat, possessed, invaded me; its ardor hardened my seminal conducts, and I felt once more the tension and the throb that sought the dark palpitations of vitals plumbed to their depths in a boundless desire of oneness which became the longing for the womb" (198).

this experience contrasts with the falsity and boredom of his experiences in the northern city. This intimacy with nature –the authenticity of it- configures a mode of existence unmediated by reason and intellectuality; a mode of existence that is felt rather than thought, and so, considered immediate and “genuine.”<sup>169</sup> The awakening of sexuality and desire as a result of a sensual encounter with nature are tropes that can be traced as far back as colonial texts. Often, the arrival to the tropics is characterized through an unexpected arousal of the senses that expresses a negotiation of the subject with the spaces of *otherness*. This exaltation of the sensuous speaks, indirectly, of the characterization of the “new” territories as fecund and lush, and is an expression of the desire of possession and penetration of these spaces. The ambiguity with which the quote ends, “un deseo de integrarme que se hace añoranza de matriz,” [“a boundless desire of oneness which became the longing for the womb” (198)] anticipates the failure of the supposed experience of originality and authenticity: it is nothing more than a desire, and as such, it is the unconscious recognition of the unfulfilled attempt to return to the origins. Paradise has been lost.

The narrator’s experience, although presented as an authentic reconnection with nature, is, in this sense, a failure. The problem does not rely on the veracity of the experience in itself, but in the act of communicating and writing about it. As Martin Jay explains in *Songs of Experience* (2005), all experiences are always mediated by other past experiences and by language. That is, all experiences are immersed in a “linguistic medium” (322) that cannot be avoidable. “Man’s language, after the Fall, and the withdrawal of Adam’s ability to name things in the Garden of Eden, lost this connection with the essence of things, a decline further exacerbated by the cacophony of separate languages that came with the Tower of Babel, which led to what Benjamin called the ‘over naming’” (320). Martin Jay’s quote oddly resembles *Los pasos perdidos*. The narrator also claims to be Adam naming things in paradise, as it will be seen later on. In addition to this, he sees his return to a Spanish-speaking environment as part of his reintegration into an ‘original matrix’. However, as a text that thinks about the way in which the world is mediated through language, this authentic experience –and this Adamic endeavor- serves to underline the novel’s final renunciation to a narrative of authenticity and the subsequent act of quotation that structures the novel: unable to express and convey his experience of the jungle, his last recourse is to quote *La vorágine* and present it as “la veracidad de mi relato” [the authenticity of my narration] (*Los pasos* 300). Experience is not only mediated, thus, but also intransmittable. As Benjamin explains in “The Storyteller,” the alienation of the modern world – the alienation that the narrator lives in, where his art is just a mere commodity- reminds us of that which has been taken from us: “the ability to exchange experiences” (83).

But lets go back to the body as a site of the authentic experience. Mouche, the character who cannot resign to European culture, will be defeated eventually by her body: “una naturaleza honda, fuerte y dura, se había divertido en desarmarla, cansarla, afearla, quebrarla, asestándole, de pronto, el golpe de gracia. Me asombraba ante la rapidez de la derrota, que era como un ejemplar desquite de lo cabal y auténtico. Mouche, aquí era un personaje absurdo” (209).<sup>170</sup> The

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<sup>169</sup> For more on the idea of the “decline of the west,” boredom, modernity, and the appearance of the senses, “The writing lesson in *Los pasos perdidos*,” by John Incledon, offers valuable insights. For more on the body, Guillermina de Ferrari’s essay “Enfermedad, cuerpo y utopia en *Los pasos perdidos* de AC y en *Pájaros de la playa* de SS”.

<sup>170</sup> “It had taken only a few days for a powerful, heartless nature to disarm her, wear her out, make her ugly, break her spirit, and now deal her *coup de grace*. I marveled at how swift the defeat had been, like a perfect revenge of the authentic on the synthetic. Mouche in this environment was an absurd being” (149). The last part of the original

mistress becomes a despicable character because her intellectuality is revealed as a false pose, and because she cannot embrace the new form of reality that the south offers. Her decay is seen as a revenge of the “cabal y auténtico,” [authentic and wholesome] pointing to the conception of nature and embodied experiences as the source of “genuine” reality. Mouche’s defeat by nature is also a colonial vengeance in which America triumphs over the imperial colonizer. Because she represents the decay and corruption of western modern life, and because her body cannot take the “genuine” experience, she becomes a despicable character to the narrator. However, this hatred is only a displacement of his own future failure, for she is a reminder of the narrator’s own intellectuality. This is confirmed in an intriguing scene at the end of the novel where Mouche reappears as a reflection of the protagonist: “la figura de una mujer se añade a la mía en un espejo cercano. Mouche está a mi lado” (315).<sup>171</sup> The narrator’s initial despise and eventual re-identification with Mouche is an allegorical depiction of the failure in the search of the “genuine” that is undertaken in the novel. In addition to this, the association of Latin America (or the South, in general) with the body and the senses, in opposition with the association of the North with the intellect, is a reenactment of western tropes related to imperialist conceptions of exoticism, leisure, and consumption that reveal the western mindset from which the narrator undertakes his discovery.

The notion of being in touch with a “genuine” experience reappears in other aspects besides the experience of the body. The narrator expresses his wonder about the fact that in the south

quedaban inmensos territorios en el mundo cuyos habitantes vivían ajenos a las fiebres del día, y que aquí, si bien muchísimos individuos se contentaban con un techo de fibra, un budare, una hamaca y una guitarra, pervivía en ellos un cierto animismo, una conciencia de muy viejas tradiciones, un recuerdo vivo de ciertos mitos que eran, en suma, presencia de una cultura más honrada y válida, probablemente, que la que se nos había quedado allá. (187)<sup>172</sup>

The encountered spaces had “un encanto que habían perdido, en las poblaciones-museos, las piedras demasiado manoseadas y fotografiadas” (131).<sup>173</sup> The ‘simple but truer’ life described in the first quote, together with the sense that southern country’s spaces had an original enchantment, point to the idea that reality hasn’t been altered or corrupted by the forces of European modern life. Simplicity, pristine conditions, and a certain mythical reality are the defining elements of the experience. The value given to the ‘simplicity and originality’ of Latin America is a nostalgic Eurocentric construction, part of a continued attempt to inscribe the continent as a lesser, savage, and backward space. What is at stake in the search and identification of traits of “genuineness” is less related with the discovery of a new territory, and

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quote in Spanish conveys a different meaning: a better translation would be “it was an exemplary revenge of the authentic and wholesome” (personal translation).

<sup>171</sup> “I caught a whiff of a perfume I knew, and a woman’s figure joined me in a near-by mirror. Mouche was standing beside me” (259). Lúcia Sá writes that “Mouche reemerges as a double of the protagonist, and her European insensitivity, so harshly criticized by him, ironically mirrors his own” (*Rainforest* 84)

<sup>172</sup> “the thing that impressed me most on this trip was the discovery that there were still great areas of the earth where people were immune to the ills of the day, and that here, even though many people were contented with a thatched roof, a water jug, a clay griddle, a hammock, and a guitar, a certain animism lived on in them, an awareness of ancient traditions, a living memory of certain myths which indicated a presence of a culture more estimable and valid, perhaps, than that which we had left behind” (123).

<sup>173</sup> “a charm that the museum cities, with their over-admired, over-photographed stones, had lost” (65).

more associated with a world not clustered with a cultural machinery that has been corrupted by capitalism. The alienation and boredom from which the character wants to escape in his trip reminds of “a culture industry [confined] to standardization and mass production,” that “sacrifices what once distinguished the logic of the work from that society” (Adorno “The culture” 95). The protagonist’s despise of his own work is, on Adorno’s terms, the recognition that “it is nothing but business” (“The culture” 95).<sup>174</sup>

To this extent, *Los pasos perdidos* reflects on the role of art within capitalism. In this sense, there is a strong ideological dialogue between Benjamin’s idea of “aura” as that which is intransmittable as an experience, developed both in “The Storyteller” and in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” In a similar way, the novel engages in a dialogue with Adorno’s concept of the “culture industry.” In the first part of the novel this is seen, most importantly, in the narrator’s critique of his own artistic production and in the despise and boredom that he shows towards his own life in the northern city where he seems unable to have an “authentic experience,” and where his art is nothing else than a commodity. However, as the novel advances (and as it will be shown later on in this essay) the act of quotation as a form of representation is also a form of reproduction that speaks of the loss of authenticity as a constitutive part of the novel, a genre which is in itself within the “culture industry” as it cannot escape “being sold” as a commodity of travel narratives. What cannot be dismissed, however, is the fact that *Los pasos perdidos* is actively reflecting on these topics, making itself (and us) aware of them and thus being meta-reflective.

Seen through this lens, what the narrator finds so refreshing is the possibility of an uncorrupted source of artistic and intellectual expression. This is shown in his encounter with three Latin American intellectuals. In his trip to the south, before reaching the jungles, the narrator encounters a white musician, an indigenous poet, and a black artist (a racially symbolic trio). However, these artists/intellectuals are contaminated by a western cultural structure.

Les pregunté, entonces..., si habían ido hacia la selva. El poeta indio respondió, encogiéndose de hombros, que nada había que ver en ese rumbo, por lejos que se anduviera, y que tales viajes se dejaban para los forasteros ávidos de coleccionar arcos y carcajes. La cultura –afirmaba el pintor negro- no estaba en la selva. Según el músico, el artista de hoy sólo podía vivir donde el pensamiento y la creación estuvieran más activos en el presente, regresándose a la ciudad cuya topografía intelectual estaba en la mente de sus compañeros... (137)<sup>175</sup>

Art, these characters affirm, is not to be found within the jungle, but in western spaces structured by European *sapientia*, or what the black musician calls an “intellectual topography.” The narrator sees Latin America as the contrasting topography, where it is not thought and culture what mediates reality, but where reality is unmediated. Disgusted by the intellectual pose of the three artists, the narrator reflects upon their mistake and reveals the true nature of what he is really looking for:

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<sup>175</sup> “I asked them...if they had ever been in the jungle. The Indian poet, shrugging his shoulders, answered that there was nothing to see there, and that such trips were for foreigners who wanted to collect bows and quivers. Culture, observed the Negro painter emphatically, was not to be found in the jungle. In the musician’s opinion, the artist today could live only where thought and creation were really alive, returning to that city whose intellectual topography was engraved on the mind of his comrades...” (72)

Al cabo de los años, luego de haber perdido la juventud en la empresa, regresarían a sus países con la mirada vacía, los arrestos quebrados, sin ánimo para emprender la única tarea que me iba revelando lentamente la índole de sus valores: la tarea de Adán poniendo nombre a las cosas. Yo percibía esta noche, al mirarlos, cuánto daño me hiciera un temprano desarraigo de este medio que había sido el mío hasta la adolescencia; cuánto había contribuido a desorientarme el fácil encandilamiento de los hombres de mi generación, llevados por teorías de los mismos laberintos intelectuales para hacerse devorar por los mismos Minotauros. (138)<sup>176</sup>

What surfaces in this encounter is the Adanic role of the narrator. The artist's mistake helps him reveal the true nature of his search for the "genuine," *the naming of things*. The true way of escaping the labyrinth of European culture and thought would be to name things again, to recast them into a new light, an original and truer form of expression. As Martin Jay writes in *Songs of Experience*, to return to Paradise. Naming is the only worthy activity with which, and through which, the disenchantment with the modern world would be corrected. This problematic Adanic enterprise is the epicenter of the entire novel: renaming and repossessing the jungle would mean getting a hold of a matrix that seems gone forever.

If Mouche represents a tired western intellectual pose, Rosario represents exactly the opposite. She joins the journey when the travelers cross the mountains in their way down to the southern jungles, and eventually becomes the narrator's new mistress. A woman accompanies each one of the stages of the protagonist throughout the novel; the actress-spouse represents the artificiality and senselessness of the modern world, Mouche represents a European pseudo-intellectualism that is dismantled in the process of the journey, and finally Rosario represents the encounter with the "genuine" identity of Latin America. The constant presence of a woman in all stages of the narrator's journey highlights the phalocentric character of the protagonist. "Era evidente que varias razas se encontraban mezcladas en esa mujer, india por el pelo y los pómulos, mediterránea por la frente y la nariz, negra por la sólida redondez de los hombros y una peculiar anchura de la cadera..." (147).<sup>177</sup> Rosario is represented as a symbiosis of the three racial types that conform the American continent, and as such, she is a symbol of the jungle and, by extension, of Latin America itself.

Both as a female character and as a symbolic presence in the novel, Rosario is apparently portrayed as subjugated and owned by the white western male presence: "aquí, pues, la hembra <<sirve>> al varón en el más noble sentido del término... sus manos son ya mi mesa y la jícara de agua que acerca a mi boca, luego de limpiarla de una hoja caída en ella, es vasija marcada con mis iniciales de amo" (213-14).<sup>178</sup> Mostly identified as "Tu Mujer" ["Your Woman"], void of her own name and identity outside her ownership by the narrator, Rosario lacks a true destiny and

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<sup>176</sup> "Years later, having frittered away their youth, they would return, with vacant eyes, all initiatives gone, without heart to set themselves to the only task appropriate to the milieu that was slowly revealing to me the nature of its values: Adam's task of giving things their names. That night I looked at them I could see the harm my uprooting from this environment, which had been mine until adolescence, had done to me; share the facile bedazzlement of the members of my generation, carried away by theories into the same intellectual labyrinths, devoured by the same Minotaurs had had in disorienting me" (73).

<sup>177</sup> "Several races had met in this woman: Indian in the hair and cheekbones, Mediterranean in brow and nose, Negro in the heavy shoulders and the breath of hips" (81).

<sup>178</sup> "There the woman 'serves' the man in the noblest sense of the word, creating the home with every gesture... her hands were now the my table and the jug of water she raised to my lips, after lifting out a leaf that had fallen into it, was stamped with my initials as master" (154).

will outside her role as a companion and wife. The subjected nature of Rosario is symbolic of the narrator's desire to apprehend and possess the true "genuine" identity of Latin America and of the jungle. Seen like this, the narrator-Rosario relationship extends old tropes of the continent's nature as a woman who has to be penetrated, dominated and owned. However, as an allegoric symptom of the narrator's failed attempt to apprehend the 'inner core' of the Latin American reality, Rosario's unwillingness to totally submit to the protagonist is revealed by the end of the story. When the narrator asks Rosario to marry her, she firmly denies any possibility of subjecting herself to the male institution. Her rejection to marriage doesn't make her a subversive figure to the male power, but it does highlight the limits of the desire of apprehension of the male.

The fact that Rosario plays an allegoric role as a symbol of the genuine, and that part of her essence is depicted through her tripartite racial type, implies that "mestizaje" and colonization are conceived as a source of the original and "genuine." The idea of the colony as the origin of the Latin American identity is a recurrent idea in Latin American discourses, and one of particular importance for Alejo Carpentier's work. To this extent, the "genuine" is also a teleological category in the world's origin, and it should be found in the "beginning" of history (history defined as that which began with the arrival of Europe). Throughout the narrative, the journey and the search of the "genuine" (both are the same) are depicted as a reverse travel in time. This metaphoric system of time-travel fully appears in the fourth chapter of the novel when the characters arrive to the jungle. The trip was a "[D]escubrimiento" (144) [Discovery], and the narrator proclaims "[S]omos Conquistadores" (221) ["we were conquistadors"]. Further more, when established in the jungle, he affirms that "[N]o hemos entrado aun en el siglo XVI. Vivimos mucho antes. Estamos en la Edad media" (238-39).<sup>179</sup> The regression through time is marked by the metaphorical identification of the journey from the city into the wilderness with Historical stages such as the Colony, the Discovery, and the Middle Ages. Each one of these is revealed as a step closer into a truer source of the Latin American reality.<sup>180</sup> This is what constitutes the trope of originality as something sought backwards.

At the end of this travel through time, the narrator encounters a remote world marked by the indigenous presence (234). It is the encounter with indigenous tribes and cultures that will be defined in the novel as the encounter with a true source of originality:

Su misterio era emanación de un mundo remoto, cuya luz y cuyo tiempo no me eran conocidos. En torno mío cada cual estaba entregado a las ocupaciones que le fueran propias, en un apacible concierto de tareas, que eran las de una vida sometida a los ritmos primordiales. Aquellos indios que yo siempre había visto antes a través de relatos más o menos fantasiosos, considerándolos como seres situados al margen de la existencia real del hombre, me resultaban, en su ámbito, en su medio, absolutamente dueños de su cultura. Nada era más ajeno a su realidad que el absurdo concepto de *salvaje*. La evidencia de que desconocían cosas que eran para mi esenciales y necesarias, estaba muy lejos de vestirlos de primitivismo. La soberana precisión con que éste flechaba peces en el remanso, la prestancia de coreógrafo con que el otro embocaba la cerbatana, la concertada técnica de aquel grupo que iba recubriendo de fibras el maderamen de una casa

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<sup>179</sup> "We have not yet come to the sixteenth century. It is much earlier. We are in the middle ages" (177).

<sup>180</sup> González Echevarría writes that this voyage through time is done as "through an imaginary museum or through a compendium of world history," where the protagonist also encounters his own past memories. In an abstract way, the critic says, the narrator's trip can also be seen as a Romantic Bildungsreise (*Pilgrim* 160).

común, me revelaban la presencia de un ser humano llegado a maestro en la totalidad de oficios propiciados por el teatro de su existencia. (234)<sup>181</sup>

The encounter with the indigenous people is described as a revelation of the unknown, and a discovery of the “primordial” and authentic. Understood through this quote, the desire for the “genuine” that structures the novel is related to a western desire for the authentic related with the 1920s and 30s search for a genuine culture uncontaminated by what was being perceived as the crisis of the modern world.<sup>182</sup> The idea of *travel* reveals itself as an escape of western crisis into the search of another refreshing reality. This new reality looked into the *ethnic other*, less as a reaffirmation of western superiority (as it did in the colony), but as a form of self-criticism of western identity. The discovery of the *other* implied the possibility of going back to the origins with both a sense of awe and a profound nostalgia of what history and modernity eradicated. The anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss stands as a pivotal figure in Europe’s search for an authentic *other*. His texts about mythology and about indigenous communities in the Brazilian Amazon region have a strong intertextual relationship with *Los pasos perdidos*, and it is a topic that, given its importance, will be explored independently later on. It is key to recognize, however, the distinct ethnographical perspective of the narrator’s tone in the passage quoted above. The attention to everyday life, labors, materials, and artifacts that appears in his description reveals an ethnographic sensibility that is confirmed by the intellectual recognition of the constructiveness of the word “savage.” The deconstruction of the idea of “savage” is an attempt to understand the indigenous tribe outside the parameters of western thought. I say attempt because the impossibility to fully step outside of these parameters is one of the fundamental reflections of both *Los pasos perdidos* and Lévi-Strauss’s work.

The idea of the jungle and the indigenous as the epicenter of the “genuine” is confirmed, in part, with the appearance of the shared indigenous-western myth of Noah and the flood. The protagonist encounters the foundational biblical myth in the middle of the Latin American tropical forest:

Los indios habían enseñado al mozo que esos petroglifos que ahora contemplábamos, fueron trazados en días de gigantesca creciente, cuando el río se hinchara hasta ahí, por un hombre que, al subir las aguas, salvó una pareja de cada especie animal en una gran canoa. Y luego llovió durante un tiempo que pudo ser

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<sup>181</sup> “Her mystery emanated from a remote world whose light and time were unknown to me. All about me everyone was busy at his own work in a harmonious concert of duties that were those of a life moving to a primordial rhythm. Those Indians, whom I had always seen through more or less imaginary reports that looked upon them as beings beyond the pale of man’s real existence, gave me the feeling here, in their own setting, in their own surroundings, that they were complete masters of their culture. Nothing could have been more remote to their reality than the absurd concept of savage. The fact that they ignored many things that to me were basic and necessary was a far cry from putting them in a category of primitive beings. The superb precision with which this one put an arrow through a fish, the choreographic air with which the other raised the blowgun to his lips, the finished technique of that group as it covered the framework of a longhouse with palm fronds, revealed to me the presence of human beings who were masters of the skills required on the stage of their existence” (173).

<sup>182</sup> Examples of this search can be traced, for instance, as far as Paul Gauguin’s work in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, a form of “primitivism” in art that even reaches the vanguards in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as seen in the work of Pablo Picasso. The rise of ethnography also attests this desire for the “authentic,” as a form of knowledge deeply rooted in the consolidation of the Empire’s control of the *other*. In the specific case of Latin America, this is not only seen in the previously discussed “novelas de la tierra,” but most importantly in the rise of an ethnographical field of study, as seen in the early works of Fernando Ortiz and Lidia Cabrera (in Cuba), or in the rise of indigenismo by authors like Alcides Arguedas (Bolivia), José Vasconcelos (Mexico), and José María Arguedas (Peru).



de cuarenta días y cuarenta noches, al cabo del cual, para saber si la gran inundación había cesado, despachó una rata que le volvió con una mazorca de maíz entre las patas. (257)<sup>183</sup>

The myth of the flood, with the obvious Latin American twists that the narrator is prompt to identify, signifies the complete regression in time into a teleological original space, the space of the myth.<sup>184</sup> This is regression in time's ultimate point, actually moving outside of time into another temporality, the time of Paradise. Seen like this, the arrival into myth is the completion of the ultimate desire of authenticity. It is also a time-place where the naming of things is possible, where a new origin can be launched. This conception of the jungle is a repetition of tropes that consider Amazonia or the jungle through images of the biblical paradise or that compare the region to pre-historic forests.

But, besides the jungle, the indigenous presence, or the myths, there is one more aspect that stands as the "genuine," and it's perhaps even *more* genuine than anything else. The narrator, lost in reflections about the birth of primordial religions and thinking he is in touch with the matrix of human kind, is suddenly interrupted by an event that breaks the routine of life in the indigenous town. A man has died of the bite of a poisonous snake and the sorcerer proceeds to cure him. And there, in the ritual of life and death, something appears: "Y en la gran selva que se llena de espantos nocturnos, surge la Palabra. Una palabra que es ya más que palabra" (244).<sup>185</sup> This *Word* is the center of the centers; it is more than just a word, it is a source in itself, a phenomenological reality that links the world of the living with the world of the spiritual. A Word that points to matter, and as it does, it gives matter a presence and a reality in the world. For the purpose of this chapter, I will call this form of language a language-matter. Language, thus, becomes the decipherment of reality, the communicative vessel for existence, the ultimate core, and the true "genuine."<sup>186</sup>

For the narrator, reality and nature have their own language, or even more, reality is in itself a language outside and beyond the human *cognis*:

Ninguna coreografía humana tiene la euritmia de una rama que se dibuja sobre el cielo. Llego a preguntarme a veces si las formas superiores de la emoción estética no consistirán, simplemente, en un supremo entendimiento de lo creado. Un día, los hombres descubrirán un alfabeto en los ojos de las calcedonias, en los pardos terciopelos de la falena, y entonces se sabrá con asombro que cada caracol manchado era, desde siempre, un poema. (270)<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> "The Indians had told the boy that those petroglyphs we were looking at had been carved during the time of a gigantic flood, when the river rose to that height, by a man who, when he saw the waters rising, had saved a pair of every kind of animal in a great canoe. Then it had rained during a time that may have been forty days and forty nights, after which, to know whether the flood had ended, he sent out a rat, which came back with an ear of corn in its paws" (196).

<sup>184</sup> In *Rain Forest Literatures* Lúcia Sá identifies the presence of this myth as an intertextual incorporation of the Paracaima indigenous traditions of the Roraima-Orinoco region. In this sense, *Los pasos perdidos* is linked to other novels touching on this tradition, like Mario de Andrade's *Macunaima* and Romulo Gallego's *Canaima*.

<sup>185</sup> "And in the vast jungle filling with night terrors, arose the Word. A word that was more than a word" (184).

<sup>186</sup> González Echevarría states the following: "Carpentier's entire literary enterprise issues from the desire to seize upon that moment of origination from which history and history of the self begin simultaneously- a moment from which both language and history start..." (*Pilgrim* 32)

<sup>187</sup> "No human choreography can equal the eurhythm of a branched outlined against the sky. I asked myself whether the highest forms of the aesthetic emotion do not consist merely in a supreme understanding of creation. A

The true arrival of men to the core of reality implies the capacity to understand and master this language-matter.<sup>188,189</sup> The predicament of this discovery is, in itself, a proclamation of the narrator's discovery: he has discovered it, he has mastered it, and he now knows and understands it. From an architectonic perspective, this realization culminates the journey of the narrator protagonist. It is within these happenings that we read that “[H]oy he tomado la gran decisión de no regresar *allá*” (259)<sup>190</sup>, implying that he has chosen to stay in the jungle for the rest of his life.<sup>191</sup> Conceptually, this discovery splits the novel into two. It culminates the search of the genuine with the ultimate realization of a pure, center-core language, which he now masters.<sup>192</sup> The second half of the novel deals with the only possible outcome of the realization that one masters a language: the project of writing.

Far and away from the world of the modern Sisyphus, within the primordial stages of existence and history, and owner of a transformative knowledge, the narrator embarks in a writing creation that is both original (true to the source), and pure (washed of the influences of a corrupted culture). This writing project is the culmination of the travel journey of the character and it denotes his final “arrival” to the original source of the Latin American identity. It is “the naming of things” that was revealed to him by the three intellectuals, and it is originated by the belief that he now comprehends, apprehends, and shares the primordial space of the jungle. Yet, this writing project becomes the system through which the text demystifies, complicates, and ultimately critiques the idea of the “genuine,” but most importantly, the idea of language as a genuine form of reality.

### **Reading and Writing in the Jungle**

Mouche, the pseudo-intellectual woman, becomes an unpleasant company for the narrator the closer he gets to the jungle. While he seems to be encountering new climates, smells, sights, and cultures, she, on the other hand, is unable to seize the moment, constantly comparing the trip to her travels through Europe. The narrator believes she is unable to articulate an opinion or a comment if it doesn't come from a book, or in other words, that she lacks originality. Her comments seem out of place and somehow superficial, to the point that the narrator wonders if all she was capable of saying was anything else than “*citas oportunas... de cosas leídas, oídas,*

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day will come when men will discover an alphabet in the eyes of chalcedonies, in the markings of the moth, and will learn in astonishment that every spotted snail has always been a poem” (211-212).

<sup>188</sup> The conception of a language-matter is opposed to, for example, Derrida's take on language as developed in “La différance” and “Plato's Pharmacy.” In Derrida language differs from the thing itself and as such, it can only be thought of through its difference with what the word is not in itself. In other words, words and signs never summon what they mean (they don't imitate the object or are not the object). They are, rather, a series of signs defined by displacement from each other. In this sense, language is unable to translate or represent reality.

<sup>189</sup> González Echevarría defines this conception of language as the one from a “writing that precedes writing” (*Pilgrim* 161).

<sup>190</sup> “Today I had made the great decision not to return *there*” (198).

<sup>191</sup> Silvia N. Rosman, commenting on the idea of travel, explains the following: “[the narrator] embarks on a journey not to displace the notion of home, but to better define it. He wishes to find a more genuine, true home, one in which wondering will no longer be desired or needed; that is, where the traveling will stop” (36).

<sup>192</sup> Silvia N. Rosman, explains that “[T]he end must be the beginning and the object looked for thus becomes an immutable essence” (15).

tomadas a sorbos en las fuentes de uso más generalizado” (134).<sup>193</sup> Although this criticism is aimed at Mouche, it is especially valid for the protagonist himself. The narrator seems to be incapable of observing and interpreting Latin America outside his scope of cult references. This situation further complicates the idea of a “genuine” encounter with the jungle and once again shows the act of quoting as a form of knowledge in the novel. In the following paragraphs I will comment on the way in which *Los pasos perdidos* is thematically and structurally informed by other texts, and by a wide variety of other citations of Western culture.

As a prominent musicologist and intellectual, the narrator is a well-read and culturally informed person. His narrative contains abundant references to western literature, music, art, and philosophy, which intensify his belonging and attachment to the western world. They structure his worldview in such a strong way that he is unable to comprehend the Latin American reality outside of it. It is worth examining one example, although many could be found in the text. When encountering the famous Roraima mountains in the Upper Amazon–Orinoco region the narrator states that “tenía mi memoria que irse al mundo del Bosco, a las babeles imaginarias de los pintores de lo fantástico, de los más alucinados ilustradores de tentaciones de Santos, para hallar algo semejante a lo que estaba contemplando” (233).<sup>194</sup> This passage is a symbol of the epistemological structure of the colony, and it also exemplifies quotation as the mechanism for the understanding of Latin America. But at the same time, as it was made clear at the moment of the encounter with the three intellectuals, this system of comparisons triggers the desire to name things again; to find a language to do it. Roberto González Echevarría has eloquently explained this duality:

there is a contradictory desire simultaneously, on the one hand, to describe the landscape in terms of metaphors and similes which domesticate the newly discovered realities through allusions to Western tradition, while on the other to preserve their originality and uniqueness. The tension is that of a “proper” though ever elusive forms of expression. (*Pilgrim* 171)

This is a common place in the act of *naming* Latin America that comes from as far as the colony, and that has been highlighted in this dissertation repeatedly: how do you write from and about the new world? Writers like Euclides da Cunha and José Eustasio Rivera, studied previously, are also confronted with this question. However, while their response is to re-invent a language and a style to write about and from the jungle, Carpentier’s particular response is a purposeful *use of quotations*. This use of quotations is, ultimately, the *ironic* response to having encountered a language-matter. In this sense, quoting is not just a matter of literary intertextuality, but a matter of signaling the impossibility of attaining the “original.” Quotation as a replacement of originality, thus, shows the loss of “aura” as a form of genuine experience and links the production of the novel to the “culture industry,” as it will be seen later on.

*Los pasos perdidos*’ intertextuality must be explored through the texts that are quoted or that have some kind of relationship with the novel. The list of possible texts, already identified by critics, is not short: the list includes Richard Shommburgk’s *Travels in British Guiana*, Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*, Levi-Strauss’ *Tristes Tropiques*, Gallegos’ *Canaima*, Paracaima oral traditions, Mircea Eliade’s studies on Latin American mythology, Venezuelan

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<sup>193</sup> “apt quotations sipped from the fountain of clichés and set to the rhythm of the day from reading” (69).

<sup>194</sup> “My memory had to recall the world of Bosch, the imaginary Babels of painters of the fantastic, to find anything like what I was seeing” (173).

folklore tales, and, of course, Rivera's *La vorágine*.<sup>195</sup> The novel also makes indirect references to various colonial chronicles, naturalists' travel narratives, and the European romantic tradition. The transparency of these references in the novel explains the abundance of criticism around the text's intertextuality; it is in no way hidden.

The intertextuality identified by critics points to the phenomenon of the western (and sometimes non-Western) *archive* and its paradoxical presence in the attempt to produce a "genuine" and original Latin American discourse. Undoubtedly, they constitute valuable attempts to identify *sources*, but few critics go beyond a complication of what is at stake in doing so. Mary Louise Pratt and Leslie Wylie's take on intertextuality in *Los pasos perdidos* add two important perspectives on the topic. They both claim, in their own ways, that Carpentier's novel is more than just influenced by texts like the one by Shomburgk; they claim that Carpentier rewrites some of these (imperialist European) narratives in a dystopic way (Pratt 193) and through ironic parody (Wylie 41), destabilizing the ideological position of the white male western intellectual against the Latin American space, and the jungle in particular. Interpretations like these ones point to intertextual relations less as a matter of influence, and more as a system of active ideological and literary reflection, and thus they are closer to my own analysis.

I believe a better answer to what is at stake in the novel's intertextuality with other texts is to be found in the links between *Los pasos perdidos* and Lévi-Strauss' *Tristes Tropiques* and Rivera's *La vorágine*. These two texts are related to Carpentier's book as narrative sources, but above all, as texts that inform the artistic act of *representation* itself in ways that comment on the formation, development, and establishment of Latin American literature in general, and in particular of the sub-genre of "novelas de la selva." My claim is that unable to work outside the frame of references of European culture and language, Carpentier opts to fully embrace a mechanism of quotation. However, by specifically quoting other fiction texts about the jungle, the novel is creating a way of representing the jungle through literature itself, consolidating the idea of the jungle as a literary trope and topic. To unpack this I will start by exploring the narrator's desire to embark on a writing project and its relationship with the reflection on language and discourse put forth by Lévi-Strauss' *Tristes Tropiques*.

#### *Tristes Tropiques* and *Los pasos perdidos*

In my analysis of the novel I stated that the narrator's journey is structured around the search for the "genuine." Once he arrives at the jungle, I explained, he believes to be facing a truer "primordial" state of human existence. He also realizes that within this original matrix of life he encounters what I have called a language-matter or, in other words, the true language of reality and nature. This triggers in the protagonist a desire to embark on a creative writing project. This writing project should be looked at carefully, for within its dynamics one finds the core, not of reality itself, but of the problem with language and discourse that the novel wants to address. It is also the main point of contact with Lévi-Strauss' *Tristes Tropiques*.

In order to look at this more carefully, it is important to focus on some of the representational theories held by the narrator throughout the novel and the way in which they

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<sup>195</sup> For more on this topic, see the following names in the bibliography: Roberto González Echevarría, Ricardo Castells, Mercedes López Baralt, Lúcia Sá, Charlotte Rogers, Bobs M. Tusa, and Ramón Felipe Medina.

inform his writing endeavor. When the narrator is first offered the trip to the jungle in search of the primitive instruments we find out that when he was an active music scholar, the narrator developed a theory of mimetic representation. His theory consisted in the following:

Inconforme con las ideas sustentadas acerca del origen de la música, yo había empezado a elaborar una ingeniosa teoría que explicaba el nacimiento de la expresión rítmica primordial por el afán de remedar el paso de animales o el canto de las aves. Si teníamos en cuenta que las primeras representaciones de renos y de bisontes, pintados en las paredes de las cavernas, se debían a un mágico ardid de caza –el hacerse dueño de la presa por la previa posesión de su imagen-, no andaba muy desacertado en mi creencia de que los ritmos elementales fueran los del trote, el galope, el salto, el gorjeo y el trino, buscados por la mano sobre un cuerpo resonante, o por el aliento, en la oquedad de los juncos. (84)<sup>196</sup>

This theory, which is also concerned with the idea of origins, claimed that music was born out of a desire to imitate, and in doing so, *posses and apprehend*, at least symbolically and ritualistically, the prey. In other words, “los... primitivos del continente imitan el canto de un pájaro antes de ir a cazarlo, en rito posesional de su voz, para que la caza les sea propicia” (83).<sup>197</sup> This theory is based on the fact that the signifier (sounds and music produced by the natives) imitate nature, and thus acts as a controlling and possessive entity on reality. This theory could be extended as a way to describe language in general. In this sense, signs (words) have a particular relationship with the object: they imitate it, and are capable of transmitting reality in a truthful way. In a nutshell, the narrator’s theory of representation is similar to a pre-structuralist take on language.

This representational theory provides a way to interpret the writing project that culminates the narrator’s journey into the jungle. This writing project, however, is not exactly the writing of a literary text, but of a musical masterpiece. It is important to keep in mind that throughout the novel the act of writing music can be interpreted as a metaphor for writing at large. The writing of a threnody stands as the most important project ever undertaken by the narrator. It is the culmination and response to his arrival to the matrix of existence at the origins of human life. The threnody is conceived by the narrator as a musical creation that will incorporate language as a musical entity: it is, in other words, a composition of language. Born out of simple nouns –“*hombre, mujer, casa, agua, nube, árbol*”<sup>198</sup>- this threnody would be the musical creation of “un verbo-génesis” [word-genesis] (*Los pasos* 272) or, how he also calls it, the enunciation of the “palabra-célula” [cell-word] (*Los pasos* 276).

The desire of control through writing appears repeatedly when the narrator is within the jungle. He expresses the anxiety of having to write it all down, before it disappears, as if his writing were needed to fix reality into the world (266). He also states that “[H]ay mañanas en que quisiera ser un naturalista, geólogo, etnógrafo, botánico, historiador, para comprenderlo

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<sup>196</sup> “Disagreeing with the accepted ideas on the origins of music, I had begun to elaborate an ingenious theory that explained the beginnings of primitive rhythmic expression as an attempt to imitate the movement of animals or the songs of birds. If we bore in mind that the first cave drawings of reindeer and bison were hunting magic –a means of taking the quarry by previous possession of its image- I was not too far afield in my belief that the elementary rhythms were those of trot, gallop, leap, warble, and trill imitated by the hand on a resonant surface or by the breath in a hollow reed” (20).

<sup>197</sup> “most primitive indians of the hemisphere imitate the song of a bird before they set out to hunt it –this in a possessory rite to make the hunt propitious” (18).

<sup>198</sup> “*man, woman, house, water, cloud, tree*” (214).

todo, anotar lo todo” (269).<sup>199</sup> This ironic comment –the irony comes from the fact that he authorizes himself to be, in a way, all of those- explains how language is seen as a mediating force that lets the narrator understand and apprehend the jungle as the site or the original and the genuine, and thus give meaning to his life. There is a pun indented, thus, in the fact that he writes his project in a series of school notebooks (the only paper source available for him) that are identified with the inscriptions *Cuaderno de... Perteneciente a...* [Notebook of... Property of...].<sup>200</sup> The idea of a language that apprehends reality, highlighted by the notebook’s inscriptions, point to the idea of the writing project as a form of possession of the jungle. The narrator’s project functions like the theory of *representation as possession* put forth in his theories of the origins of music. The narrator is in touch with the jungle, with the “genuine,” and he masters it and owns it, as his writing project would confirm.

Nonetheless, his project fails. That which is of fundamental importance to writing becomes scarce: paper and ink. Having a limited amount of *Cuaderno de... Perteneciente a...* notebooks, the narrator desperately seeks another writing material: “Alguna materia debe haber en la selva, tan pródiga en tejidos naturales, yutas extrañas, yaguas, envolturas de fibra, en que se haga posible escribir” (282). Even more, we read that the narrator “trataba de escribir en yaguas, en cortezas, en el cuero de venado que alfombra un rincón de nuestra choza” (285).<sup>201</sup> This “escollo estúpido” about “la falta de papel” (283)<sup>202</sup> problematizes the act of writing itself. The desperate search for a surface to pose and inscribe his writing on –a writing that would master reality- is a metaphorical way to point at the inaccessibility of reality through language. In this sense, the lack of paper signals a crisis on writing as a form of capturing reality.

The outcome of the desire of writing in *Los pasos perdidos* could be read as a literary way of engaging with the structuralist paradigm about writing and language that was developed in the 1950s. The crisis in the idea of language as a way to capture reality is a strong link between Carpentier’s text and Levi-Strauss’ *Tristes Tropiques*. Claude Levi-Strauss travelled to the Brazilian Amazon from 1935 to 1938 and twenty years later, in 1955, he published his book. The text is an autobiographical travelogue that is also an ethnographic recount about various tribes in the region, and a reflection on western culture, particularly about anthropology, ethnology, and language. The defining elements of *Tristes Tropiques* are the self-awareness of the point of enunciation from which the ethnographic discourse is given, and the influence of Ferdinand de Saussure’s theories on language. Saussure’s proposal of language as a system of signs randomly assigned and defined only by differentiation highly influenced Lévi-Strauss’ understanding of ethnology. Based on these suppositions, he realized there was no objective referent in the study of ethnicity and culture; the reference wasn’t an apprehensible category outside his language and western mindset. As a result, the only thing revealed in the study of the *other* was the self itself and its acts of representation. This led him to propose that ethnology was not the study of specific *other* cultures, but of Culture at large, and to propose a series of systems that determined any and all cultural expressions. This made Lévi-Strauss one of the most influential names on the consolidation of structuralism as an epistemological paradigm.

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<sup>199</sup> “There were days when I would wish to be a naturalist, a geologist, an ethnologist, a botanist, a historian, so that I could understand all this, set it down, explain it so far as possible” (210).

<sup>200</sup> Translated by Osis as “*Notebook... Property of...*” (217).

<sup>201</sup> “was trying to write on leaves, bark, a deerskin mat in our hut” (227).

<sup>202</sup> “anything so stupid” – “lack of paper” (224).

The points of contact between Carpentier and Lévi-Strauss are many. An important part of this relationship is seen in Carpentier's ethnographic rendition of the jungle's indigenous tribes. Both texts are travel narratives into the heart of the jungle in search for the "genuine" matrix of human culture; both are centered on the idea of writing from and about the encounter with this center, and both end in failure.<sup>203</sup> Thematically and structurally, *Tristes Tropiques* and *Los pasos perdidos* have astounding affinities that reveal that Lévi-Strauss' trip could have served as a source for the Cuban writer, and their visions of indigenous practices and of the jungle itself are very similar.

However, the intertextual relationship I want to seek between these two texts is not centered on their affinities or their possible creative influence (this has been already identified by critics like López-Baralt). The points of contact that I want to underline are, first, the reflections on language as a system of representation and, secondly, the surfacing of the paradigm of structuralism as a mode of understanding and apprehending reality. In other words, I believe Carpentier and Lévi-Strauss recognize that language's relationship with reality is not based on a series of natural, straightforward, and denominative connections, but that language is an aleatoric system that interprets and organizes reality – it thus creates it. Reality does not have a meaning outside the system of language from which it is apprehended, and thus it is not independent from the set of cultural meanings put forth by that language. This has a major implication for the representation of the jungle: how, then, to represent the Latin American jungles? Is it even possible? The jungle emerges out of the text as a full act of fiction. As a cultural creation where what is at stake, more than the reality of the object that is being tried to apprehend, is language itself. In a continuation of a reflection that comes from as far as Euclides da Cunha's *A margem da história*, Amazonian space becomes a laboratory of representation and fiction.

First, I will unpack how this works in *Tristes Tropiques*. The first aspect that should be taken into consideration is the fact that Lévi-Strauss wrote his text at least fifteen years after his trip to the Brazilian Amazon. This implies that his narrative is both an account of his travel and a meta-reflection about the meaning and purpose of his trip. It is, in this sense, a memoir, a text whose accuracy is always indeterminate. This temporal structure is a pivotal element in the interpretation of *Los pasos perdidos*, for there are many hidden clues that reveal that the narrator of the novel wrote his experiences long after they happened, a topic to which I will return later on. Accordingly, Lévi-Strauss, writing in the past tense, explains that the most important aspect of his trip would have been to find a proper language to express and apprehend the "genuine" realities to be found in his travels:

If I could find a language in which to perpetuate those appearances, at once so unstable and so resistant to description, if it were granted to me to be able to communicate to others the phases and sequences of a unique event which will never reoccur in the same terms, then –so it seemed to me– I should in one go have discovered the deepest secrets of my profession: however strange or peculiar the experiences to which anthropological research might expose me, there would be none whose meaning and importance I could not eventually make clear to everybody. (62)<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Mercedes López-Baralt's essay "Los pasos encontrados Lévi Strauss y Alejo Carpentier" provides further analysis on the topic.

<sup>204</sup> All the quotes in English come from the 1974 translation by John and Doreen Weightman.

Furthermore, this preoccupation is also about finding a proper structure: “In what order should one describe those profound and confused impressions which assail the traveler when he first arrives in a village where the native culture has remained comparatively untouched?” (215). The answer to these problems relied on the realization that “the misunderstanding between East and West is primarily semantic: the concepts of ‘signifiers’ that we try to propagate in the East refer to ‘signifieds’ which are different there or non-existent” (148). That is: the relativity of language impedes a true understanding of the object. The object, then, becomes language itself, and that which is ultimately revealed is the nature of the source from which the search is conducted.

Lévi-Strauss, in one of the many poetic moments of his text, reveals the heart of his failure:

Through a remarkable paradox, my life of adventure, instead of opening up a new world to me, had the effect rather of bringing me back to the old one, and the world I had been looking for disintegrated in my grasp. Just as, once they were in my power, the men and the landscapes I had set out to conquer lost the significance I had hoped they would have for me, so for these disappointing yet present images, other images were substituted which had been held in reserve by my past and had seemed of no particular importance when they still belonged to the reality surrounding me. (376)

The center of the trip becomes not the ethnographic observations, but the questions of the endeavor itself: “Why has he [the ethnographer] come here? With what hopes or what objectives? What is exactly the nature of anthropological research? Is it a normal occupation like any other profession...? Or does it result from a more radical choice, which implied that the anthropologist is calling into question the system in which he was born and brought up?” (376). The trip as a pursuit for meaning and as a search of the “genuine” becomes a failed attempt because the subject does not reach the ultimate destination –there is no discovery. Indeed, the failure of traveling is a recurrent topic throughout the text seen as early as the first line that inaugurates the book, “I hate traveling and explorers” (17), and confirmed with the conclusion that they are a *deception* (38). This metaphorical idea of travel writing as a farce is important in analyzing the narrator’s trip in *Los pasos perdidos* as well. The narrator’s journey fails in a symbolic and physical way: his writing project is impossible to achieve and his second return to the jungle ends in failure.

From an overall perspective, *Tristes Tropiques* is a book that reflects on language, form, and the systems and codes of understanding the world that structure western culture. It talks about the impossibility of apprehension of the *other* at the same time that it reveals the inescapability of the forms of organizing and interpreting reality that we possess. As Peter Barry puts it, “meaning or significance isn’t a kind of core or essence inside things: rather, meaning is always outside. Meaning is always an attribute of things, in the literal sense that meanings are attributed to the things by the human mind, not contained within them” (29). The text left behind by the traveler is nothing more than traces of the writer’s world and mind; an evidence of his language and mindset. All of Lévi-Strauss’ reflections are echoed in *Los pasos perdidos*. The idea of an archive that informs the way in which Latin America is perceived by the narrator points to the difficulty in avoiding the western cultural baggage as a point of the enunciation. Added to this, the idea of a “proper” language in *Tristes Tropiques* is present in the idea of a true and “genuine” language in Carpentier’s novel. Further more, the theory of *representation as*



*possession*, together with the impossibility of writing, point to a system of meaning that battles to capture reality. These two texts are conceptually related and point to the same problems.

In addition to all of this, there is an intriguing moment in Lévi-Strauss' narrative that must be mentioned. It is a moment that holds special importance to the analysis of the relationship with Carpentier's work. Inspired by his own travels, Lévi-Strauss fantasizes about a storyline for a theatre piece: "It was as clear in my mind as if it had already been written, [...] for six days, I wrote from morning till night on the backs of sheets of paper covered with word lists, sketches and genealogical tables" (378). The similarities between Lévi-Strauss' anxiety and impulse to write recalls the protagonist of Carpentier's novel. Further than that, the story includes a character who is, like the protagonist of *Los pasos perdidos*, a traveler who goes away on a journey and returns some years later. Lévi-Strauss writes the following about this character:

Now that he had come back with a halo of glory –the explorer whose presence was in demand at every society dinner- he alone knew that the fame he had bought at such cost was founded on a lie. The was nothing real in all the experience he was credited with having lived through; traveling was a snare end and a delusion; the whole thing could appear true only to those people acquainted with the reflection not the reality. (380)

This passage underlines the idea of travel as a failure, but it also implies the idea of travel as a lie –as a fiction. This rhetorical twist summons *Los pasos perdidos*' fictional lie as the only possible narrative of the narrator's travel experience:

Lo que venderé, pues, es una patraña que he ido repasando durante el viaje: prisionero de una tribu más desconfiada que cruel, logré fugarme, atravesando, solo, centenares de kilómetros de selva; al fin, extraviado y hambriento, llegué a una <<misión>> donde me encontraron. Tengo en mi maleta una novela famosa, de un escritor suramericano, en que se precisan los nombres de animales, de árboles, refiriéndose leyendas indígenas, sucesos antiguos, y todo lo necesario para dar un giro de veracidad a mi relato." (*Los pasos* 300)<sup>205</sup>

Inventing a narrative to presumably overcome the void of meaning and the loss of purpose on traveling is *the* narrative resource in *Los pasos perdidos*. It makes Levi-Strauss' statement a literal one. Incapable of communicating his experience, the narrator comes up with a fiction based on another novel. In this sense, the presence of *La vorágine* in the novel is part of the ways in which language's relationship with reality is dealt with.

### Quoting Rivera's *La vorágine*

The links between *La vorágine* and *Los pasos perdidos* are many. Both novels have as main characters bourgeoisie artists that escape the boredom of their urban lives; both travel into the interior of the Latin American jungle with their mistresses, whom they love and hate at the same time; they both write as a fundamental way of negotiating their experience within the forest; they both become parents; they both find and lose themselves, as subjects and through space. Both novels, too, are travel diaries narrated in first person, and their voices, language, and

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<sup>205</sup> "What I would sell was a tall story to which I had been putting the finishing touches during the trip: I was held prisoner by a tribe that was suspicious rather than cruel; I finally managed to escape, crossing, all alone, hundreds of miles of jungle; finally, lost and hungry, I reached the 'mission' where they found me. I had in my suitcase a famous novel by a South American writer, giving the names of animals, trees, native legends, long-forgotten events, everything needed to lend a ring of authenticity to my narration" (242-243).

writing enterprises are haunted by texts from the past. Rivera and Carpentier both feel the need to transform language and style to better represent nature; the first transforms *modernismo* into a hyperbolic and fragmented naturalism, and the latter articulates a baroque aesthetic to name the continent. Interestingly enough, they both achieve an akin result. In the most direct sense of the term, these two novels are *similar*. Although many critics have identified their proximity (González Echevarría, Wylie, Rogers, etc), Ramón Felipe Medina's article addresses this topic directly. He identifies "afinidades," "paralelismos," and "extraordinarias coincidencias"<sup>206</sup> between the two texts. Although Medina establishes a complete set of relations among the novels, he also states a clear difference in styles that respond to opposing sensibilities informed by their own aesthetic and social contexts. He claims that "Carpentier, desde una perspectiva más contemporánea, se arrima a una versión más objetiva del mundo" (123).<sup>207</sup> However, I believe Medina's analysis falls short: on the one hand, there is no questioning of what is at stake in the similarities of the two novels and, on the other, claiming Carpentier's vision as "more objective" is very conflictive, to say the least.

Even though the two novels have many similarities in their characters, plot, and structure, I want to focus on the representation of the jungle as a space. The main aspect from which it is possible to claim that *Los pasos perdidos* quotes *La vorágine* is in Carpentier's decision to represent the jungle focusing on the same *instances*. That is, *Los pasos perdidos* reproduces the same forms of observing nature and space as in *La vorágine*: from all the possible ways of depicting the jungle, Carpentier chooses to represent the same aspects from Rivera's novel. What is at stake in showing that Carpentier's novel quotes Rivera's is the recognition that, confronted with the impossibility of a language denotes reality, *Los pasos perdidos* suffices the gap between object and language with more language –another novel. As it will be seen, representation becomes an aphasic act where the object is always circumscribed but never really summoned, making of the jungle a space of and for *the literary*.

*La vorágine* represents the jungle as a space far and beyond –as a space outside the nation. In the famous inaugural claim of the second part of the novel the narrator makes constant references to being in a place removed from the rest of the country, isolated and trapped. "Déjame huir, oh selva," says the voice, "[D]éjame tornar de la tierra de donde vine" (*La vorágine* 190).<sup>208</sup> The claim identifies the jungle as a place outside of the rest of the nation, isolated from what the voice calls "mi país" [my country] (*Lv* 189). In *Los pasos perdidos* there is also a sense of the jungle as an *allá*, a word that is constantly used by the narrator to divide the space of nature and civilization. However, although the novel takes place in a Latin American country (the Orinoco or Greater Amazonia region), and although it makes references to many aspects about the local geography (like indigenous traditions and landscapes), the jungle as an *allá* is disassociated with an actual geographical or political entity. On the contrary, the *allá* in Carpentier's novel is less a politically complex space, and more an *autonomous literary site*. This is seen, in part, through the representation of the jungle as another dimension within the region –as a secret garden with secret doors. This space first appears in a conversation between the narrator and "el griego," a gold seeker that orbits the narrative.

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<sup>206</sup> "affinities," "parallelisms." "extraordinary coincidences" (my translation).

<sup>207</sup> "From a more contemporary perspective, Carpentier is closer to a more objective version of the world" (my translation).

<sup>208</sup> "Let me flee, oh jungle" – "Let me return to the land from which I came" (128).

Cubriendo territorios inmensos –me explicaba-, encerrando montañas, abismos, tesoros, pueblos errantes, vestigios de civilizaciones desaparecidas, la selva era, sin embargo, un mundo compacto, entero, que alimentaba su fauna y sus hombres, modelaba sus propias nubes, armaba sus meteoros, elaboraba sus lluvias: nación escondida, mapa en clave, vasto país vegetal de muy pocas puertas. <<Algo así como el Arca de Noé, donde cupieron todos los animales de la tierra, pero sólo tenía una puerta pequeña>>, acotó el hombrecillo. Para penetrar en ese mundo, el Adelantado había tenido que conseguirse las llaves de secretas entradas: sólo él conocía cierto paso entre dos troncos, único en cincuenta leguas, que conducía a una angosta escalinata de lajas por la que podía descenderse al vasto misterio de los grandes barroquismos telúricos. Sólo él sabía donde estaba la pasarela de bejucos que permitía andar por debajo de la cascada, la poterna de hojarasca, el paso por la caverna de los petroglifos, la ensenada oculta, que conducía a los corredores practicables. El descifraba el código de las ramas dobladas, de las incisiones en las cortezas, de la rama-no-caída-sino-colocada. (189)<sup>209</sup>

The jungle, as seen through the eyes of the gold seeker, is a place of adventure and treasures encoded in an aura of mystery and enchantment. This stereotypical vision of the jungle is highly informed by old colonial tropes that configure the rain forest as a legendary place. The most interesting aspect of this description is not its repetition of worn images, but the depiction of the jungle as an autonomous isolated and closed space, presented as a place outside of geography, as if it resided on another dimension. There is no continuity between the countryside and the jungle. Instead, a wall surrounds it and it only has a unique entrance, and getting in depends on a highly sophisticated method of *reading* the signs of nature. This door is signaled by the inscription of three V's, one on top of the other, on the bark of a tree. Although these inscriptions are real (as Carpentier himself encountered them in his trip), they could be making a reference to Rivera's novel title, *La Vorágine*. What is shown in this representation of the jungle is the evolution of the jungle as a site that shows the limits of the nation, towards the jungle as a site of the *problematization of the literary*. The politics of national territories, the extraction of rubber as a materialization of Amazonia as a commodity, and even the fact that this is not Amazonia anymore but *the jungle*, point to the appropriation of the space as a narrative, novelistic, and literary problem.

The geographical references of *La vorágine* and *Los pasos perdidos* are worth being compared, as well. The two novels include mechanisms of inscribing their narratives into geographical regions that complicate the representation of the jungle. The fifth edition of *La vorágine*, as was discussed in the previous chapter, includes a map of Colombia that attempts to depict the region in which the novel takes place. This map gives a geographical location of the events that occur in the story and sets the novel within the Amazonian region. The presence of the map reinforces the realism of the novel associated with the testimonial depiction of the horrors perpetrated during the rubber economy. In this sense, the map becomes a factual link between reality and the narrative. This map, however, is also very ambiguous; the

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<sup>209</sup> “Despite the vast area of the jungle –he explained to me- embracing mountains, abysses, treasures, nomad peoples, the remains of lost civilizations, it was, nevertheless, a world compact, complete, which fed its fauna and its men, shaped its own clouds, assembled its meteors, brought on its rains. A hidden nation, a map in code, a vast vegetable kingdom with few entrances. ‘Sort of like Noah’s ark, where all the animals of the earth could fit, but with only one small door,’ the little man added. To penetrate this world, the Adelantado had had to find the keys to its secret entrances: he alone knew of a pass between two trees, the only one within a circumference of fifty leagues, leading to a narrow stairway of stones by which it was possible to descend to the vast mystery of immense telluric baroques. He alone knew of the white footbridge under the cascade, the postern gate of brush, the entrance to the cave of the prehistoric stone carvings, the hidden trail that led to practicable passes. He could read the code of broken twigs, incisions on tree trunks, the branch not fallen but placed” (126).

unconventionality of the map and its inclusion within the novelistic machinery make it part of the fiction. In this sense, the map serves a double ambiguous function: it links the fiction to Amazonia, but also reinforces the fictive aspect of the book. The map, then, is symbolic of *La vorágine*'s representational strategy underlining how the novel is caught between testimony, realism, and fiction.

*Los pasos perdidos* also includes a map, or at least a written geographical apparatus titled "Nota" that could be interpreted as a map. This narrative map is part of the novel, but not part of the diary. Its inclusion reveals an authorial presence similar to the one found in *La vorágine*'s para-narrative apparatus, where José Eustasio Rivera appears as part of the fiction. Carpentier's written map serves to inscribe the fiction into a geographical region (the Orinoco River and Roraima mountains), while at the same time it underlines the *autonomy* of the narrative regarding the geographical facts.

Si bien el lugar de acción de los primeros capítulos del presente libro no necesita de mayor ubicación; si bien la capital latinoamericana, las ciudades provincianas, que aparecen más adelante, son meros prototipos, a los que no se ha dado una situación precisa, puesto que los elementos que los integran son comunes a muchos países, el autor cree necesario aclarar, para responder a alguna legítima curiosidad, que a partir del lugar llamado Puerto Anunciación, el paisaje se ciñe a visiones muy precisas de lugares poco conocidos y apenas fotografiados- cuando lo fueron alguna vez.

El río descrito que, en lo anterior, pudo ser cualquier gran río de América, se torna muy exactamente, el Orinoco en su curso superior. El lugar de la mina de los griegos podría situarse no lejos de la confluencia del Vichada. El paso con la triple incisión con forma de <<V>> que señala la entrada de paso secreto, existe, efectivamente, con el Signo, en la entrada del Caño de Guacharaca, situado a unas dos horas de navegación, más arriba del Vichada: conduce, bajo bóvedas de vegetación, a una aldea de indios guahibos, que tiene su atracadero en una ensenada oculta.

La tormenta acontece en un paraje que puede ser el Raudal del Muerto. La capital de las Formas es el monte Autana, con su perfil de catedral gótica. Desde esa jornada, el paisaje del Alto Orinoco y del Autana es trocado por el de la Gran Sabana, cuya visión se ofrece en distintos pasajes de los Capítulos III y IV. Santa Mónica de los Venados es lo que pudo ser Santa Elena del Uarirén, en los primeros años de su fundación... (332)<sup>210</sup>

The "Nota" goes on to explain the similarities between the places and situations described in the novel and the places and situations seen and experienced by Carpentier in his

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<sup>210</sup> Onis' translation of Carpentier's book omits this fundamental part of the narrative. The following is my own translation: "Even though the place of the action of the first chapters of this book does not need location; even though the Latin American capital city, or the provincial cities that also appear in the novel are just prototypes, to which no precise situation has been given because the elements that compose them are common to many countries, the author believes it is necessary to make clear –in order to answer any legitimate curiosity- that from a place called Puerto Anunciación the landscape is rendered to precise visions of not very known or photographed places –that is, if they ever were.

The river described, which in the novel could have been any great river of America, was exactly the Orinoco River in its upper part. The place where the mine of the Greeks is located could be placed not far from the Vichada. The passage with the triple V that marks the entrance to the secret passage exists, as a matter of fact, as a Sign, in the entrance to the Guacharaca River, located more or less at two hours of navigation going up the Vichada River: it leads, under ceilings of vegetation, to a Guahibo Indian reserve, who have a berth on the river bend.

The storm happens in a place that could be the Dead Man's Torrent. The Capital of All Forms is the Autana Mountain, with its silhouette of Gothic Cathedral. From this point on, the landscape of the Orinoco and the Autana regions is changed for that of the Great Savannah, whose vision is offered in different passages of Chapters III and IV. Santa Monica de los Venados is what could have been Santa Elena del Uarirén in its first years of existence...

own travels through the region. The ambiguity created by the presence of the authorial figure is fueled by the insistence on the fact that these places “exist” and that they “respond to a reality” (332). González Echevarría claims that there is a geographical incoherence in Carpentier’s note because it would be “difficult to reach the Great Savanna traveling up (westward) to the Orinoco.”<sup>211</sup> This leads him to conclude that “by making the action of the novel take this geographically impossible detour, Carpentier may be underscoring the fictionality of the text” (*Pilgrim* 168-169). I agree with González Echevarría’s statement about fictionality being underscored. Nevertheless, I don’t believe this is achieved by the appearance of a geographical incoherence, but by the absolute conversion of this geography into a “prototipo” [prototype]. The “Nota” highlights, in a paradoxical way, the autonomy and distance of the jungle in *Los pasos perdidos* with the geographical region to which it makes a reference. This autonomy recalls the novel’s structuralist’s relationship between object and language and, most importantly, bestows a literary independence that reveals the *fictionalization* of the region into a novel. In other words, what is at stake in the use of a map in *Los pasos perdidos* is the signaling of space as a “prototype” or, in other words, space as a literary creation in opposition to a real geographical category.

Besides the representation of the jungle as an *allá* and the use of a geographical apparatus that complicates the fiction, *La vorágine* and *Los pasos perdidos* coincide in their vision and focal points of representation. One of the most noticeable ones is the depiction of the jungle as an impenetrable giant structure that makes human vision difficult. *La vorágine* elaborates a metaphor in which the jungle is seen as an architectural structure seen through the use of words like *bóveda* [vault], *cárcel* [prison – green walls], and *cénit* [zenith]. Within this structure of tall and impenetrable nature, vision is almost impossible:

¿Qué hado maligno me dejó prisionero en tu cárcel verde? Los pabellones de tus ramajes, como inmensa bóveda, siempre están sobre mi cabeza, entre mi aspiración y el cielo claro, que sólo entreveo... ¡Tú me robaste el ensueño del horizonte y sólo tienes para mis ojos la monotonía de tu cénit, por donde pasa el plácido albor, que jamás alumbró las hojarascas de tus senos húmedos! (*La vorágine* 189)<sup>212</sup>

In Carpentier’s narrative the arrival into the jungle’s wall, where the door is located, is described as the appearance of an “inacabable monotonía de lo verde” (221).<sup>213</sup> Further more, the space is initially described like this:

estamos bordeando... una suerte de selva, sin manchas de color, que hunde sus raíces en el agua, alzando un valladar inabordable, absolutamente recto, recto como una empalizada, como una inacabable muralla de árboles erguidos, tronco a tronco hasta el lindero de la corriente, sin un paso aparente, sin una hendidura, sin una grieta. Bajo la luz del sol que se difumina en vahos sobre las hojas húmedas, esa pared vegetal se

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<sup>211</sup> Lúcia Sá, as has been stated some paragraphs above, claims that this incoherence is resolved by taking into consideration the mythical traditions of the region and its geographical distributions.

<sup>212</sup> “Oh, jungle, wedded to silence, mother of solitude and mists! What malignant fate imprisoned me within your green walls? Your foliage, like an immense vault, is between my hopes and the clear skies, of which I see only glimpses... You stole from me the dreams that spring from the broad horizons. You offer my eyes nothing but the dull monotony of your green roof. Over it flows the peaceful down, but never lightning de depths of your humid bosom.” (127)

<sup>213</sup> “the endless monotony of impenetrable greenness” (158).

prolonga hasta el absurdo, acabando por parecer obra de hombres, hecha a teodolito y plomada. (*Los pasos* 221)<sup>214</sup>

Many elements of Carpentier's representation recall Rivera's opening scene. Some of these elements are the presence of one defining color (green), the verticality of the space as a dimensional trait, the impenetrability of the surrounding which poses a problem for sight and light, and the election of sun and the fallen leaves as the two extremes that achieve a complete atmosphere. In addition, words like "valladar" ["fence",] and "pared" ["wall,"] recall the use of the word "cénit" [highest point] as images of unreachable verticality, while they also denote the use of an architectural metaphor to describe the space. Both jungles are revealed from inside and both coincide in describing it as a structure with such height and density that encloses the subject's vision. This form of representation might not necessarily strike the reader as a point of connection between the two texts. However, the revelation of the jungle from within is a unique perspective. To put this into perspective it is important to recall that most narratives from the colony, from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and even other narratives from the twentieth century, prefer to represent the jungle as a landscape seen from a high vision point, or as a panoramic vision seen from the river. The representation from within is a distinctive point of view associated with the vision of the jungle as a prison or hell, which is in itself associated with the rubber extraction system and the brutal conditions within which workers had to survive.

In accordance with a representational focal point from within, both novels move into the depiction of the jungle through its micro-cosmos. *La vorágine* presents an accumulation of detailed events and small instances that affect the traveler's senses, revealing the life of under world:

Aquí, la parásita afrodisíaca que llena el suelo de abejas muertas; la diversidad de flores inmundas que se contraen con sexuales palpitaciones y su olor pegajoso emborracha como una droga; la liana maligna cuya pelusa enceguece a los animales; la pringamosa que inflama la piel, la pepa del curujú que parece irisado globo y sólo contiene ceniza cáustica, la uva purgante, el corozo amargo. (*La vorágine* 296)<sup>215</sup>

In *Los pasos perdidos* the space is seen like this:

Nuestra embarcación se introdujo en ese angosto túnel, con tan poco espacio para deslizarse que las bordas rasparon duramente unas raíces retorcidas. Con los remos, con las manos, había que apartar obstáculos y barreras para llevar adelante esa navegación increíble, en medio de la maleza anegada. Un madero puntiagudo cayó sobre mi hombro con la violencia de un garrotazo, sacándome sangre del cuello. De las ramazones llovía sobre nosotros un intolerable hollín vegetal, impalpable a veces, como un plancton errante en el espacio –pesado, por momentos, como puñados de limalla que alguien hubiera arrojado de lo alto.

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<sup>214</sup> "we are skirting, to a kind of colorless jungle growth, with roots extending into the water, which threw up a solid fence, as straight as a palisade, an endless wall of trees standing trunk to trunk at the very edge of the stream, without sign of an opening, without a cleavage, without a crevice. In the light of the sun, which faded to leaps over the damp leaves, this vegetable wall continued so long that it seemed the work of man's hands, carried out with theodolite and plummet" (159).

<sup>215</sup> "Here the aphrodisiac parasite that covers the ground with dead insects; the disgusting blooms that throb with sensual palpitations, their sticky smell intoxicating as a drug; the malignant liana, the hairs of which blind animals; the *pringamosa* that irritates the skin; the berry of the *curujú*; a rainbow hued globe that holds only a caustic ash; the purging grape; the bitter nut of the *corojó* palm" (231).

Con esto, era un perenne descenso de hebras que encendían la piel, de frutos muertos, de simientes velludas que hacían llorar, de horruras, de polvos cuya fetidez enronaba las caras. (*Los pasos* 222)<sup>216</sup>

Both coincide in the accumulation of “maleza” as an initial element, the presence of a poisonous dust that affects the skin, and the indication of dead fruits and deadly seeds. *Los pasos perdidos* continues like this:

Un empujón de la proa promovió el súbito desplome de un nido de comejenes, roto en alud de arena parda. Pero lo que estaba abajo era tal vez peor que las cosas que hacían sombra. Entre dos aguas se mecían grandes hojas agujereadas, semejantes a antifaces de terciopelo ocre, que eran plantas de anagaza y encubrimiento. Flotaban racimos de burbujas, endurecidas por un matiz de polen rojizo, a las que un aletazo cercano hacía alejarse, de pronto, por el tragante de un estancamiento, con indecisa navegación de holoturia. Más allá eran como gasas, opalescentes, espesas, detenidas en los socavones de una piedra larvada. Una guerra sorda se libraba en los fondos erizados de garfios barbudos –allí donde parecía cochambroso enrevesamiento de culebras. Chasquidos inesperados, súbitas ondulaciones, bofetadas sobre el agua, denunciaban una fuga de seres invisibles que dejaban tras de sí una estela de turbias podredumbres –remolíneos grisáceos, levantados al pie de las cortezas negras moteadas de liendres. Se adivinaba la cercanía de toda una fauna rampante, del lodo eterno, de la glauca fermentación, debajo de aquellas aguas oscuras que olían agriamente, como un flango que hubiera sido amasado con vinagre y carroña, y sobre cuya aceitosa superficie caminaban insectos creados para andar sobre lo líquido: chinches casi transparentes, pulgas blancas, moscas de patas quebradas, diminutas cínifes que eran apenas un punto vibrátil en la luz verde-pues tanto era el verdor atravesado por unos pocos rayos de sol, que la claridad se teñía, al bajar de las frondas, de un color de musgo que se tornaba color de fondo de pantanos al buscar las raíces de las plantas. (*Los pasos* 222-223)<sup>217</sup>

*La vorágine* also describes the micro-cosmos of the jungle as a site of putrefaction and fermentation: “a fuerza de almacenar en años enteros hojarascas, chamizas, frutas, se desfondan como un saco de podredumbre” (*Lv* 295); “por todas partes el hálito de fermento, los vapores calientes, el sopor de la muerte, el marasmo de la creación” (*Lv* 296).<sup>218</sup> Rivera’s text also includes as part of his representation a complex system of animal life, mostly happening at the level of insects and underworld creatures, like “reptiles ciegos, salamandras mohosas, arañas peludas,” and in this world “vomitan los branqueros millones de hormigas devastadoras que recortan el manto de la montaña y por anchas veredas regresan al túnel, como abanderadas del

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<sup>216</sup> “And yet our boat managed to make its way through this tunnel, with so little room to spare that its sides grated against the gnarled roots. Oars and hands had to push aside obstacles and barriers to continue this incredible trip through the submerged undergrowth. A sharp stick fell on my shoulder with such force that it made my neck bleed. The branches rained a vegetable soot on us, almost impalpable at times, like plankton of the air. And there was the continuous moving through vines that irritated the skin, dead fruits, dust that begrimed our faces” (160).

<sup>217</sup> “The shove of the prow loosed a nest of ants from a hole in the sand. But what lay beneath us was even worse than the products of the shade. Under the water great riddled leaves waved like dominoes of ocher velvet, lures and traps. On the surface floated clusters of dirty bubbles, varnished over the reddish pollen, which a passing fin sent drifting off into the eddy of a pool with the wavering motion of a sea cucumber. A kind of thick, opalescent gauze hung over the opening of a rock teeming with hidden life. A silent war was going on in those depths bristling with hairy talons, where everything seemed a slimy tangle of snakes. Strange clicking noises, sudden ripples, the splash of waters told of the rush of invisible beings leaving behind them a way of murky decay. One felt the presence of rampant fauna, of the primeval slime, of the green fermentation beneath the dark waters, which gave off a sour reek like a mud of vinegar and carrion, over whose oily surface moved insects made to walk on the water: ching-bugs, white fleas, high-jointed flies, tiny mosquitoes that were hardly more than shimmering dots in the green light, for the green, shot through by an occasional ray of sun, was so intense that the light as it filtered through the leaves had the color of moss dyed the hue of swamp-bottoms as it sought the roots of the plants” (160-161).

<sup>218</sup> “everywhere is the creek of fermentation, steaming shadows, the sopor of death, the nerving process of procreation” (230).

exterminio, con sus gallardetes de hojas y de flores. El comején enferma los árboles con su lepra suplicatoria mientras va carcomiéndoles los tejidos y pulverizándoles la corteza” (296).<sup>219</sup>

Moving away from the micro-cosmos of the jungle, *La vorágine* depicts vegetation as a ferocious system of creatures that fight for survival: “Árboles deformes sufren el cautiverio de las enredaderas advenedizas, que a grandes trechos los ayuntan con las palmeras y se descuelgan en curva elástica, semejantes a redes mal extendidas;” “Por doquiera el bejuco de matapalo – rastrero pulpo de las florestas- pega sus tentáculos a los troncos, acogotándolos y retorciéndolos, para injertárselos y transfundírselos en metempsicosis dolorosas” (295).<sup>220</sup> This struggle, says the narrator, is “[T]odo por el júbilo breve de vivir una hora más!” (297).<sup>221</sup> *Los pasos perdidos* imitates this perception of nature: “era la vegetación feraz, entretejida, trabada en intrínquilis de bejucos, de matas, de enredaderas, de garfios, de matapalos” (226).<sup>222</sup> In this ferocious vegetation, the narrator says, “las especies estaban empeñadas en una milenaria lucha por treparse unas sobre otras, ascender, salir a la luz, alcanzar el sol” (226).<sup>223</sup> In this survival of the fittest death is also present, and both Rivera and Carpentier chose the same image to exemplify the result of the battle. Rivera writes the following: “Entretanto, la tierra cumple las sucesivas renovaciones: al pie del coloso que se derrumba, el germen que brota; en medio de las miasmas, el polen que vuela” (296).<sup>224</sup> Carpentier, on his part, depicts the same image, and even uses the same word “coloso” to denote the giant tree:

un buen día, el rayo acababa de derribarlo [al árbol] sobre el deleznable mundo de abajo. Entonces, el coloso, nunca salido de la prehistoria, acababa por desplomarse, aullando por todas las astillas, arrojando palos a los cuatro vientos, rajado en dos, lleno de carbón y de fuego celestial, para mejor romper y quemar todo lo que estaba a sus pies. Cien árboles perecían en su caída, aplastados, derribados, desgajados, tirando de lianas que, al reventar, se disparaban hacia el cielo como cuerdas de arcos. (227)<sup>225</sup>

One last aspect in which *Los pasos perdidos* mimics *La vorágine* is in the representation of the jungle as a place of confusion and deceit, where reality is always questionable. In both texts vegetation is a treacherous and shifting entity with human characteristics. While in the 1924 novel it has a mysterious and evil character, in Carpentier they have the will to escape humans.

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<sup>219</sup> “scattering blind reptiles, rusty salamanders” – “The *bachaqueros* vomit forth trillions of devastating ants. These mow down the mantle of the jungles and return to their tunnels over the wide swaths they cut, carrying leaves aloft like the banners of an army of extinction. The *comején* grub gnaws at the trees like quick-spreading syphilis, boring unseen from within, rotting tissue and pulverizing bark, until the weight of branches that are still living bring the giants to the ground” (230).

<sup>220</sup> “Deformed trees were held imprisoned by creepers. Lianas bound them together in a death grip. Stretched from tree to palm in long elastic curves, like carelessly hung nets” - “Everywhere the *matapalo* –the pulpy creeper of the forests- sticks its tentacles on the tree-trunks, twisting and strangling them, injecting itself into them, and fusing with them in painful metempsychosis” (230).

<sup>221</sup> “All for the brief joy of a few more hours of life” (231).

<sup>222</sup> “exuberant vegetation, a tangle of lianas, bushes, creepers, briars, parasite growths” (164).

<sup>223</sup> “every species was engaged in the age-old struggle to climb over the other, rise, reach the light, the sun” (164).

<sup>224</sup> “Meanwhile the earth continues its successive renovations: at the foot of the colossus that falls, new germs are budding; pollen is flying in the midst of miasmas; everywhere is the creek of fermentation, steaming shadows, the sopor of death, the nerving process of procreation.” (230)

<sup>225</sup> “until one day a ray of lightning finally cast it [the tree] down into the shifting lower depths. Thereupon the colossus, unshaken since prehistoric times, crashed, groaning in all its splinters, hurling branches right and left, riven, al carbon and celestial fire, crashing and burning all that lay at its foot. A hundred trees died with it, crushed, uprooted, shivered, bringing down with them lianas that shot upward like bowstrings as they snapped” (165).



In both spaces, as well, nature has the power to confuse human subjectivity. In *La vorágine* the jungle dazzles and sickens human senses to the point of confusion and hallucination, and in *Los pasos perdidos* it creates a vertiginous effect on the observer.

The most important aspect of this comparison between the two texts is less the identification of a source, and more the realization of the impossibility of an “original” representation of the jungle space. If *Los pasos perdidos* is thematically structured around the idea of the “genuine,” then the quotation of *La vorágine* points to the impossibility of, precisely, a “genuine” form of depiction. As Martin Jay has pointed out in the already quoted passage (*Songs of Experience*), there are no genuine experiences for these cannot be unmediated by other discursive references. By copying *La vorágine*’s rendition of space, Carpentier’s novel makes a reproduction that is both distanced and unauthentic, not only undermining its own representation, but *La vorágine*’s supposedly original rendition as a whole. It does so to the extent that it makes *La vorágine* lose its context and the power of its historical and ideological position. In this sense, this mechanism of quotation highlights the loss of “aura.” Benjamin defined “aura” as that which is jeopardized and lost by the mechanical reproduction of an object:

The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object. (221)

If *La vorágine*’s and *Los pasos perdidos*’ authenticity is undermined, though, something else is gained: the emergence of the jungle as a space of literature. Rid of the question of reproducibility and authenticity, the jungle is established as a site of the accumulation and transformation of literature: the jungle as a laboratory for fiction and representation, the jungle as the site of and for literature.

On the other hand, the reproduction of the jungle that occurs in *Los pasos perdidos* is also a commentary on what Adorno has called the “culture industry.” As it has been mentioned before, the narrator of the novel lives in a world void of meaning where his artistic productions are objectified by the market. In this sense, the inability to produce an authentic artistic representation of the jungle also signals the inability of the character to escape the capitalist context in which he finds himself. Not in vain we read that the “novel” he is writing will be *sold* as a replacement of his true experience in the middle of the forest.

The baroque character of the jungle in *Los pasos perdidos* is another element that connects Carpentier’s novel with Rivera’s *La vorágine*. In his famous essay “Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso” [“The Baroque and the Real Marvelous”] the Cuban writer says that the 1924 Colombian novel deepens the baroque, implying that the jungle depicted by Rivera is unmistakably baroque. Early scholars would have considered this interpretation of *La vorágine* imprecise; Rivera has been repeatedly seen as a *modernista*, or *centenarista*, or even a naturalist (as seen in Neale Silva’s book). However, *La vorágine*’s jungle is represented as a baroque space, and further than that, it stands at the origin of Carpentier’s baroque project. Mark Anderson identifies the emergence of the baroque in early century narratives of the region (da Cunha, Rangel, Rivera) as a problem of visual perspective that switches visual and rational apprehension of space for a haptic sensorial interpretation. “I argue,” says Anderson,

that these texts' occasional baroque-ness emerges in response to movements of confrontation with the opacity of the Amazonian aquatic and vegetal surfaces themselves. These opaque surfaces refract traveler's gazes, provoking seemingly baroque linguistic texture as the textual representation of the jungle's impermeable entanglement as well as the chaotic theoretical folding the writer's minds undergo as they try to make sense of an environment that is as vast as it is intricate. (60)

Anderson identifies this "opacity" as a response to the emergence of the jungle as the defying *Other* in the scientific, mercantile, and capitalist enterprise of European expansion in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The jungle was "a key cognitive obstacle whose complexity so vexed available modes of representation that it forced a rift in nineteenth-century life sciences" (Anderson 62). Anderson adheres to an understanding of the baroque as a response to the early modern Cartesian mindset. This baroque representation responded to the fact that the jungle was also a workplace in which rubber tappers lived in infamous conditions. In this sense, the impossibility of apprehensive visualization, the opacity of the space to a cognitive enterprise, and the biopolitical and sociological complexity led, in text's like *La vorágine*, to a "baroque proliferation of cognitive fragments that can never add up to a whole" (Anderson 71).

From a historical perspective the baroque emerges as a response to the Cartesian revolution and as a counteractive response to fight back the loss of authority of the Catholic Church in the context of the Reformation. It consolidated as an aesthetic of excess and intensity, with a formal and thematic depth achieved by the accumulation of layers both in surfaces and meaning. It is an aesthetic characterized by a proliferation of centers that destabilize the equilibrium of the whole, a complexity pointing towards a difficulty of rationalization, and an accumulation that amounts to the recognition of the artificial and crafted nature of the artistic representation. It served a subjugation purpose in the context of the European expansion, taken as a tool of ideological oppression into the newly conquered territories of the Spanish Empire, and it became enriched within this context. Given its accumulative nature, it became not only the signature aesthetic of the colony, but it permitted the inclusion of indigenous and African worldviews throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, granting it its domain as the Latin American founding aesthetic.

In Europe and in Latin America the complexity of the world put forth by the baroque was silenced by the emergence of neoclassicism at the end of the eighteenth. The neoclassic period, nurtured by positivism, saw the baroque as obscure and intricate. However, at the end of the nineteenth century, the baroque began its re-entrance into aesthetic fields, as artists and historians "began to (re) discover in the Baroque certain strategies of figuration and fragmentation that suited their own aesthetical and ideological purposes" (Parkinson Zamora and Kaup 4). By the mid 1950s, mostly through the leadership of Cuban artists like Lezama Lima, Alejo Carpentier, and later on Severo Sarduy, the baroque was re-appropriated it as the Latin American postcolonial aesthetic. This latter re-appropriation conveyed a counter-hegemonic ideological potential within itself.

Although the baroque can be historically identified as an emerging form of art in the early modern context, it has been often described not as a stage, but as a mode of artistic production, and even as an epistemological and representational paradigm that transcends a question of history or style. Eugenio D'Ors, followed by Carpentier, for instance, conceive the baroque as a form of understanding and thus depicting the world, and not just as a historical category. For Carpentier, the baroque was the natural form of expression of the Latin American

continent. This is one of the reasons for which he identified Rivera's work as baroque. He defined it as an "arte en movimiento, un arte de pulsión, un arte que va de un centro hacia afuera" (*De lo real* 173). The core of the continent's baroque-ness relies in its colonial history: America, states Carpentier, is a "continente de simbiosis, de mutaciones, de vibraciones, de mestizajes" (*De lo real* 179). He affirms that

toda simbiosis, todo mestizaje, engendra un barroquismo. El barroquismo Americano se acrece con la criolledad, con el sentido del criollo, con la conciencia que cobra el hombre Americano, sea hijo de blanco venido de Europa, sea hijo de negro Africano, sea indio nacido en el continente... [El barroquismo está] la conciencia de ser otra cosa, de ser una cosa nueva, de ser una simbiosis, de ser un criollo; y el espíritu criollo de por sí es un espíritu barroco. (*De lo real* 183)<sup>226</sup>

Carpentier identifies the colonial encounter –the "symbiosis"– as the founding principal of Latin America's baroque character. What he previously described as the coexistence of multiple realities and worldviews becomes integrated here into a "barroquismo." In other words, into a one complex, de-centered, and integrated reality of multiple textures and outings. His comment on "mestizaje" as inherently baroque proposes the "hombre Americano" as a subject with a different consciousness, somehow biologically and culturally different. This difference is less a re-statement of Europe's *other*, but more of a proposal of a consciousness and subjecthood that resists its placement into European categories and thus has a subversive potential. The resulting subject of this "symbiosis" would be, ironically, the "authentic" American man. Added to this, the baroque-ness of America is also a matter of the continent's nature: "Nuestro continente es barroco por la arquitectura..., por el enrevesamiento y la complejidad de su naturaleza y su vegetación, por la policromía de cuanto nos circunda, por la pulsión telúrica de los fenómenos a que estamos todavía sometidos" (*De lo real* 189).<sup>227</sup>

As seen through these explanations, Carpentier identifies the baroque as a consequence of the continent's colonial history and the character of its nature. Yet, the highest stake in Carpentier's baroque is a matter of language, style, and discourse, and therein lays its appropriation of Rivera's text. The role of the writer, even more than revealing a sociological identity, is to create a style that mimics such reality: "Tengo que lograr con mis palabras un barroquismo paralelo al barroquismo del paisaje del trópico templado," says Carpentier (*De lo real* 191).<sup>228</sup> According to him, colonial chroniclers lacked the language to describe the American reality and the role of the Latin American contemporary writer is to find a language and discourse that resolves this insufficiency of language. However, as seen through the narrator of *Los pasos perdidos*, finding a language and writing about the jungle is almost an impossible task. To solve this, then, the novel chooses *La vorágine* as an outing.

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<sup>226</sup> "Every symbiosis, every *mestizaje*, generates baroque-ness. The baroque-ness from America is increased by creole contexts; with the sense of being creole, with the consciousness gained by the American man, whether he is the son of a European white, from a black African, or if he's Indian born in the continent... [The American baroque] is in the consciousness of being something new, of being a symbiosis, of partaking in the creole identity; and the creole spirit is in itself a baroque spirit" (my translation).

<sup>227</sup> "Our continent is baroque because of the architecture -the complexity of its nature and vegetation; because of the polychrome character of what is around us, for the telluric momentum of the phenomena to which we are submitted" (my translation).

<sup>228</sup> "I have to achieve with my words a baroque-ness paralleled to the baroque-ness of the mild tropical landscape" (my translation).

The jungle as a baroque world is a site of excess, composed of layers of clustered and unruly nature, moving in all directions. Objects and forms are always shifting, as if they were constantly impersonating and imitating different creatures. Structurally, the space is enclosed and heavy, often described with architectural images such as “cathedral” or “tunnel” and with a play of light and shadow that intensifies the density and impenetrability of the space. The jungle appears in *Los pasos perdidos* as a baroque space through the accumulation and fragmentation of the natural world, but above all as a problem of language. On the one hand, the narrator describes the space through images of shifting and mimicking identities, calling it a “proliferación barroca.” “el mundo de la mentira, de la trampa y del falso semblante; allí todo era disfraz, estratagema, juego de apariencias, metamorfosis” (*Los pasos* 228). On the other hand, this reality of shifting appearances implies a problem of language in the sense that objects are difficult to name. In the following example the idea of an un-apparent nature transforms into a problem of denomination, where the voice struggles to name and identify the animal or plant being described.

Aquí todo parecía otra cosa, creándose un mundo de apariencias que ocultaba la realidad, poniendo muchas verdades en entredicho. Los caimanes que acechaban en los bajos fondos de la selva anegada, inmóviles, con las fauces en espera, parecían maderos podridos, vestidos de escaramujos: los bejucos parecían reptiles y las serpientes parecían lianas, cuando sus pieles no tenían nervaduras de maderas preciosas, ojos de ala de falena, escamas de ananá o anillas de coral: las plantas acuáticas se apretaban en alfombra tupida, escondiendo el agua que les corría debajo, fingiéndose vegetación de tierra muy firme; las cortezas caídas cobraban muy pronto una consistencia de laurel en salmuera, y los hongos eran como coladas de cobre, como espolvoreos de azufre, junto a la falsedad de un camaleón demasiado rama, demasiado lapizlázuli, demasiado pomo estriado de un amarillo intenso, simulación, ahora, de salpicaduras de sol caídas a través de hojas que nunca dejaban pasar el sol entero [...] Mundo del lagarto-cohombro, la castaña-erizo, la crisálida-ciempiés, la larva de carne zanahoria y el pez eléctrico que fulminaba desde el pozo de las linazas. (*Los pasos* 228)<sup>229</sup>

The first attempt of naming starts with the use of a comparison “parecían” [“seemed”], but it quickly moves into a list, as if the accumulation provided a better sense of the objects that made up the space. Following this, the narrator opts for a simile, indicating that some elements were “como” [“like”] other elements, moving then into syncretic metaphors, complicating the forms of comparisons, like when he says “camaleón demasiado rama.”<sup>230</sup> Finally, the description chooses to create new words by adding a hyphen between two despairing creatures, like “largarto-cohombro” [“lizard-cucumber”]. The baroque nature of the image described in this paragraph recall’s Deleuze’s definition of the baroque through the idea of the *fold*: as a shifting,

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<sup>229</sup> “Everything here seemed something else, thus creating a world of appearances that concealed reality, casting doubt on many truths. The alligators lurking in the depths of the swamps, motionless, jaws ready, seemed rotten, scale-covered logs. The vines seemed snakes, the snakes vines when their skin did not simulate the grains of precious woods, their eyes the markings of moth wings, their scales those of pineapple or coral rings. The aquatic plants formed a thick carpet, hiding the water that flowed below, mimicking the vegetation of the solid earth. The fallen bark soon acquired the consistency of pickled laurel leaves, and the fungi were like congealed copper drippings sprinkled with sulfur. The chameleons were twigs, lapis lazuli, lead bright stripped in yellow, imitating the splashes of sunlight filtering through the leaves, which never allowed it to come fully. The jungle is 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, the carrot-larva, the electric fish that electrocutes from the dregs of the slime” (166).

<sup>230</sup> Translated by Osis as “chameleons were twigs,” but a literal translation would look similar to “very twig chameleons.”

ever multiplying, non-linear surface –a cave within a cave of caves-, that never has only one defining nature. When looked upon carefully, the hectic, shifting, and accumulative nature of the space comes less from the amount of objects and more from the circumvention of language (the folding of language). In other words, the complexity of the quoted paragraph highlights, more than anything, an effort to tame language and make it functional in its representation of the jungle.

Cova, the narrator of *La vorágine*, faces the same difficulty. The rhetorical epicenter of Rivera's novel arrives when Cova realizes that the domesticating aesthetic of *modernismo* is not the proper way to represent the jungle: “¿Cuál es aquí la poesía de los retiros, dónde están las mariposas que parecen flores translúcidas, los pájaros mágicos, el arroyo cantor? ¡Pobre fantasía de los poetas que sólo conocen las soledades domesticadas!” (296).<sup>231</sup> In an attempt to find a better style and language of representation, Cova lists an accumulative account of what he sees, signaled by a hectic and un-located “aquí” [“here”]: “Aquí, los respuestas de sapos hidrónicos, las malezas de cerros misántropos, los rebalses de canos podridos. Aquí, la parásita afrodisíaca...; la diversidad de flores inmundas...; la liana maligna...” etc (296).<sup>232</sup> This accumulation also signals the insufficiency of language to represent space, and points to a problem in language as a form to denote reality.

Irlemar Chiampi's interpretation of Carpentier's baroque as aphasia is helpful to explain the novel's complication of language. The struggle to tame it and make it represent the object –a struggle seen in the proliferation of attempts to depict it- is seen by Chiampi an aphasic paradigm. There is an excess and a “derroche” [outpuring] that while attempting it, it is quite opposite to a mimetic representation. More than showing and signaling the object, it is a symptom of “el malestar que el narrador [atesta] ante lo innombrable,”<sup>233</sup> becoming an enterprise that is both the desire and the impossibility of mimetism (105). Chiampi explains: “Un tipo de afasia –la de la similitud- figura la indecibilidad de los aspectos históricos y naturales de América, desplegándose en una retórica barroquista” (112).<sup>234</sup> This aphasia “asoma la conciencia de la arbitrariedad de las palabras (o hermogenismo, según Gennete), cuando entran en escena la disimilitud y la diferencia que separan los signos y las cosas” (103).<sup>235</sup> Language, concludes Chiampi, is only similar to itself. As a result of this, Chiampi proposes that *simulation* becomes a way to alleviate the impossibility of language to denote reality: “La diferencia entre el bloqueo real que produce una regresión verbal y el pseudobloqueo, de carácter poético, que se abre a una eclosión verbal, está en la simulación. La simulación es un artificio, pero es asimismo el síntoma

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<sup>231</sup> “Where is that solitude that poets sing of? Where are those butterflies like translucent flowers, the magic birds, those singing streams? Poor fantasies of those who know only domesticated retreats!” (231).

<sup>232</sup> “Here the aphrodisiac parasite that covers the ground with dead insects; the disgusting blooms that throb with sensual palpitations, their sticky smell intoxicating as a drug; the malignant liana” (231).

<sup>233</sup> “the uncomfortable feeling that the narrator experiences in the face of the un-namable” (my translation).

<sup>234</sup> “A type of aphasia –that of the similarity- configures the un-speakable nature of the historical and natural aspects of America, unfolding into a baroque aesthetic” (my translation).

<sup>235</sup> “stages a consciousness of the random nature of words (or hermogenism, according to Gennete) when the un-similarity and difference of the things and their signs come into stage” (my translation).

de un desorden que, si no opera una regresión real, sí opera un deseo de regresión original del primer nombramiento” (113).<sup>236</sup>

Aphasia and simulation, or the impossibility of representing the object and the nostalgic desire to go back to the original naming, explain the importance of *La vorágine* as a quoted and imitated text in *Los pasos perdidos*. Confronted with the impossibility of naming the jungle, Carpentier’s recourse is to represent the jungle through another text, solving aphasia with another aphasic discourse, creating a *mis en abyme* of language that creates a linguistic inflation in the economy of representation. Literature uses literature to suffice the gap between reality and words, and in the meantime the object –Amazonia- loses the dimensions of its presence and becomes a literary trope, a jungle (a jungle of words). What occurs in *Los pasos perdidos* is not the representation of the Amazonia, but the creation of the jungle as a literary space –a space of literature.

### **The Consolidation of the “Novela de la selva” (and its Post-colonial Criticism)**

The *simulation* of which Irlemar Chiampi writes about is already signaled in the text itself. As the narrator points out, the reader is traveling through “el mundo de la mentira, de la trampa y del falso semblante; allí todo era disfraz, estratagema, juego de apariencias, metamorfosis” (*Los pasos* 228).<sup>237</sup> What we are reading is not what we think we are reading (the fold, again). The reader is not really observing the jungle but a representation carefully crafted with literary lies. It is false, just an illusion or an appearance. Further than that, it is a strategy composed of misleading props. He exposes it clearly in his return to civilization: “lo que venderé, pues, es una patraña que he ido repasando durante el viaje” (300).<sup>238</sup> These references point to the elaboration of the jungle as a *fiction*. That is, they point to the creation of the jungle as a literary fictional space of the novel. In the following paragraphs I will analyze the ways in which *Los pasos perdidos* reflects about the genre of the novel. Not only the text is problematizing language, writing, and representation, but also pointing to the idea that all these reflections are geared towards the creation of a novelistic artifact: to the creation of the “novela de la selva.”

Lydia de León Hazera’s 1971 book titled *La novela de la selva hispanoamericana. Nacimiento, desarrollo y transformación* [The Spanish American Jungle Novels: Origin, Development, and Transformation] is one of the first attempts to create a thorough critical discourse of the emergence and consolidation of what in the Latin American tradition has been called “novelas de la selva.” She identifies the genre as “un producto del anhelo americanista del siglo XIX que buscaba crear una literatura autóctona” (11)<sup>239</sup>, and identifies Rivera’s *La vorágine* as the basic prototype. Hazera traces the evolution of the novels focusing in a thematic development of the jungle throughout the last two centuries. According to her, the “novelas de la

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<sup>236</sup> “The difference between the actual impossibility of naming, produced by a verbal regression, and the pseudo-impossibility, produced by the poetic outpour of words, relies in the recognition of simulation. Simulation is an artifice, but it is also the symptom of a malfunction that stages a desire to go back to the original and straightforward naming of things” (my translation).

<sup>237</sup> “The jungle is the world of deceit, subterfuge, duplicity; everything there is disguise, stratagem, artifice, metamorphosis” (166).

<sup>238</sup> “What I would sell was a tall story to which I had been putting the finishing touches during the trip” (242).

<sup>239</sup> “a products of an American 19<sup>th</sup> century desire that sought to create an autochthonous literature” (my translation).

selva” find their origin in the Romantic period in the early 1800s, when nature becomes invested with an emotional and subjective weight. This leads her to propose texts like Sarmiento’s *Facundo* (1845), Isaac’s *María* (1867), or Bello’s *Silva a la agricultura en la Zona Tórrida* (1826) as sources for the interest in nature as an epicenter for the continent’s autochthonous discourse, which the jungle eventually exemplifies in its best. Hazera’s analysis, however, does not underline the ways in which the “novelas de la selva” reflect on the act of representation and language. I believe this is a key factor in determining when the genre *became a genre*. Although there is an undeniable literary tradition that has the topic of the Latin American nature at its center, and specifically the jungle, it is only when this tradition reflects on itself (and starts quoting itself) that a conscience of a genre surfaces. Added to this, it is only when it starts calling itself a fiction and a *novel* that the term “novela de la selva” consolidates. Within the greater corpus of jungle narratives, I believe it is *Los pasos perdidos* that does all of this and thus consolidates the existence of a genre.

There are multiple references to the act of writing a novel. When the characters first enter the jungle, the narrator notices the space and the behavior of those who surround him, and notes that such observations “[dan] visos de realidad a la *novela* que, por la autenticidad del decorado, estoy fraguando” (221).<sup>240</sup> This indicates that the entire experience is already thought of as a elements for and for a novel, and underlines the idea of the jungle as a theatrical stage that, paradoxically, seems authentic. This play of words recalls the theater stage in which the novel begins and its “árboles de mentira” (222) [fake trees], while it also reinforces the idea of the jungle as a “falso semblante” [false]. Later on, when the narrator realizes that back home he has been the object of speculation, he writes the following: “Alguien –no saben decirme quién- ha dicho allá que estoy extraviado en la selva, tal vez prisionero de indios sanguinarios. Se ha creado una *novela* en torno a mi persona, que incluye la insidiosa hipótesis de que yo haya sido torturado” (290).<sup>241</sup> Novels, according to this quote, seem to be the only possible way to imagine the fate of a person in the jungle. Lastly, when Mouche, the French mistress, returns from the jungle, she is interviewed to tell her version of the events. The narrator, who reads the interview, writes what follows: “Se presenta [Mouche] como una estudiosa de la astrología, que se aprovecha de la misión a un amigo para acercarse a las nociones cosmogónicas de los indios más primitivos. Completa su *novela* confirmando que abandonó voluntariamente la empresa, allí donde la derribara el paludismo” (303).<sup>242</sup> These three examples of the use of the word “novela” can be interpreted in two ways. On the first hand, they reveal the meta-fictional nature of the book as a fictional artifact. On the other hand, it relates the words *novel* and *lie* in the same semantic field. In this sense, novels are an act of fiction, a mischievous appearance that tricks into believing that something *is* when it is not. If the jungle is seen as the world of simulations and lies, and the novel is precisely that which tells a lie, there is a conceptual trick being played: a novel about the jungle is an accumulation of lies. This signals the autonomy of the genre as an

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<sup>240</sup> “this gave an air of reality to the setting of the novel I was forging” (159).

<sup>241</sup> “Somebody –they didn’t know the name- had said back there that I was lost in the jungle, possibly a prisoner of head-hunting Indians. I had become the hero of a novel, which included the hypothesis that I had been tortured” (223).

<sup>242</sup> “She presented herself as a student of astrology who had taken advantage of this mission entrusted to a friend to acquaint herself with the cosmogonic concepts of the most primitive Indians. She wound up her tale [*novela*, in Spanish] by stating that she had been forced to give up her undertaking when stricken by malaria” (246).

independent discursive apparatus, anchored not in reality, but in itself, creating, once again, a representational fold that, according to Deleuze, is so characteristic of the baroque.

The appearance of a reflection of the genre of the novel complicates the relationship between language and reality. Writing becomes an obsolete practice when it comes to taming and apprehending it. This inability to fully experience the jungle translates into the inefficiency of writing as a form of apprehending the space:

Recuerdo ahora la rara mirada que me dirigía [Rosario], cuando me veía escribir febrilmente, durante días enteros, allí donde escribir no respondía a necesidad alguna. Los mundos nuevos tienen que ser vividos antes que explicados. Quienes aquí viven no lo hacen por convicción intelectual; creen, simplemente, que la vida llevadera es esta y no la otra. Prefieren este presente al presente de los hacedores del Apocalipsis. El que se esfuerza por comprender demasiado, el que sufre las zozobras de una conversión, el que puede abrigar una idea de renuncia al abrazar las costumbres de quienes forjan sus destinos sobre este lógamo primero, en lucha trabada con las montañas y los árboles, es hombre vulnerable por cuanto ciertas potencias del mundo que ha dejado a sus espaldas siguen actuando sobre él. (329)<sup>243</sup>

The jungle had to be lived, not written, says the narrator. Like Lévi-Strauss, the protagonist realizes the in-transmitability of his experience, and accepts that he cannot escape the cultural frame that structures him and his writing. The idea of the “genuine,” a certain return to the matrix of civilization, reveals itself impossible. As the narrator states at the end of his journey, Sisyphus had only been living a dream vacation that has reached an end (330). This experience of failure is the ultimate topic of the novel: the impossibility of apprehending nature, of becoming part of it, of leaving behind the “origins.” The result, however, is the act of writing a novel. In this sense, *Los pasos perdidos* recalls the idea of the novel as the result of what Lukacs has called a “transcendental homelessness” (41). For the critic, the novel appears as a consequence of the loss of unity and meaning in life, as a reflection of “an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality” (56). In the world of the novel representation becomes problematized, “the outside world cannot be represented;”

both the parts and the whole of the outside world defy any forms of directly sensuous representation. They acquire life only when they can be related to either to the life-experiencing interiority of the individual lost in their labyrinth, or to the observing and creating eye of the artist’s subjectivity: when they become objects of moods of reflection. (79)

The novel, according to Lukacs, signals the impossibility of meaning and unity in the appearance of *form* in itself; *form* highlights the incompleteness of the world and, as well, attempts a reconstruction of this reality, a simulation of a coherent and meaningful world. Understanding the novel as the loss of immanence of life is also a way to returning to the baroque of the text. Both seem to attempt a coherence of a world that has lost its center, and

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<sup>243</sup> “I recalled now the strange way she had looked at me when she saw me writing feverishly for days on end, there where writing fulfilled no useful purpose. New worlds had to be lived before they could be analyzed. Those who lived there did not do so out of any intellectual conviction; they simply thought this, and not the other, was the good life. They preferred this present to the present of the makers of the Apocalypse. The one who made too much of an effort to understand, the one who underwent the agonies of a conversion, the one whose idea was that of renunciation when he embraced the customs of those who forged their destinies in this primeval slime in a hand-to-hand struggle with the mountains and the trees, was vulnerable because certain forces of the world he had left behind continued to operate in him” (277).



in which the exterior and interior have become indistinguishable categories. The novel is the genre of a world in which the fold becomes the structuring principle of reality. As Ian Buchanan says, this fold is “a response to the difficulty of creating a non-centered, non-totalized, but at the same time non-chaotic philosophy” (125).

In *Los pasos perdidos* this “transcendental homelessness” is seen in the image of the narrator as a Sisyphus, in its inability to find the “genuine,” and in the impossibility to write a comprehensive account of that which is irrevocably lost, the matrix that gives sense to it all. The novel, then, appears as a *form* that attempts the reconstruction of what has been lost, a form of reconstruction of the “authentic.” The intertextual mechanism with which the novel operates –the quoting of *La vorágine*– reinforces the depth of the loss, while it also underlines the conscience of the genre and of the form. Lukacs affirms that it is in the “inability of the outside world... to achieve real completeness” that the novel finds its autonomy and independence. “Art,” says Lukacs, “the visionary reality of our world made to our measure, has thus become independent: it is no longer a copy, for all the models have gone; it is a created totality, for the natural unity of the metaphysical spheres has been destroyed forever” (37). In this sense, *Los pasos perdidos*’ conscience of genre implies a radical independence and autonomy from the world it supposedly wants to convey: the jungle is nothing else than a novelistic creation –a literary trope.

Antonio Benítez-Rojo extends the idea of the novel’s autonomy even further. In his reading of Carpentier’s novel he says that “there are no substantial reasons for subordinating the language of the novel to any other language,” (180) arguing that a post-modern era of representation has reached the literary discourse.

It now seems banal to many of us to seek the legitimation of the novel’s discourse within any of the great philosophic, economic, or sociological fables of the past. We are now in the era of *Blow up*. The terms *unity, coherence, truth, synthesis, origin, legitimacy, dialectical contradiction*, and others of the sort break down... A point is reached at which the “original” representation falls apart –it always falls apart... Everything comes down to fiction, game, experimentation. For many, it is the sign of the new era. (180)

The novel’s independence, reached by the genre’s complication of representational practices, and by the inclusion of a reflection of itself, consolidates, thus, the emergence of the “*novelas de la selva*.” The subgenre appears, true, as a lineage of literature that reflects on the role of nature in the modernizing process of the continent, but above all, as a consolidation of the novel as a literary artifact that chooses the jungle to stage the limits of representation- the jungle as a laboratory for fiction.

The consolidation of a novelistic tradition that problematizes the representation of the jungle leads to the consolidation of a genre in itself, but it also opens up questions about the actual jungle in Latin America. The word “jungle” in itself signals this problem. Is Amazonia the jungle? When does the word “jungle” become relevant? What is it a sign of? Does it continue or does it interrupt the consumption of Amazonia? The pivotal, but also hard, question is: How to return to Amazonia from the trope of the jungle? In texts like the ones by Rivera and Carpentier, Amazonia starts a process of becoming-a-trope. The appearance of the “jungle” makes Amazonia invisible, with all its sociological and environmental importance. *However*, while this might be true, I propose that these “*novelas de la selva*” open up a space of reflection about representation that lets us see Amazonia through the idea of itself as a constructed notion. By staging transformations and limitations of language, and complicating representation as a form of

apprehension of Amazonia, these novels offers a space of examination, through the creation of fictional discourses, of the systems, mechanisms, and ideological positions that have claimed possession and consumption of the region. It is no coincidence that the narrator of *Los pasos perdidos* ends in failure, and that he has to return to his northern city leaving the jungle behind him. He cannot master it, apprehended, or consume it. He leaves behind, though, a novel.

There is a ironic gesture in the appearance of the novel as a commodity: the narrator of *Los pasos perdidos* is sick and tired of the capitalist context in which he lives, and despises the fact that art has become a commodity. Yet, at his return, he states that the novel he is planning will be sold (“lo que venderé” (300)) [“what I would sell”], closing a cycle that ends in marketable commodities and in the reaffirmation of the difficulty of escaping the “culture industry.” The risk of making Amazonia invisible and perpetuating its depiction as a commodity for Western culture is at stake in the idea of selling a narrative about it. Carpentier’s novel is, as a matter of fact, a literary text that makes the jungle a commodity to be consumed; its literary success across Latin America and other countries to which it has been translated speaks of it. Although the novel makes of the jungle a narrative to be sold and consumed by first world markets, there is a critical distance about this throughout the story to the extent that it depicts precisely this as one of the most prevalent signs of the decline of the West.

As a criticism to capitalism and, in particular, a criticism to discourses about Amazonia, *Los pasos perdidos* can be read through a postcolonial lens. For example, John Beverly, Mary Louise-Pratt, and Miampika Landry-Wilfrid see the baroque as a form of negotiation of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic cultures, and as a form of negotiation that opens up spaces of reflection and criticism of imperial powers. Lezama Lima, who, together with Severo Sarduy thought the baroque as an expression of the Latin American continent, calls the baroque the art of the “counter-conquest” (Lezama Lima) and defines it as “an impulse toward form in search of its symbolic purpose” (Sarduy 215).<sup>244</sup> On a similar line of thought, Steve Wakefield’s book *Carpentier’s Baroque Fiction; Returning Medusas Gaze* claims that the writer’s use of baroque as an ideological and aesthetic category is a “weapon of post-colonial pride and innovation” (1). He argues that Carpentier uses the baroque, a tool of imperial power in the history of the Spanish colonization of the Americas, and “puts it to a new, subversive use” (1). This subversion comes from the fact that the baroque’s excess and dispersion serves “to obscure or hide the object behind a linguistic barrier” (78).

The postcolonial episteme that structures the novel implies a sense ecological awareness. The entire project of discursive appropriation of the jungle is, as Wendy Faris writes, “ultimately unsatisfactory,” given the fact that it is an impossible task (252). This renunciation –that is both a

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<sup>244</sup> Lezama Lima and Severo Sarduy’s work have multiple points of contact with Carpentier’s work. The three of them are seen as the consolidators of the (neo)baroque aesthetic in Latin America, and this was achieved by their literary works, as well as by their essays on the topic. Among them, it is important to highlight Sarduy’s theoretical discourse on the baroque as a linguistic phenomena. His writings on baroque language and the baroque sign were highly influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure’s theory and they are in dialogue with the reflections on language proposed in this chapter. In addition to this, Sarduy’s concept of the baroque as “simulation” has a strong dialogue with Carpentier’s representation of the jungle as simulation, as seen by Irlemar Chiampi. Sarduy’s theories, however, were developed in the mid 1970s and had a particular focus in matters of gender identity. For these reasons, although it is important to identify its relationship with Carpentier’s work, Sarduy’s theories of the baroque belong to somehow different contexts. (Translations by María Pérez and Anke Birkenmaier.)

renunciation to the apprehension of a geographical space and to the representational authority of the written discourse- symbolically undermines the act of possession and consumption of nature. In relation to this, George Handley states that Carpentier's baroque "inherently recognizes nature's unpredictability and strangeness [and] it does not pretend to control nature but neither does it choose to ignore nature's relevance. Instead of forcing a choice between biocentrism and anthropocentrism, it offers a sense of ecology that is a kind of decentered humanism" (120). Like this, Carpentier's baroque renunciation of representation as possession opens the space to perceive the possibility of an ecological responsibility in his novel.

Overall, the baroque becomes a tool to obscure, criticize, and question hegemonic discourses and the act of representation as possession. In this sense, the invisibility of Amazonia obtained by the appearance of the literary trope of the jungle is also a way to critically highlight the rhetoric of consumption that has governed the region, and claim its independence. In other words, Amazonia will remain within the discourse of Latin America, claims Carpentier's novel, but only as a trope, and not just any trope: a trope that holds within a machinery of reflection that opens up a space of awareness of the systems that have claimed possession over it.

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Almost at the end of his stay in the jungle the narrator faces one of the most difficult decisions. Nicasio, a man with leprosy, haunts the community where the protagonist and Rosario live. He was part of the group of people who founded the community in the middle of the forest. After he was infected with the disease he was expelled from the community and condemned to wander the neighboring jungles for himself. In the idyllic community of Santa Mónica de los Venados, Nicasio represents a foil to the utopian character of the town. Charlotte Rogers, together with Guillermina de Ferrari, agree in seeing Nicasio as a symbolic figure that maintains the community pristine, healthy, and safe; his presence is a reminder of everything that could go wrong if the tight govern of Santa Mónica is let loose. The fear of his presence serves as a reminder of death and sickness and the importance of keeping the rules. In a way, then, Nicasio is the *other* within the world of the jungle. One day, however, Nicasio trespasses the limits and rapes a girl from the community. Marcos (one of the men from the town) and the narrator charge a gun and go into the forest in his search, determined to kill him.

Aquello debía ser suprimido, anulado, dejado a las aves de rapiña. Pero una fuerza, en mí, se resistía a hacerlo, como si, a partir del instante en que apretara el gatillo, *algo hubiera cambiado para siempre*. Hay actos que levantan muros, cipos, deslindes, en una existencia. Y yo tenía miedo al tiempo en que se iniciaría para mí a partir del segundo en que yo me hiciera Ejecutor. Marcos, con gesto colérico, me arrancó el fusil de las manos. <<¡Arrasan una ciudad desde el cielo, pero no se atreven a esto! ¿No habías estado en una guerra?...>> El fusil maquiritare tenía bala en el cañón izquierdo y carga de perdigones en el derecho. Sonaron dos disparos tan seguidos que casi se confundieron, rebotando luego el estampido de roca en roca, de valle en valle... Aún volaban los ecos cuando meforcé a mirar: Nicasio seguía arrodillado en el mismo lugar, pero su rostro se estaba desdibujando, emborronando, perdiendo todo contorno humano. Era una mancha encarnada que se desintegraba a pedazos y se escurría a lo largo del pecho, sin prisa, como una materia cerosa que se estuviera derritiendo. (*Los pasos*, original emphasis 289)<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> "He ought to be eliminated, done away with, left to the birds of the air. But something in me resisted, as though from the moment my finger tightened on the trigger, *something would be changed forever*. There are acts that throw up walls, markers, limits in a man's existence. And I was afraid of the time that would begin for me the second I turned Executioner. Marcos, with an angry gesture, snatched the gun from my hands. "They blast a city to pieces

This is a key moment in the narrative. It is a turning point that defines the narrator's stay in the jungle. As he says, "*algo hubiera cambiado para siempre*" ["something would be changed forever"]. This episode functions as a symbolic renunciation. By refusing to kill Nicasio, the protagonist is renouncing to a full integration with the jungle and opting for the creation of a narrative. The jungle was not for him. "Nada de esto se ha destinado a mi, porque la única raza humana que está impedida a desligarse de las flechas es la raza de quienes hacen arte" (329).<sup>246</sup> The narrator renounces the jungle to create art, to write a novel. The jungle, the *real jungle*, stays behind. At the end of the story, being unable to find the secret entrance, the narrator is forced to leave and go back to his life in the modern city. He turns his back and quits. Yet, the jungle stays there, alive, with its cycles and reality.

It's interesting to note how the novel ends. A voice -an unknown voice- says that the waters have receded and that the searched Sign is visible again.

Alguien dice, detrás de mi, que el río ha descendido notablemente en estos últimos días. Reaparecen muchas lajas sumergidas y los raudales se erizan de espolones rocosos, cuyas algas dulces mueren a la luz. Los árboles de las orillas parecen más altos, ahora que sus raíces están próximas a sentir el calor del sol. En cierto tronco escamado, tronco de un ocre manchado de verde claro, empieza a verse, cuando la corriente se aclara, el Signo dibujado en la corteza, a punta de cuchillo, unos tres palmos bajo el nivel de las aguas. (*Los pasos* 330)<sup>247</sup>

This poignant ending contains the cornerstone of the novel. When the protagonist lets go of the possibility of going back into the jungle, something else is revealed: the Sign with a capital letter. Instead of the real forest, what appears is the Sign that stands for language, for writing, for *La vorágine*: for the novel.

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from the sky, and can't do this. Weren't you in the war?" The gun had a bullet in the right barrel and a cartridge in the left. The two reports followed one another almost without interval, and the report echoed from rock to rock, from valley to valley. The waves of the echoes still vibrated in the air when I forced myself to look. Nicasio was kneeling in the same place, but his distorted face had lost all human likeness. It was a bloody mass that was disintegrating, slipping down his chest like melting wax. Finally the blood stopped flowing and the body collapsed on the wet grass" (232).

<sup>246</sup> "But none of this was for me, because the only human race to which it is forbidden to sever the bonds of time is the race of those who create art" (278).

<sup>247</sup> "Somebody behind me said the river had fallen a great deal these last days. Many of the submerged stones had reappeared, and the rapids bristled with rocky spurs whose fresh water algae died in the light. The trees along the bank looked taller now that their roots would soon feel the warmth of the sun again. On one scaly trunk, a trunk of ochre streaked with pale green, there would become visible, when the waters settled, the Sign carved on its bark with the point of a knife some three handspans above the level of the waters" (278).

## Chapter Four

### Amazonia in Ruins: Nostalgia and Critique in *Órfãos do Eldorado*

Ninguém quis ouvir essa história. Por isso as pessoas ainda pensam que moro sozinho, eu e minha voz de doido. Aí tu entraste para descansar na sombra do jatobá, pediste água e tiveste paciência para ouvir um velho. Foi um alívio expulsar esse fogo da alma. A gente não respira no que fala? (Hatoum *Órfãos* 103).<sup>248</sup>

Sitting under the shade of a *jatobá* tree, Arminto Cordovil, the protagonist of *Órfãos do Eldorado* (2008), tells the story of his life. He sits there, as he probably does everyday of his life, remembering his youth and trying to make sense of so much pain and desolation. He is old, poor, almost homeless, and considered by many just an old crazy man from the streets. Through the loops of his memory, his oral narrative tells the story of his life and his family. He belonged to the Cordovil household, a wealthy family who made its fortune during the period of financial euphoria around the rubber extraction economy. Neglected by his father because his mother was killed at his birth, Arminto grows up at the margins of his father's world, mixed with the indigenous servants of the family. After sleeping with Florita, an indigenous woman who was both a maid and the father's lover, Arminto is expelled from the household and sent to the city of Manaus to make a living on his own. At the sudden death of Amando, his father, he has to settle again in the town of Vila Bela and take care of the family business. Inexperienced and careless about the family affairs, he only cares for Dinaura, a mysterious orphan with whom he falls deeply in love. The wealthy business of transportation vessels through the Amazonian rivers that was built by his father and predecessors, however, faces the downhill of the rubber extraction economy that followed its boom. Arminto, caring only for his lover, is unable to salvage the family's wealth, and finally loses everything. He ends up lonely, forgotten, living in a shack at the margins of what once was a vibrant wealthy city. His voice and his stories are all he has now.

*Órfãos do Eldorado* is a story about ruins, and told within the ruins. The ruins of a house, of a city, of a lifetime, but above all, the ruins of modernity, that which was brought at the turn of the century by the rubber extraction boom. It is about the Cordovil family, its glory and decay, but it is, beyond this, a story of the Brazilian Amazonia in the twentieth century, from its positioning as a world modern epicenter, to the unfulfillment and treason of a promise of wealth that fell down as quickly as it peaked. It is, as Arminto Cordovil says, a story no one wants to hear: it is the story of how Paradise crumbled, of how "everything that is solid melts into air." Originally written by Marx, but then used by Marshall Berman to express the experience of modernity (Berman 15), the phrase captures the frustration and vacuum left by the vanishing promises that modernity made, but that never came to be. Arminto's narrative exposes how modernization's growth expanded markets, cities, capital, and power in the region, but at the end it was "capable of everything except solidity and stability" (Berman 19), bringing thus decay, frustration, poverty, and loss of direction. In other words, modernity promised a history of financial and "civilizational" liberation, only to offer ruins at the end.

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<sup>248</sup> "No one else wanted to hear this story. That's why people think I live alone here, me and my madman's voice. Then you came to rest in the shade of the jatobá tree, asked for water and had the patience to listen to an old man. It was a relief to purge this fire from my soul. Don't we breathe through what we speak?" (149-150). All English translations of *Órfãos do Eldorado* come from John Gledson's *Orphans of Eldorado* (Canongate, 2010).

Always invoking the legendary idea of Amazonia as the site of El dorado, *Órfãos* remembers, through Arminto's voice, a past that is both longed for, but also questioned and critiqued. As an outsider of his family, of the city, and ultimately of History, Arminto's voice and narrative stand, I claim, as an alternative recount that resists the Hegelian idea of History as progress leading to redemption. As it does so, the novel's constant preoccupation with orality and voices (those which no one wants to hear) make the narrative an alternative to the authority of written discourses, such as those that built the idea of El dorado itself. However, the fact that we are holding a novel in our hands (we, the *listeners* of Arminto) is a paradox that speaks of the means and topics through which Amazonia remains within the literary tradition of the region.

Set within a similar landscape of the "novelas de la selva," and re-elaborating the topic of the rubber production era, *Órfãos do Eldorado*, however, presents a different Amazonian world. Even though nature is a solid presence, the story is focused in the rarely seen urban experience of an industrialized and globalized Amazonia, the cities of Manaus and Belén do Pará. In this sense, Hatoum represents the region through its cities and highlights the cosmopolitan, financial, and political systems in them. The *selva* thus gives way to the streets, plazas, businesses, and outskirt neighborhoods that are also part of Amazonia. Within this scenario, *Órfãos do Eldorado* is not anymore a travel narrative of an intellectual from the city to the periphery, but a story told by the heir of one of the colonizers of the region. In the cosmopolitan and global Amazonia that this novel represents, the limits between foreigners, colonos, caboclos (mestizos), and indigenous people become, if not blurry, at least overlapped. Within these blurry limits Arminto Cordovil's voice is situated in an intermediary position that threads the perspective of an outsider with the perspective of an insider.

*Órfãos do Eldorado*, perhaps in the realm of the tradition of other Amazonian novels like Vargas Llosa's *El hablador* (1987), has a strong indigenous presence that determines the narrative.<sup>249</sup> This is seen in the presence of characters like Florita, the indigenous maid and lover, and in the fact that Arminto Cordovil, as an "orphan" of his own family, grows up having strong links to the indigenous world. However, what Hatoum represents is less the voice of the indigenous than of an Amazonia where indigenous traditions and presence have not been isolated

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<sup>249</sup> The topic of indigenous worldviews and voices is a constant preoccupation in some of the literature about Amazonia. In some texts it appears as a stronger presence than others (as in Carpentier's and Hatoum's novel), and in others it is less relevant (as in *A margem da história* or in *La vorágine*). Although Amazonia is a region with diverse and numerous indigenous populations, it would be hard to say that all the literature about the region includes this topic to the same degree. In this chapter, my dissertation is less focused on expanding the *indigenista* debate, and more interested in studying the ways in which the indigenous presence complicates a mostly white dominated idea of History. This will be seen, later on, around a critique to the Hegelian idea of History as developed by the framework of Subaltern Studies.

However, there are academic publications that have dealt into the topic of *indigenista* literature. For example, in *Rain Forest Literatures* Lúcia Sá studies four indigenous cultural traditions from the Amazon region (the Carib, Tupi-Guarani, Upper Rio Negro, and Western Arawak) and the way in which they have been integrated into or influenced western mainstream literature about the region. Sá's work establishes a theoretical perspective in which modern and contemporary literature about the region can be studied through processes of transculturation between indigenous worldviews and western representations. Although Sá does not study Hatoum's work, it could be said that a novel like *Órfãos do Eldorado* could be included under a corpus of texts in which the presence of indigenous traditions is thematically and structurally important. In this sense, *Órfãos* is in dialogue with novels like Mario de Andrade's *Macunaima* (1928), Vargas Llosa's *El hablador* (1986), or Alejo Carpentier's *Los pasos perdidos* (1953), just to name a few.

from globalization and from urban centers, finding like this a way into Arminto's narrative (Slater *Entangled* 17). Perhaps the novel's most emblematic and most studied distinctive trait, which invests the novel with a strong indigenous theme, is the pivotal appearance of *encante* [enchanted] stories. In the novel, these stories –but particularly the story of the enchanted city under the river- compete and intertwine with the history of the region and the idea of El Dorado. However, although critics often perceived these stories as indigenous mythical traditions interwoven in the narrative, the *encante* stories, as Candace Slater explains, are oral folklore “intermediary” tales rooted in indigenous, western, and black traditions (*Entangled* 68), that, in addition to this, have been fictionalized in the novel (“Folk” 152).<sup>250</sup> The presence of these stories within Arminto Cordovil's narrative contributes to situate his voice in a blurry frontier where insiders and outsiders are hard to distinguish. In this sense, *Órfãos do Eldorado* is located in a niche that is both in dialogue with western perceptions and traditions of the region (*El dorado* imagery, for example), grounded on the enterprise of modernity (the rubber industry and its aftermaths), and in touch with a local perspective of history and nature that reveals a *different* view of Amazonia.

A pivotal element of analysis in *Órfãos do Eldorado* is the ideological position of the novel's narrator. The narrator is both an insider and an expelled outsider; a heir of the colonizing fathers, but an adopted child of the indigenous women that surround him. In this sense, Arminto, like the enchanted stories he tells, is located in an “intermediary” location that is both foreign and local, but without belonging to neither of them. He is removed from his white wealthy family but yet not entirely associated with its periphery.

It is not a coincidence, perhaps, that Milton Hatoum's authorial position can be also similarly described as an occupying “intermediary” place, although from a rather different perspective. While it is clear that writers like Euclides da Cunha, José Eustasio Rivera, and Alejo Carpentier are talking from the non-Amazonian “lettered city,” locating Hatoum's intellectual position is more complex. He is both a Brazilian intellectual talking from the most traditional urban lettered centers, and an Amazonian born writer whose voice emerges from Manaus with a deep knowledge and understanding of the region. Added to this, Hatoum's Middle Eastern heritage and identity (a central topic of his previous novels) make his positioning an even more intricate point. What is at stake in this discussion, however, is the recognition of an academic debate that struggles to locate Milton Hatoum in a Brazilian literary map, sometimes labeling him as a voice whose literature is about the immigrant experience, or -highly significant for this dissertation- within a regionalist tradition. As it will be seen later on, this chapter's take on this issue resonates with the way Francisco Foot Hardman describes Hatoum's narrative. As Foot Hardman says, his literature is founded in a specific historical and cultural experience (that of the Amazon region), but elaborated through a sense of dislocation that achieves a universal resonance (*Morrer em Manaus* 238-239). This means that Hatoum articulates an experience of being an outcast of processes of modernization that is also a common shared experience outside of the specificities of Amazonian history and its tradition. In this sense, this chapter locates

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<sup>250</sup> In “Folk and Popular Stories of Enchantment as Inspiration for Milton Hatoum's *Órfãos do Eldorado* and Responses to a Changing Amazon” (2014), Candace Slater examines some of the similarities and differences between the oral traditions and the stories included in the novel. She claims that “the novella is really very different from many of the oral stories on which it is ostensibly based” (156).

Hatoum as a writer in dialogue with the regionalist tradition, but not exactly as a regionalist writer.

Beyond the obvious fact that his novels have been published in the past 10 years, it is worth examining some of the implications behind the notion of Hatoum as a ‘contemporary writer’. What does it mean to be *contemporary*? Agamben, on “What is the Contemporary?” argues that “[C]ontemporariness is... a singular relationship with one’s own time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it” (41), and adds that the “contemporary is he who firmly holds his gaze on his own time so as to perceive not its light, but rather its darkness” (45). Agamben refers to the contemporary artist as that who is able to distance and disjoint himself from his time and/or the History that inscribes him. What appears as highly relevant is not the recognition of Hatoum as a voice of worth and value today, but rather the idea that his voice is not perfectly aligned or attuned with the celebration of the History in which he inhabits. In other words, that what makes him a contemporary –or better, his value as a contemporary writer- relies precisely on the critique of History he is able to articulate. As it will be seen later on, this chapter analyses Hatoum’s novel as a critique of History and as a text that enables a discourse from the margins (or outskirts) of his time, so in this sense being a *contemporary* means more than just being here and now. Later on, when I delve into why Hatoum re-visits Euclides da Cunha with such a keen interest, I will bring back the idea of the contemporary as the one who operates as an archeologist (and thus, operates through ruins).

Locating Milton Hatoum and *Órfãos do Eldorado* in a literary map, especially in relation with the regionalist tradition, implies reading the novel in dialogue with the other texts studied in this dissertation. In this sense, this chapter reads Hatoum’s novel (and positions him) by restating the question that has been underscored before: how to write about Amazonia? Whether or not he should be considered a regionalist writer, Hatoum is highly invested in writing and representing the region with a clear conscience of the literary tradition in which he is immersed. He has stated that

[P]ara um escritor que mora longe dos centros irradiadores de cultura, mas perto de uma das regiões mais exóticas do mundo, cabe-lhe responder a uma pergunta: como povoar de signos este espaço branco (a folha do papel), tendo como referencia simbólica um outro espaço em Blanco, konradiano, lugar longínquo, território perdido *num recanto da floresta e num desvão obscurecido da história?* (Hatoum *Escrever à margem* 6)<sup>251</sup>

By asking the question of how to write Amazonia, by making clear references to Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, and by quoting Euclides da Cunha’s image of Amazonia as a “white page” (da Cunha calls Amazonia Genesis’ last unwritten page), Hatoum is deliberately locating his literature within the literary tradition of Amazonia and the “novelas de la selva” (one could consider Conrad’s reference as the prototype of novel to which Rivera’s *La vorágine*

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<sup>251</sup> A writer who lives far away from the centers from which culture spreads, but close to one of the most exotic regions of the world, must respond a question: how to fill with signs the blank space (the paper), having as a reference another Blank space, which reminds of Conrad, a faraway place, a lost territory *in a far corner of the forest and in a lost dark place in history?* (my translation).



belongs).<sup>252</sup> Even more, he's re-stating the pivotal question of this dissertation: how to re-write and translate into the domain of literature (how to make a *literarization* of) the region in dialogue with its discursive past? Writing in the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, the tradition to which he refers is composed of the texts of the naturalist explorers, but also the writings of Euclides da Cunha and Rivera themselves. As Hatoum explains, writing [a escritura] "trata-se simplesmente (mas isso é decisivo) da dificuldade de escrever ou da recusa de repetir o que já foi pensado e escrito" (qtd. in Pinheiro 11).<sup>253</sup> Seen like this, it is possible to state that Hatoum's work is yet another example of how Amazonia is transported into the realm of literature (of how it is represented), but also, and perhaps more importantly, how Amazonia has remained and has transformed throughout its discursive history up to today, to the here and now. On this, Candace Slater affirms that the novel is part of a shift in the ways in which Amazonia is now represented; that is, not just as the realm of consumable nature, but as a more complex, more populated, real place ("Folk" 157, "Visions" 7).

An initial answer, thus, to the question of how to write Amazonia becomes apparent in a comparison with the way the previous novels studied in this dissertation represented the region: *Órfãos do Eldorado* focuses on Amazonia as an urban, cosmopolitan, and globalized region, where complex social textures go beyond distinctions of who is the foreign and who is the local. But the boldest answer, however, is related to how the novel thinks and re-writes the History of the region. And, since it will be such an essential part of my analysis, I must define what I mean by History: By History with an "H" I imply a History written and controlled by European imperial powers. The History of "discovery," conquest, and possession of the colonies: the history of western development and expansion. History, above all, as Hegel understood it: that is, as a progression and evolution in time towards a liberating goal, towards the triumph of individual freedom, reason, and to its secular law regulating state. The world's History, Hegel explains, can be explained as the development and progress of a consciousness of freedom and liberation. This History, one must add, is not just any History, but one that constitutes itself through the written word. In this sense, History is that which is *written* as such, and one is *inscribed* in it through the act of writing. Hatoum's novel, as it will be seen, departs from a similar idea of History and plays with the model of the written/unwritten/oral, and with the concept of being in-scribed or out-scribed of History.

To this respect, in *Órfãos do Eldorado* the question of how to write Amazonia is interwoven with the question of how to make sense of its History. However, this *making sense of history* is done from the ambiguous location discussed some paragraphs above: not from within or from outside, but on the margins –or rather, being *out-scribed* from History. Not in vain does Milton Hatoum intentionally re-appropriate da Cunha's image of being and writing *à margem da história* [at the margins of history], in what da Cunha calls *num recanto da floresta e num desvão obscurecido da história*.<sup>254</sup> In this sense, while the other chapters in this dissertation have

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<sup>252</sup> It is interesting to note that Hatoum considers Alejo Carpentier's *Los pasos perdidos* as the "melhor livro escrito sobre a Amazonia" [best book ever written about Amazonia] (16), as read in Daniel Piza's profile of the writer included in the book *Arquitetura da Memória*.

<sup>253</sup> Writing is simply about –and this is pivotal– the difficulty of creating or avoiding the repetition of that which was already thought and written (my translation).

<sup>254</sup> Translated on note 4. This quote from Euclides da Cunha comes from *Obras Completas*, Vol. I. Rio de Janeiro, Companhia José Aguilar Editora, 1966, p. 245. It is quoted by Hatoum in the essay "Escrever à margem da história,"

been preoccupied with the way “lettered city” writers render Amazonia as, above all, a space, in here Amazonia transforms into a problem of History – that is, the inscription of a space into a Hegelian understanding of History, and its dislocation. This dislocation from where History is re-visited constitutes a distance from History itself (a distance that recalls the position of the *contemporary* artist).

Miltom Hatoum’s re-visitation of History shares many similarities with da Cunha’s idea of being *at the margins of history*. In Euclides da Cunha’s writings about Amazonia being at the margins implied, at the same time, a *nostalgia for*, and, a *resistance to* being integrated into the modernization process of civilization. Amazonia was waiting to be modernized, included into the civilizatory enterprise of western capitalist systems; in other words, introduced into History. But yet, as it was discussed in Chapter One, Amazonia needed to be protected from this enterprise, and needed to be avenged from its inclusion into the globalizing world; that is why da Cunha wanted to write *Um paraíso perdido* and conceived it as a vengeful enterprise. This Euclidean duality is perceived in the title of *Órfãos do Eldorado*: on the one hand, the idea of orphanhood conveys a nostalgic longing for El dorado, for the idea of Amazonia as a land of wealth, materialized in the euphoric financial boom of the rubber extraction industry (perhaps a nostalgia for the liberating promise of History). On the other, the idea of orphanhood implies the coming to terms with the failed enterprise of History, from which a questioning and criticism of the myth of El dorado and its meanings can emerge. As Hatoum himself says, this nostalgia could be, at the same time, “uma crítica raivosa, uma crítica política da cidade” (interview with *Revista de História* 4).<sup>255</sup> At the end of this chapter I will delve into the ways in which one can think Hatoum’s critique of History not only by interpreting the meanings of nostalgia, memory, and the presence of ruins, but also through a dialogue between the novel and some of the most acute criticisms of the Hegelian idea of History, such as those that have emerged from the field of postcolonial and subaltern theory.

Memory plays a pivotal role in the critique of History. Amazonia *is* a site of memory, like a ruin that needs to be reconstructed: “passo a tarde de frente para o rio,” Arminto tells us. “Quando olho o Amazonas, a memória dispara, uma voz sai da minha boca, e só paro de falar na hora que a ave graúda canta” (14).<sup>256</sup> History is re-visited through the memory of Armando Cordovil, whose train of thought is trying to articulate a subjective identity in opposition and resistance to his father, the successful businessman who represents the idea of History. In other words, Arminto Cordovil’s memory, the reconstruction of the Amazonian past, is not only done at the margins of History (which confers him a distance), but through an attempt to differentiate himself of the overwhelmingly dominating (and devouring) father figure:

não tinha a obstinação do meu pai. Nem a esperteza. Amando Cordovil [the father] seria capaz de devorar o mundo. Era um destemido: homem que ria da morte. E olha só: a fortuna cai nas tuas mãos, e uma ventania

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a text written by the author in April 4 1993 in an encounter of Brazilian and German writers held by the Goethe Institute in São Paulo.

<sup>255</sup> An angry criticism, a political criticism of the city (my translation).

<sup>256</sup> “I spend my afternoons looking at the river”; “When I look at the Amazon, my memory takes flight, a voice comes from my mouth and I only stop talking the moment the big bird sings” (6).

varre tudo. Joguei a fortuna com a voracidade de um prazer cego. Quis apagar o passado, a fama do meu avó Edílio. (Hatoum *Órfãos* 14)<sup>257</sup>

Both the pleasure with which Arminto wastes money and the attempt to eradicate that past in his identity determine the “*crítica raivosa*” [the angry criticism] through which History will be revised. It is in this way that, as Hatoum himself says, memory becomes “um desafio ao passado.” Not in the sense that memory constitutes a challenge when trying to write history, but that memory challenges the notion of History itself -it interrupts it: as he explains, it is a way to “prestar contas con ele,” that is, to negotiate and understand ones position within history. Memory acts as an agent that, facing the ruins, tries to reconstruct *and critically understand* the past –much like an archeologist. “O ponto de partida são essas ruínas, e a ficção é uma tentativa de imaginar a sua história, reconstruí-la e retornar ao que já não existe mais” (Hatoum interview in *Arquitetura da memória* 25).<sup>258</sup> This return, thus, constitutes a nostalgic return, but, most importantly, the process of understanding the causes of the ruins entails a questioning and a critique of History. Nostalgia is the result of the ferocious passing of ‘progress’ time, but it is, also, as Svetlana Boym suggests, a “rebellion against the idea of time, the time of history and progress” (xv). I will return to ruins and nostalgia as a critique History later on.

Besides memory, orality also plays a pivotal role in the critique of History. Through the voice of Arminto Cordovil multiple voices enter the narrative forming what Albuquerque has called “um coral de vozes dispersas” (127).<sup>259</sup> This “Rulfian” texture of the narrative –dialogic and polyphonic, to use Bakhtin’s concepts- defines the out-of-history character of Arminto Cordovil: these voices come from the “orphans” of modernity, those who were kept at the margins or who were betrayed by the civilizatory enterprise of the rubber financial euphoria. “Alguem ainda ouve essas vozes?” asks Arminto to his unknown listener (Hatoum *Órfãos* 13).<sup>260</sup> These voices, in addition, are not only there to represent the outskirts of modernity (the orphans), but to politicize orality in opposition to writing. As it was mentioned before, the novel plays with the equivalency of *writing* as an act of law and with its sense of being a means of inscription into History. This is signaled in one of the central and most important aspects of the novel: the presence of a book called *Façanhas de um civilizador* [Endeavors of a civilizing man], where the father wanted to write the History of his family’s conquest of the region. In opposition and resistance to these writings of the “civilizing endeavors,” voices –orality- offer an alternative vision of History.

In his “Thesis on the Philosophy of History” Benjamin states that “[T]here is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism,” and goes on to explain that “barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another” (256). As a novel that resists the authority of the written document –that resists writing History as the *façanhas de um civilizador*, for example-, and that collects the orphan voices of

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<sup>257</sup> “And I didn’t have my father’s obstinacy -nor his cunning either. Amando Cordovil could have swallowed the whole world. He was fearless: a man who laughed at death. Anyway, see here: good fortune falls in your lap, and a gust of wind blows it all away. I eagerly threw the fortune away, taking blind pleasure in doing so. I wanted to rub out the past and all the ill fame of my grandfather Edílio” (6-7).

<sup>258</sup> “a challenge to the past”; “adjust numbers with it”; “the point of departure were those ruins, and fiction was an attempt to imagine their history, reconstruct it and return to that which doesn’t exist anymore” (my translation).

<sup>259</sup> “a chorus of dispersed voices” (my translation).

<sup>260</sup> “Does anyone hear those voices anymore?” (5).

the periphery, *Órfãos do Eldorado* interferes in the transmission of this barbarity and places the orphan (not the “heirs” of the “victors,” as Benjamin says) in the role of judges of History. This chapter’s main focus is to read *Órfãos do Eldorado* as a critique of (Hegelian) History, that is, History understood as progress, and to understand the novel as a critique and as an alternative to the History of Amazonia as the site of modernity’s El dorado. However, the necessity to go back to El dorado (the longing and nostalgia of Paradise), even if as a critique, points to a major conclusion: *Órfãos do Eldorado* enters the literary tradition of Amazonia in the twenty-first century claiming a resistance and a critique to western narratives of modernization that appropriated the region, but at the same time stages the impossibility of exiting them. This duality constitutes an example of the contemporary ways in which Amazonia appears in literary discourses, and poses a question of the nation’s project success. At the end of the chapter, I will return to the novel’s critique of the nation.

And something else: *Órfãos do Eldorado* goes back in time about a century and re-visits Euclides da Cunha. Hatoum, one might say, digs into the past, like an archeologist does. And as an archeologist, Hatoum thrives among ruins. The ruins from which *Órfãos do Eldorado* is told – the *tapera* from which Arminto beholds the Amazon River and from which his memory departs – belong to an Amazonia that is in ruins; the ruins left by modernity. A modernity that, as Marshall Berman writes, “threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are,” and that has lost “its capacity to organize and give meaning to people’s lives” (15-17). Within these ruins Arminto Cordovil’s voice tries to convey a meaning to his life and circumstances. In their decay, ruins enable a critique of modernity. Ruins stand as symbols of the unavoidable passing of time. As such, they are also signs of a totality that has been lost and they invoke nostalgia for a grandeur that got lost in the way. Nonetheless, they also signal, precisely, the fragility of power and they can thus enable the imagining of a different kind of future. Arminto’s voice is a reminder that Amazonia is much more than a wealthy forest, and that in its fragility there’s much more at stake than “just” nature. So, in this sense, Hatoum’s archeology is also a potential sign for a future. If ruins, as Hell and Schlone explain, encapsulate the “vacuity and loss as underlying constituents of the modern identity” (7), they can also provide the possibility of a new beginning. Because, what is a critique of History is not an attempt to correct the future?

### **The Intermediary Voice(s) of Milton Hatoum**

Before delving into an analysis of *Órfãos do Eldorado* it is worth examining the points of enunciation of both Milton Hatoum’s voice as a writer, as of his narrator, Arminto Cordovil. The reason for doing this is because when compared with the other writers and texts that this dissertation examines, *Órfãos do Eldorado* confronts us with some important variations. The voices of the writers examined in the previous chapters (da Cunha, Rivera, and Carpentier) belong to non-Amazonian intellectual circles whose relationship to the region, with varying degrees, was constituted through limited travels and with a strong identification with urban centers to which Amazonia was, at least in geographical terms, a periphery. Milton Hatoum, however, is the only one of these writers that was born in the city of Manaus and whose intellectual trajectory could be described as having a more intimate relationship with the region. This, though, should not go unproblematized, as it will be seen in this section.

In a similar way, the protagonists of the novels studied earlier (*La vorágine* and *Los pasos perdidos*) are, like their naturalist predecessors of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,

travelers into the region, who also happen to be either writers or intellectuals. Arminto Cordovil, on the contrary, is not a traveler coming from afar, nor is an intellectual. Arminto's voice must not go unproblematized, either. The key point is to recognize that, although the essays and novels studied in this dissertation constitute complex aesthetical and ideological representations of the region, they are, however, texts written *about* Amazonia, and not *from* Amazonia. This is not to say, however, that *Órfãos do Eldorado* is, unmistakably, a *local* novel; far from that. Nonetheless, it is delivered and situated from a different point of enunciation as the other novels.

Certain Brazilian academics, as it will be seen, read Milton Hatoum as a *regionalist* writer, although he is part of a main stream Brazilian literary community and is immersed in global literary markets. Other part of it, however, situates him in a peripheral position, addressing him as an example of literature about Middle Eastern diaspora. Added to this, the fact that *Órfãos do Eldorado* was written by the demand of the Scottish publishing house Canongate, as part of its series called *The Myths*, further complicates this. So, a series of questions arise: from where and to whom is Milton Hatoum writing, then? What are the literary circuits that his work (including his past novels) circulates? Where and how to locate him within a literary tradition of representations of Amazonia?

Milton Hatoum was born in Manaus in 1952. He is the son of a Lebanese immigrant family, who has had ties to the region since the times of financial wealth around the rubber extraction period. At the age of 15 years he left Manaus and began living in different Brazilian cities like Brasilia and São Paulo, and in the 1980s lived in different European cities, where he became a professional. Since his return from Europe he has alternated his time as a scholar working in different universities in Manaus, the United States, and in São Paulo, where he currently resides. Since the publication of his first novel *Relato de um certo oriente* (1989), which won the Premio Jabuti, a prestigious Brazilian award, Hatoum has become one of the most noticeable names in the contemporary literary scene of his country. Today he is an important intellectual voice actively participating in the Brazilian cultural scene.

His first three publications, which precede *Órfãos do Eldorado* (2008), are *Relato de um certo oriente* (1989), *Dois Irmãos* (2000), and *Cinzas do Norte* (2005). These first three novels, which have received numerous and important recognitions, share characteristics that show Hatoum's interests. They are all novels often narrated by multiple voices, but organized around one main voice, whose memory delves into the past to unsettle the family's history and secrets. In *Relato de um certo oriente*, the female narrator returns to Manaus only to find her family in ruins. Within the decay of her past, she reconstructs the story of her grandparents, parents, and siblings, revealing how secrets and tragedies have marked the life of each and everyone of them, as in a need to reconstruct her and her brother's past. Set within Manaus and the Lebanon, the novel traces the experiences of an immigrant family and the historic background in which they happen. *Dois Irmãos*, the second novel, is narrated by a man who delves into his past to uncover who his father is in the story of two brothers who, like Cain and Abel, hold the keys to the family's decay. *Cinzas do norte*, following a similar structure, is narrated by Ovalo, an orphan who reconstructs the history of his family and his friendship with Mundo, within a story of class differences, and set within the context of Manaus' history at the time of the Brazilian dictatorship in the 1960s and 70s.

Descriptions of all of his works share the same words: memory, family, ruins, the city of Manaus, identity, etc. Within the foldings of memory, Brazilian history appears intimately

intertwined with the fate and identity of the characters. Narratives become time machines that explore the past as if individuals were unable to fully inhabit the present, and as if they needed to look back to decipher their place in the world. Many of the topics present in these novels already anticipate the main elements that define *Órfãos do Eldorado*, such as the idea of a family in decay, memory, orphanhood, and a re-writing of myths into literature, as seen with the Cain and Abel structure of *Dois Irmãos*.

As a literature structured around what Silviano Santiago calls the *experience of the madeleine* (*Cosmopolitanismo* 47), memory becomes the nostalgic and critical method through which the past is reconstructed. Although later on I will refer to the implications of nostalgia in *Órfãos do Eldorado*, it is important to comment on Hatoum's relationship to nostalgia as a motif in the broader picture of Brazilian literature. It would be possible to say that nostalgia is a recurrent tone that comes from as far as the romantic foundations of Brazil's tradition. Take into consideration, for example, Antonio Gonçalves Dias "Canção do exílio" (1843) or Casimiro de Abreu's "Meus oito anos" (1859), as literature that inaugurates a nostalgic drive that will find echoes in, for example, Darius Milhaud musical pieces "Saudades do Brasil" (1920) or in the colonial *saudade* of Gilberto Freyre's *Casa Grande e Senzala* (1933). To this extent, Hatoum's nostalgic texture could be described as an inherited topic of Brazilian literature itself. The key aspect that differentiates Hatoum's work would be, however, the use of nostalgia as a critical device to question progress and History and, on the other side, the appearance of Amazonia as a complex cosmopolitan, urban space.<sup>261</sup>

*Relato de um certo oriente*, Hatoum's first novel and the one that situated him within the literary scene, marks the origin of the ways in which the author has been perceived and catalogued within the Brazilian literary map. The two most noticeable elements that emerge from this novel, and that find unequivocal echoes in the following publications, are aspects related to a local Amazonian specificity (the history of Manaus told through the story of one of its families), and what Stefania Chiarelli has described as the fictionalization of a Middle Eastern immigration experience within the growth of modern Brazil (19).

The need to locate Milton Hatoum within a Brazilian literary map only becomes important, at least in this chapter's analysis, as a means to complicate and, at the same time, better define his point of enunciation of a region so often described by foreign voices. What is at stake in defining him as a writer concerned with an immigrant experience and, on the other side, in defining him as a regionalist, is the possibility to understand Milton Hatoum's voice as one having an intimate experience with the Amazon region (and its literary and cultural traditions), but at the same time located at the margins of an *insider's* perspective. This fluid character between a foreigner and an insider enable an understanding of Hatoum's voice as that of an *intermediary*. This explains the fluidity between, for example, the western El dorado myth and the local *encante* stories that, threaded together, form the novel's representation of Amazonia.

The academic work of Stefania Chiarelli and Joyce Silva provide solid examples of how Milton Hatoum has been read through the lens of a Middle Eastern heritage within Brazil's

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<sup>261</sup> Candace Slater lists other writers that also represent Amazonia outside the "forest mold," like Francisco Gómez de Amorim, Abguar Bastos, and Francisco Xavier Galva. See note 11 on "Visions."

literary scene.<sup>262</sup> Chiarelli understands *Relato de um certo oriente* as a novel that articulates an experience of cultural hybridity that ultimately constructs an identity grounded on the idea of difference and alterity (20). In this sense, Hatoum's literature highlights a kind of Brazilian subjectivity that is originated in a sense of multiculturalism. The identity of the immigrant and the foreigner, then, merges into a bigger identity, that of a Brazil made out of multiple voices and experiences, of which the indigenous and the black are also part of (19). A key point of Chiarelli's work is the identification of Hatoum less as a voice of alterity, and more as a part of a discourse on alterity that constitutes a national identitarian paradigm in dialogue with the idea of Brazil as a racially mixed nation.

On a more sophisticated level, Joyce Silva Braga's elaboration on the topic of immigration and diaspora offers a lucid way to position Hatoum's voice and literature. Instead of understanding the writer's work as a representation of the Middle Eastern experience within Brazil, Silva Braga understands the ideas of immigration and exile as elements that create a distance from which Amazonia, and not the Lebanese experience, is represented. Said differently, this distance can also be described as a way of being and seeing from *the margins*. In addition to this, Silva Braga analyses Hatoum's affiliation with the Orient by focusing on his intellectual identification with another Lebanese intellectual, Edward Said. Hatoum translated into Portuguese Said's work *Representations of the Intellectual*, and this leads Silva Braga to explain that "ao escolher traduzir Edward Said, Milton Hatoum traz a tona um dialogo profundo com a cultura árabe e com esse pathos do exílio, enaltecendo tanto a sua experiência de exiliado quanto a experiência de Said" (688).<sup>263</sup> This "experience of exile" becomes significant in Hatoum as a movement that describes how the *local Amazonian voice* moves out towards the metropolis. That is, from his Lebanese experience Hatoum appropriates an experience of exile, but this exile doesn't describe a geographical dislocation from Lebanon, but rather a displacement into a mainstream intellectual circuit. This exile into a main stream "lettered city," however, becomes, as in Said's case, the process through which a critical voice is structured:

Essa "viagem para dentro", rumo a metrópole, é um mérito dos intelectuais do Terceiro Mundo, de acordo com Said, pois esses intelectuais se configuram como figuras opositoras do *status quo*, que se expressam através da apropriação do discurso dominante da metrópole, porém voltam-se contra essa metrópole para desconstruir suas tentativas de dominação das regiões de onde esses intelectuais vem. Esse é um dos motivos, em nossa perspectiva, de Hatoum voltar seus olhos sempre para Manaus e, não, por questiones regionalistas que a critica literária sempre deixa transparecer, cujas reflexões reducionistas buscam enaltecer o exótico e tornar o local (Amazonas o Manaus) ainda mais distante e inacessível, assim como os orientalistas fazem com o Oriente. (Silva Braga 690)<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Besides their work, the essays of Maria Aparecida Ribeiro, Raymond L. Williams, and Estela J. Vieira, all included in the collection of essays about the writer titled *Arquitetura da memória* (Ed by Maria da Luz Pinheira de Cristo 2007), and Albert von Brunn's essay, provide further bibliography on the topics of immigration. Some of the topics that appear in these essays are related to Milton Hatoum's narrative as a literature of a minority, or as a literature concerned with the representation of the Orient, or with the representation of the immigrant.

<sup>263</sup> By choosing to translate Edward Said, Milton Hatoum engages in a profound dialogue with the Arab culture and with the pathos of exile, highlighting both the experience of the exiled and Said's experience (my translation).

<sup>264</sup> According to Said, the trip towards the interior, routed towards the metropolis, is the merit of the intellectuals from the Third World. They present themselves as people who oppose to the *status quo*, and find a method of expression through the appropriation of the dominant discourses of the metropolis. Like this, they launch their criticism against the metropolis by deconstructing its attempts of domination of precisely the same regions from which these intellectuals come from. This is one of the reasons why, we think, Hatoum is constantly looking back to

Silva Braga's reflection on Milton Hatoum's intellectual persona helps to understand the writer's voice as an intermediary voice. It undermines an opposition between *local* and *foreigner* revealing a more complex positioning where the Amazonian born writer is formed by a metropolis intellectual discourse that –and this is the key point- lets him form a critical perspective towards his own region. Milton Hatoum says that

[é] como si o viajante [o escritor] se distanciasse da “margem da História”, a fim de assimilar outras culturas, sem no entanto perder a bússola que aponta para seu Norte. O Norte, depois da errância e do exílio, é menos uma geografia que um lugar que se busca. Lugar que já não mais existe, ou lugar utópico que só existe na memória. Em outras palavras: essa tentativa de um retorno a terra natal só é possível através da linguagem. (Hatoum qtd. In Silva Braga 697)<sup>265</sup>

This becomes pivotal in reading *Órfãos do Eldorado* because it sheds light on how Hatoum appropriates local and foreign legends (the *encante* stories and the myth of El dorado) to construct a critique of the region's History. Being an insider that locates himself *at the margins of history* allows him to deconstruct and critique the idea of History and progress –the *fazanhas de um civilizador*- as a teleological enterprise that would redeem Amazonia from its barbarity. As Silva Braga comments, “na literatura de Milton Hatoum, o exílio é um pathos que provoca um certo tipo de “estranhamento” no personagem” (698)<sup>266</sup>, and this “estrangement” is precisely the origin of a dislocation from which Arminto Cordovil's critical remembrance articulates itself. In addition to this, as Hatoum explains in the quote above, after exile the only possible way to retrieve the Amazonian experience is through language. This highlights writing –the *literarization* of Amazonia- as the means to negotiate –that is, question, critique, and understand- the region's relationship to the center.

According to Silva Braga, Milton Hatoum “promove [uma] decoração do discurso dominante, do centro, principalmente o europeu, para, ao retornar, por meio da linguagem, desconstruir a visão que se tinha dessa região que o escritor toma como referencia” (698).<sup>267</sup> This act of *devouring* the discourses of the metropolis (El dorado) in service of a deconstruction of the forms through which western imagination has represented Amazonia recalls, on the one hand, Brazilian modernists' *antropofagia* and, on the other, Silviano Santiago's concept of the *space in-between*.<sup>268</sup> These forms of appropriation of the metropolis' discourse describe a movement towards a form of constructing an autonomous post-colonial voice.

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Manaus. That is, not because of reasons related to regionalism, as many critics recurrently state, whose simplistic reflections tend to highlight the exotic and depict Amazonia or Manaus inaccessible and distant, the same way the orientalist do with the Orient (my translation).

<sup>265</sup> It is as if the traveler or the writer distanced himself from the “margins of History” so he can assimilate other cultures, but without losing his direction. His north, after exile and wander, is less of a geography and more of a place; a place that doesn't exist, or that is a utopia and only exists in memory. In other words, a kind of place to which a return is only possible to do through language (my translation).

<sup>266</sup> In Milton Hatoum's literature exile is a pathos that provokes a certain type of estrangement in the characters (my translation).

<sup>267</sup> Promotes an assimilation of the dominant, central discourse, mainly the European one, so that in his return, through language, he can deconstruct the region's vision, one that uses as a point of departure (my translation).

<sup>268</sup> The *Manifesto Antropófago* was published in 1928 by the Brazilian Poet Oswald de Andrade in the context of the cultural and artistic revolution of *modernismo* in the 1920s Brazil. Antropofagia described a process in which Brazilian modern art and culture needed to “cannibalize” –incorporate, integrate, digest- its indigenous cultural



As it was mentioned before, the novel was written and originally published as part of a collection promoted by the Scottish publishing house Canongate. The collection “brings together some of the world’s finest writers, each of whom has retold a myth in a contemporary and memorable way.” Within this series, the novel is presented as “a magical, modern retelling of the Amazon’s greatest legend.” My point in bringing this up is to further complicate what it means to partake in the intellectual circuits of the metropolis. If the entire purpose of this discussion is to elucidate where is *Órfãos do Eldorado*’s representation of Amazonia grounded, the globalized and commercial forces behind it cannot be ignored. Milton Hatoum’s work coincides with an expansion and internationalization of Brazilian literature in the world, very much associated with the country’s growth as a one of Latin America’s most powerful, noticeable, and interconnected countries in the past fifteen years. Seen like this, Milton Hatoum belongs to a generation of writers whose work is deeply intertwined with the cultural markets of a globalized world, or how contemporary academia has defined it, as part of World Literature.

“World Literature” or the idea of a “Global Novel” entail, as Héctor Hoyos comments, the integration of a specific literary production into global markets and circuits of translated circulation, or, in other words, a form of literature that can have a “world literary standing” (Hoyos 6). This position not only depends on the translatability of the novel (and hence its circulation potential), but also on how much this literature is able to say about the “ideologies of the global” (Hoyos 10). Hatoum novel fits comfortably into the category of ‘world literature’, not only because it led itself to world markets (it was created for one), but because it embodies –or rather, *inscribes*- that which defines ‘the global’: the local Amazonian specificity within the world market geopolitics –how the ‘first world’ consumes the ‘third world’. Hatoum’s Amazonia is also, quite literally, the retelling of magical Amazonia as a consumable legend. This act of “selling” literature about Amazonia recalls *Los pasos perdidos* and the protagonist’s idea to “sell” a narrative of his experience in the “jungles.” Although the labeling of Hatoum’s novel as ‘world literature’ highlights its integration into the circuits of global capitalism, it also offers the possibility of defining the Global through a Latinamericanist approach.<sup>269</sup> *Órfãos do Eldorado* is a deconstruction of western representations of the region and a critique of its ‘civilizing’ History. More than anything, this speaks of the complexity of locating Amazonian voices (at least intellectual voices) as either local or foreign, precisely because Amazonia has never been isolated from the forces of modernity and globalization. As such, tensions between the global and the local define its discursive history.

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heritage and modern global artistic trends and produce an identity that was unique and modern. By integrating modern vanguard aesthetics and the languages, cultures, and worldviews of the peripheral indigenous elements of the nation, Brazilian *modernismo* was to achieve a new national post-colonial identity.

Silviano Santiago extends the idea of *antropofagia* as a form of locating Latin American thought in his now famous essay “The Space In-Between” (which first appeared in 1978 in *Uma literatura nos trópicos*). He studies the formation of the Latin American cultural identity and discourse as a form of re-appropriation of European cultural influences. He claims that in the difference and treason generated by this form of re-appropriation -in their deviation from their norm- reside their value as forms of post-colonial identity. In this space that is neither pristine nor completely colonized –a space in-between- is where Latin America’s discourse is formed.

In this sense, Hatoum’s intermediary voice could be understood in the context of a wider corpus of critical thought that understands the creation of a Latin American post-colonial discourse as a product of cultural *antropofagia*.

<sup>269</sup> For more on this debate, see Héctor Hoyos 2015 book *Beyond Bolano: The Global Latin American Novel*.

In spite of being inscribed into debates of transculturalism and immersed in a circuit of global literature, Milton Hatoum has also been read in Brazil within a regionalist current. This does not undermine the fact that Hatoum occupies the position described in the earlier paragraphs, but it does imply that his literature responds to and is in dialogue with a certain approximation to Amazonian discourses. Schollhammer, in his book about Brazilian contemporary fiction, describes him as an example of Amazonian regionalism, but “sem exageros folclóricos” (87), and argues that “há na narrativa de Hatoum uma aproximação a herança literária latino-americana que se desenvolveu dos romances tipo ‘novela de la tierra’” (89).<sup>270</sup> In this sense, Hatoum finds a niche with other writers like Alberto Rangel, Ferreira de Castro, Graciliano Ramos, Jorge Amado, and Ronaldo Correia de Brito, to name a few. In addition to this, throughout his interviews and essays, Hatoum has expressed a clear interest and admiration for writers like Euclides da Cunha, Graciliano Ramos, and Marcio Souza, all who, with many variations, have been identified with producing literature about very particular Brazilian regions.<sup>271</sup> Yet, when asked about his relationship with the Amazonian regionalist tradition, Hatoum decidedly rejects his inscription into it stating that “quero distancia dela” [I want distance from it] (Revista de História), and discourages a reading of his work through a relationship with regionalism.

Tania Pellegrini’s work is one of the most solid commentaries of Milton Hatoum’s inscription into regionalism. For her, the writer’s literature is immersed within “a território único e ‘outro,’ cuja aura de exotismo –queira-se ou não- já faz parte das representações simbólicas do resto do país” (128).<sup>272</sup> In this sense, she understands his literature as a *re-visited regionalism* (129), and argues that “dentro da estrutura geral da sociedade brasileira, [Milton Hatoum’s] regionalismo ainda tem o papel de acentuar as particularidades culturais que se forjaram nas áreas internas, contribuindo para definir sua outredade, ao mesmo tempo que as reinsere no seio da cultura nacional” (129).<sup>273</sup> In this sense, reading his work as a literature that re-states Amazonia’s unique character, and writing from within a “lettered city,” Hatoum preserves certain “folclore” or “artenasato” [craftmanchip] into the nation’s plurality (Pellegrini 135). It is easy to follow and adhere into Pellegrini’s arguments given the fact that Hatoum’s literature, and especially in the case of *Órfãos do Eldorado*, does revolve around Amazonia’s unique character, like the presence of *encante* stories and a unique sense of the region’s cultural and socioeconomic history. Hatoum’s inscription into regionalism speaks to the fact that his literature is undeniably concerned with Amazonia’s history and culture. Whether this makes him a regionalist writer or not, is to be still discussed. I believe that locating Hatoum within this specific category, as scholars like Schollhammer and Pellegrini do, responds to a greater debate within Brazilian academia and the role regionalism has played in the national literary history. Regionalism has played such an important role in Brazil that it becomes hard to think outside its

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<sup>270</sup> Without folkloric exaggerations; there is in Hatoum’s narrative a proximity to the Latin American heritage of the regionalist “novelas de la tierra” (my translation).

<sup>271</sup> See, for example, the following interviews and texts: “Escrever a margem da história,” where he elaborates his position as a writer appropriating some of da Cunha’s essays; “Milton Hatoum, um cronista a espreita,” interview with Revista Cult; “O Amazonas preservou a floresta e destruiu a cidade,” interview with Revista de História.

<sup>272</sup> A unique and “other” territory, whose exotic aura –whether you want it or not- is already a part of the symbolic representations of the country (my translation).

<sup>273</sup> Within the general structure of Brazilian society, Milton Hatoum’s regionalism still accentuates the cultural particularities that were forged in these interior areas, contributing in defining their *otherness*, at the same time that he brings them into the national culture (my translation).

box. Debates like the ones identified in the previous pages exemplify how, in the contemporary cultural scene, terms like “regionalism” lack in describing the complexity of writers like Hatoum. Nonetheless, the debate does bring an important point to the discussion. Regionalist or not, and whether or not he rejects it, Hatoum’s literature is in dialogue with a tradition that has delved into Amazonia’s specificity.

So, from where and into what literary circuits is Milton Hatoum writing? I believe he is writing *from* Amazonia. However, not the exotic and “other” Amazonia of certain regionalism, but the twenty-first century Amazonia: a region with a strong cultural specificity that is not isolated whatsoever from São Paulo, the Lebanon, the UK, and California.<sup>274</sup> An Amazonia that is interconnected globally and that is situated at the center of environmental debates. An Amazonia that hosts poor and isolated indigenous and non-indigenous communities, and that opens its waters to transatlantic cruises. Yet, Milton Hatoum is also writing within a specific literary tradition, that which is constantly asking itself *how to write about Amazonia in response to its discursive history*. In this sense, he is in dialogue with the writers studied in this dissertation. He writes as a citizen of Manaus, as an immigrant, and within a globalized literary market: he is an insider and a foreigner at the same time, a condition that speaks less about Hatoum, and more about Amazonia as the crossing site of national and international interests. This is why Euclides da Cunha and the idea of writing *at the margins* echoes through all of his literature. Milton Hatoum’s voice, then, could be seen as that of an intermediary between the local and the global, the local and the foreign, a reflection of Amazonia’s position in a globalized world. This intermediary voice writes immersed in a tradition and brings it into a contemporary literary scene.

The debate on where to locate Milton Hatoum’s voice also illuminates Arminto Cordovil’s voice, the narrator of *Órfãos do Eldorado*. His voice –the place from where he delivers his narrative- is a voice made out of other voices. On the one hand, the voice of the father and the western colonizing enterprise he represents: “Voz, mesmo, só a de Amando: voz para ser obedecida... Meu pai queimou a floresta para fazer pasto. Ele prosperou, até comprou uma barraca e começou a transportar borracha, castanha e madeira de Médio Amazonas para Belém” (*Órfãos* 68).<sup>275</sup> On the other hand, the indigenous voices; voices translated by Florita that make up the memories of his childhood: “Lendas que eu e Florita ouvíamos dos avós das crianças da Aldéia. Falavam em língua geral, e depois Florita repetia as histórias em casa, nas noites de solidão da infância” (13).<sup>276</sup> For as much as Arminto is the heir of the colonizing father, he’s also feeds from the source of indigenous knowledge: “Uma tapuia me amamentou. Leite de índia, ou suco leitoso do tronco do amapá” (*Órfãos* 16).<sup>277</sup> Ultimately, however, Arminto Cordovil’s voice, although influenced and nurtured by other presences, stands by itself:

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<sup>274</sup> These are not just random cities: Milton Hatoum lives and works in Sao Paulo; the UK was a fundamental force in the rubber economy, and hosts the publishing house that first published *Órfãos do Eldorado*, and the novel has a strong intertextual dialogue with UC Berkeley’s professor Candace Slater, whose research about *encante* stories helped shape Hatoum’s inclusion of the enchanted city tale.

<sup>275</sup> “The only real voice was Amando’s –the voice that was to be obeyed... Then my father burnt the forest to make pasture. He was successful, even buying a barge to transport rubber, Brazil nuts and wood from the middle ranches of the Amazon to Belem” (93).

<sup>276</sup> “Legends that Florita and I heard from the grandparents of the children in Aldeia. They spoke in the *lingua geral*, and later Florita repeated the stories at home, in the lonely nights of my childhood” (4).

<sup>277</sup> “A *tapuia* breastfed me. An Indian’s milk, or the milky gum of the *amapá* tree” (9-10).

“E eu, envelhecido, sobrava. Então me afastei do mundo. Queria o silêncio. Voz, só a minha, para mim” (*Órfãos* 92).<sup>278</sup> This “voice for himself” marks the autonomy of Arminto from his father, but it also highlights the extraction from the worlds to which he could belong: not entirely indigenous, but not a heir to his father, Arminto is “afastado do mundo” [withdrawn or distanced from the world] at the outskirts. His voice is also that of an intermediary that fluidly translates (and there is always a treason in translation) the voices of the worlds he partakes from. His intermediary voice functions as a form of knowledge that constitutes his marginal identity. His voice is the voice of memory that at the same time *longs for* and *resents* the center from which he is expelled. It is precisely from this perspective and through this voice that a critique of Amazonian History will emerge: he is the rebel heir that will abdicate to his heritage as the son of a *civilizador*.

### ***Façanhas de um civilizador – or Writing El Dorado***

Through Arminto Cordovil’s voice, *Órfãos do Eldorado* tells the story of how Amazonia became the center stage of a growing capitalist global economy, anchored in the wealth brought by the rubber extraction system. Instead of focusing on nature or the rubber tappers (as in *La vorágine*, for example), the novel represents this through depicting the cities of Manaus and Belén do Pará as cosmopolitan places with an active and vibrating economy. In the novel, this portrayal of Amazonia as a site of wealth is connected to the western myth of El dorado, linking the region’s economy to a western discursive tradition that finds its origins in the texts of imperial travelers that go as far as the first colonial chronicles. In addition to this, the novel connects the idea of Amazonia as El dorado with the endeavor of *writing History* through the presence of a text that never got written, but that would be called *Façanhas de um civilizador* [The Deeds of a Bringer of Civilization]. In this sense, *Órfãos do Eldorado* articulates Amazonia’s participation into the modern project as the region’s inclusion into a discourse of (written) History that describes an emancipating, civilizing endeavor. This section focuses on how Milton Hatoum’s novel presents Amazonia’s inclusion into History and its relationship with writing as a ‘civilizatory’ practice.

“Até a Primeira Guerra, quem não tinha ouvido falar de Arminto Cordovil? Muita gente conhecia meu nome, todo mundo tinha ouvido falar da riqueza e da fama do meu pai, Amando, filho de Edilio” (*Órfãos* 13).<sup>279</sup> The story begins in 1840 with Edilio’s cacao plantation in the hacienda Boa Vida, close to the city of Vila Bela. Inheriting the wealth created by his own father, Amando builds his own home in the city, the “palacio branco,” where Arminto was born and raised. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Cordovil family investments transitioned from cacao plantations into the transportation of rubber through the Amazonian rivers. Within this fleet of transportation vessels, the last of them, the one named *Eldorado*, holds a symbolic place in the narrative: “Vi o cargueiro alemão uma única vez, de madrugada, depois de uma noitada num cabaré barato da rua da Independência. Sentei no cais flutuante e li a palavra branca pintada na proa: *Eldorado*. Quanta cobiça e ilusão” (*Órfãos* 21).<sup>280</sup> This vessel represents the history and

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<sup>278</sup> “So I withdrew from the world. I wanted silence. The only voice I wanted to hear was my own” (131).

<sup>279</sup> “Before the first World War, who hadn’t heard from Arminto Cordovil? Lots of people knew my name, everyone had heard tell of the wealth of my father, Amando, Edilio’s son” (5).

<sup>280</sup> “I saw the German freighter close to only once, at dawn, after I’d spent the night at a cheap cabaret in the Rua da Independencia. I sat on the floating quay and read the word painted in white on the prow: Eldorado. So much greed and illusion!” (17).

fate, not only of the Cordovil family, but of the entire region; a history of economic wealth and ambition that ended up being as elusive as the mythical city, nothing else than an illusion that sank as fast as it peaked. The historic arch that the novel traces –from 1840 up to today– symbolically encapsulates almost all of modern Brazil, starting few years after Dom Pedro II was proclaimed Emperor (1831), and finishing with the globalized contemporary nation.

Much more than a name, *Eldorado* summons the constructions of Amazonia as a site of consumable wealth that defined the inclusion of the region into western history. Constantly represented as elusive and inaccessible, the myth of the golden city functions as what Slater calls a “giant,” that is, a powerful stereotype that reduces the region just to the idea of its nature and conceals its social and cultural complexities (Slater *Entangled* 29-37).<sup>281</sup> What is at stake in the reference to El dorado is, on the one hand, the remembrance of a myth associated with wealth and richness, but on the other, and most importantly, the allusion of Amazonia as a region *inscribed* into the rhetoric of western History. And the word *inscribed* must be emphasized, since it conveys the idea of writing as a form of inscription: through the image of El dorado, colonial chroniclers and naturalist travelers *wrote* the region into History. In this sense, Amazonia as El dorado stands as the origins of the need to penetrate, conquer, systematize, consume, and put nature into production. Or in other words, to actually make of Amazonia El dorado.

El dorado also summons the appropriation of Amazonia by foreigners, as it constitutes a narrative that legitimizes the appropriation of the land by the European empire. In the novel, the vessel *Eldorado* that travels up and down the river is the culmination of an endeavor of conquest and appropriation started in 1839 by the Cordovil family. Through the memory of Arminto we discover the violent past of the Cordovil family and their story of appropriation and exploitation in Amazonia that leads to their social position within the region:

Sei que Amando e mau avô tinham inimigos. Amando contava atos heróicos de Edílio: a coragem com que ele e seis soldados derrotaram mais de trezentos revoltosos na batalha do Uaicurapá. Mas outras vozes desmentiam esse heroísmo, diziam que em 1839 Edílio havia comandado um massacre contra índios e caboclos desarmados. Depois dessa matança, ele tomou posse de uma área imensa na margem direita do Uaicurapá. Um sobrevivente deve ter gravado os crimes do tenente-coronel Edílio Cordovil no tronco de uma árvore secular. Amando queria escrever um livro, “Façanhas de um civilizador”, uma elegia ai pai dele, um dos líderes da contra-revolta. (*Órfãos* 71)<sup>282</sup>

Edílio’s “heroic acts” –the massacre and displacement of indigenous people with the subsequent usurpation of their territories– are considered by Amando the great deeds of a civilizing endeavor –or put into Hegelian terms, the civilization and liberation of barbarous

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<sup>281</sup> In *Entangled Edens* Candace Slater provides a historization and analysis of the emergence and transformations of the myth of El dorado in relation to the different ways Amazonia has been comprehended by western culture. In her late essay “Visions of the Amazon: What Has Shifted, What Persists, and Why This Matters,” (2015) Slater re-visits these topics with an up-to-date perspective.

<sup>282</sup> “Amando and my father had enemies. Amando recounted the heroic deeds of Edílio: the courage with which he and six soldiers defeated more than 300 hundred rebels in the Battle of Uaicurapá. But other voices questioned the heroism, saying that in the 1839 Caboclos Revolt Edílio had presided over a massacre of unarmed *caboclos* and Indians. After this slaughter, he took possession of an immense area on the right bank of the Uaicurapá. One survivor must have carved the crimes of Lieutenant-Colonel Edílio Cordovil on the trunk of an ancient tree. Amando wanted to write a book, *The Deeds of a Bringer of Civilization*, as an elegy to his father, one of the leaders of the counter-revolt” (98).

lands. The appropriation of the indigenous land is once again recalled when Arminto has to sell his properties, and we see that the “palacio branco” has “escritura lavrada em cartório” [a written scripture] (73). This “legal” document that proves land ownership thorough a written and cartographic scripture is the result of a physical and political displacement and violence; that which is “legal” becomes a violent imposition made legitimate by the act of writing. Writing appears as a form to legitimize and thus authorize the violent appropriation and consumption of the region. The word “escritura,” which in Portuguese implies both *written* and *legal document*, link the idea of *writing* as a form to license, approve, and regulate western’s occupation and consumption of the land. The would-be text *Façanhas de um civilizador* legitimizes the conquest of Amazonia and the search for El dorado, while at the same time it promises an emancipating goal, the arrival of western civilization. At the same time, it inscribes this “legitimate” conquest into western’s History; one that, as Benjamin reminds us, is always written by the victors and that serves the purpose to authorize occupation as a form of progress and liberation.

The novel’s critique of writing (and reading) becomes apparent throughout the narrative in other forms. This is visible when Arminto, curious about who his distant father was, searches in his office for clues about his identity. Doing so, he uncovers the “history” of the father’s past, as if uncovering an archive. He reads letters, documents, contracts, etc:

depois de fuçar a papelada guardada na caixa de Mandarin, descobri que Amando tinha sido um contrabandista e sonegador... Transportava a carga até outras freguesias para não pagar impostos em Vila Bela; depois desembarcava tudo numa ilha perto do Manaus e sonegava outra vez. Subornava o empregado da mesa-de-rendas, subordinava até o diabo... [Os políticos] Eram os aliados, os sócios dele... Mau pai sonegava e depois dividia o lucro com eles; ali ajudava a prefeitura, dava carroças para recolher o lixo, dava os cavalos e os bois que puxavam as carroças, pagava os reparos do matadouro e da cadeia, o salário dos carcereiros. Depois fez a mesma coisa com o frete das barças e do Eldorado: escrevia para o governador do Amazonas, para um funcionário do Ministério da Viação Publica. (*Órfãos 77*)<sup>283</sup>

The father’s “archive” discovered by Arminto could be compared with that of the colony, and Arminto’s role as that of the critical and modern historian who reconstructs a critique of the empire through these documents. What is highlighted in this archival discovery is the fact that the appropriation of territories, the evasion of the law, and the corruption of power, are all mediated and legitimized by the act of writing. Like the “other voices” that undermine Edílio’s heroic past, Arminto becomes a character that undermines the legitimacy of this archive, as it will be seen later on.

A deeper appreciation of the role of writing can be seen in Estiliano, the family’s lawyer, and in the presence of a tourist writer with whom Arminto establishes contact. Stelios da Cunha Apóstolo is the family’s lawyer and a lifetime companion to Arminto. Stelios appears in the narrative as a sort of adoptive father to the narrator, and as the caring and compassionate

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<sup>283</sup> “After I’d rummaged through the papers in the Mandarin box, I discovered that Amando Cordovil had been a smuggler and tax-evader... He took the cargo to other areas so as not to pay taxes in Vila Bela; then he unloaded everything on an island near Manaus and played the same trick. He bribed the customs official; he bribed the devil himself... [Politicians] were his allies, his partners, I said. My father avoided duties and then shared the profits with them; then he helped the mayor’s office, donated carts to collect the rubbish, gave the horses and oxen that pulled the carts, paid for the repairs at the slaughterhouse and the jail, even the jailers’ wages. Then he did the same thing with the cargos for the barges and the *Eldorado*: he wrote to the governor of Amazonas, and to a civil servant in the Ministry of Public Transport” (107).

ambassador his real father never sent. He is also the naïve lawyer of the father's business, whose ignorance on the corruption is revealed too late in his life. But he is also, and above all, a person of words and literature: "falava das livrarias de Paris como se estivesse lá, mas nunca tinha ido a França. Vinho e literatura, os prazeres de Estiliano" (19).<sup>284</sup> Estiliano's profession as a lawyer and his love for literature point, once again, to the presence of the written word as a form of knowledge that associates scripture as a legitimizing form. He is the one who literally "makes legal" the acts that put in motion the 'civilizatory' endeavor, although he ignores what is being covered up. In addition to representing *the law*, Stelios also stands for literature, another of the forms from which Arminto wants to distance himself: "Ia mandar Estiliano ao diabo, ele e a palavra escrita e toda a poesia do mundo" (*Órfãos* 86).<sup>285</sup> Estiliano, whose last name is da Cunha, is a character who reminds the reader of Euclides da Cunha. He is presented as a father figure and is related to literature and to law.

In addition to this, Arminto depicts a visiting writer as a tourist eager to experience the "autochthonous" Amazonia, in a gesture that comments on the idea of the writer as a foreigner (like Rivera, Carpentier or Lévi-Strauss) avidly experiencing and taking notes with an accelerated expectation:

Três mulheres e um homem. Escritor. Elas eram elegantes e posudas, todas vestidas de preto, e viviam molhadas de tanto calor. Foi um alvoroço, os homens não saiam de perto das grã-finas. O escritor puxava conversa com todo mundo: índios, caboclos, artesãos e compositores de toadas. E não se cansava de anotar o nome das plantas e bichos. Comia tudo, até piranha. (*Órfãos* 86)<sup>286</sup>

Uncomfortable and out of place, the urban writer becomes associated with the foreigner, as literature is with Paris, and El dorado is with the conquistadors. The writer is portrayed as a tourist whose voracity is only another form of foreign consumption of the region and who wants to see Amazonia through the imagery of the wild and savage.

Lembro de um grupo de turistas que queria ver índios. Eu disse: E só observar os moradores da cidade. Um dos turistas insistiu: Índios puros, nus. E então os acompanhei até a Aldeia da minha infância e mostrei a eles os últimos sobreviventes de uma tribu. Se vocês quiserem conversar com eles, conheço uma tradutora, eu disse, pensando em Florita. Não queriam conversar, e sim fotografar. (*Órfãos* 88)<sup>287</sup>

The representation of the writer as a tourist who arrives into the region to consume certain imagery reminds of Mario de Andrade and his photographic memoir *Um turista aprendiz*, the 1927 expedition associated with Brazilian *modernismo*. De Andrade's work was an exploration of the region that attempted to register and integrate Amazonia's specificity into the cultural renovation that was taking place in the 1920s in Brazil. The photographs, the diary, and the subsequent publication of the novel *Macunaima* (1928) effectively contributed to the radical

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<sup>284</sup> "he'd talk about the bookshops in Paris as if he was there, though he'd never been to France" (14).

<sup>285</sup> "I was going to send Estiliano to the devil; him, and the written word, and all the poetry in the world" (122).

<sup>286</sup> "Three women and a man –a writer. They were elegant poseurs, dressed all in black, and soaking wet from the heat. There was a great excitement, and the men couldn't keep away from the socialities. The writer was striking up conversations with everyone: Indians, *caboclos*, artisans and popular composers. He never tired of recording the names of plants and animals. He ate everything, even fried piranha" (122-123).

<sup>287</sup> "I remember a group of tourists who wanted to see Indians. I said: All you need to do is look at the inhabitants of the town. Then I took them to the Aldeia of my childhood and showed them the last survivors of a tribe. If you want to talk to them, I know an interpreter, I said, thinking of Florita. They didn't want to talk, just take photos" (126).

change in the way Brazil view itself through its culture.<sup>288</sup> However, de Andrade's work, as that of most of the Brazilian modernist artists, was produced by and for urban circles. The appearance of a *tourist writer* and the *photographer* articulates a critique, if not specifically about Mario de Andrade's work, about the integration of Amazonia into literary and intellectual circles that are foreign to the region. In opposition to this, Arminto presents a vision that is far from what tourists seek: an urban space redefined by global economies where the "moradores" are the once thought "pristine" indigenous.

In the association of *writing* and of the *writer* to the consumption of the region –the writer as the one who consumes– the novel elaborates a connection between writing and the appropriation of the region. To this extent, *Órfãos do Eldorado* adheres to a reflection that is present throughout this dissertation: the conquest and occupation of Amazonia has always functioned together with its representation in western discourses. In this sense, *Façanhas de um civilizador* symbolizes western imperial narratives, those which claimed possession and consumption of Amazonia throughout its history. What is crucial, however, is to understand that modern and contemporary literature is a response to this. What is at stake in my view is the emergence of modern literature as an autonomous field that becomes the center from which the imageries and practices that have forced Amazonia's integration into modernity are destabilized. Twentieth and twenty-first century literature has complicated and critiqued the politics (da Cunha), the aesthetics (Rivera, Carpentier), and the History associated with in-scribing Amazonia into capitalism. By including a reference to a modern traveler writer and emphasizing his desire for "autochthonous" imagery and his ambiguous ethic, Hatoum seems to be reminding us, in addition, that a true critique and subversion of Amazonia's inscription into modernity must depart from a consciousness of the point of enunciation of the writer (the intermediary place located at the margins). This, perhaps, is Hatoum's own critique of da Cunha's or Rivera's works. Nonetheless, although Hatoum articulates a possible (and valid) criticism of twentieth century literature, his work aims to comment on the tight relationship between colonial desire and the written word and, most importantly, literature as a reaction to this.

What is, one must ask, the fundamental difference that constitutes discursive drive of imperial desire discourses and the literature of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries? I believe the difference relies in the fact that imperial words denote the world, and by doing so, they enact a symbolic apprehension of it. They are a form of depicting Amazonia as *knowledge* and *information* –a very specific kind, one that would aid it's the enlargement of the empire through the consumption of nature. The modern and contemporary literary tradition denotes, above all, not the world itself, but rather point to their nature as language and form –that is, they are first and foremost discourses centered on their aesthetic and not the knowledge and information they provide. This is why all the works studied in this dissertation speak about their own form and representational strategies, and through and by them, about the world. *Órfãos*, by reflecting on writing and orality, also reflects on its own form and systems of meaning.

To summarize, *Órfãos do Eldorado*, thus, not only makes a specific reference to the myth of El dorado, but it also re-elaborates the image of Amazonia as a site of wealth by re-telling the story of how the region was apprehended and consumed by foreigners. El dorado, symbolically and literally, materializes into the rubber economy and its system of production, such as the

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<sup>288</sup> See footnotes 2 and 8



transportation vessels that built the Cordovil family's fortune. At the same time, the novel articulates El dorado with the endeavor of writing. In this sense, the novel elaborates the idea of written discourse as a foreign form of legitimizing the western occupation and consumption of the region. By associating this occupation through the idea of a "civilizing" endeavor and through the idea of an archive, the novel associates the discourse of El dorado with History as an emancipating narrative of progress, always written by the victors and perpetrators of the occupation. In addition to this, the novel positions literary discourses as the platform from which History and imperial writing is destabilized.

The other way in which *Órfãos do Eldorado* re-elaborates the myth of El dorado and depicts the "façanhas de um civilizador" is by representing Amazonia through its cities. "Os colonizadores confundiam Manaus ou Manoa com o Eldorado. Buscavam o ouro do Novo Mundo numa cidade submersa chamada Manoa. Essa era a verdadeira cidade encantada" (*Órfãos* 99).<sup>289</sup> Manaus and Belem do Pará, as cosmopolitan cities riding the wave of modernity, materialize the wealth and euphoria generated by the rubber extraction in the region. By locating its point of enunciation in the city, Hatoum's novel undermines the stereotype of Amazonia as a peripheral natural world, while at the same time highlights the urban phenomena as a consequence of its integration into History and its narrative of progress. In this sense, El dorado becomes the city of Manaus.

"Manaus tinha tudo," explains Arminto: "luz elétrica, telefone, jornais, cinemas, teatro, ópera" (17).<sup>290</sup> It is through his experience as an urban dweller that the economy of the place appears:

O coração e os olhos de Manaus está nos portos e na beira do Negro. A grande área portuária fervilhava de comerciantes, peixeiros, carvoeiros, carregadores, marreteiro. Arranjei um serviço no empório de um português, estudava de manha, almoçava no mercado, e passava a tarde carregando caixas e atendendo fregueses [...] Conheci o comandante de *Atahualpa*, do *Re Umberto*, do *Anselm*, do *Rio Amazonas*. Fiz amizade com Wolf Nickels, do *La Plata*. Esses comandantes trabalhavam na Lamport & Holt, na Ligure Brasileira, no Lloyd Brasileiro, na Booth Line e na Hamburgo America do Sul. As vezes eu acompanhava passageiros estrangeiros a um passeio de canoa nos lagos próximos de Manaus; andava com eles pelo centro da cidade, eram loucos por conhecer o teatro Amazonas, não entendiam como podia existir um colosso de arquitetura na selva. (*Órfãos* 21)<sup>291</sup>

As a modern city integrated into a transnational financial and tourist destination, Manaus integrated Amazonia into the "belle époque." Ana Daou explains that from 1880 to 1910 the region became the focus of an unprecedented financial prosperity, framed within a faith of

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<sup>289</sup> "The colonizers confused Manaus or Manoa with Eldorado. They were looking for the gold of the New World in a submerged city called Manoa. That was the real enchanted city" (142).

<sup>290</sup> "Manaus had everything: electric light, telephones, newspapers, cinemas, theaters, opera" (12).

<sup>291</sup> "The heart and the eyes of Manaus are in its docks and along the bank of the Rio Negro. The great port area swarmed with businessmen, fishermen, colliers, dock-workers, peddlers. I got a job in a store run by a Portuguese man, studied in the morning, had my lunch in the Market and spent the afternoon carrying boxes and serving costumers [...] I got to know the captain of the *Atahualpa*, the *Re Umberto*, the *Anselm*, the *Rio Amazonas*. I became friendly with Wolf Nickels, of the *La plata*. These captains worked for Lamport and Holt, the Ligure Brasileira, the Lloyd Brasileiro, the Booth Line and the Hamburg-South America. Sometimes I accompanied foreign passengers on a canoe trip to the lakes near Manaus; I took them round the centre of the city –they were mad keen to see the Opera House, and couldn't understand how such a grand work of architecture could exist in the middle of the jungle" (15-17).

material and social progress. Its increasingly complex society lived an economic euphoria as technology and production created a global market dynamic. Within this context, the opening of Amazonian rivers became a pivotal avenue for commerce connecting the remote sites of rubber extraction to international lines of exportation. This period of economic wealth attracted both Brazilians and foreigners into the region, such as the *sertanejos* of which da Cunha writes, or even Milton Hatoum's own family. The centralized importance of cities like Manaus and Belem, together with an economy that threaded all levels of society, generated a very specific social and demographic character in which indigenous people, mestizos, foreigners, and Brazilians from other urban centers mix and overlap. It is in this social context and place in which Hatoum locates his novel, as a place where indigenous societies are "os moradores da cidade" [the inhabitants of the city] (*Órfãos* 88). It also created an important bourgeois class anchored in the ideals and values of a European society, represented in the novel by the Cordovil family. The most symbolic token of this society became, without a doubt, the famous opera house named Teatro Amazonas, inaugurated in 1896, which hosted a repertoire of performances paired with the most exclusive venues in the Paris of the times.<sup>292</sup> In the novel, the names of the locations where the narrative takes place are a clear echo of these euphoric moments: the "palacio branco," the *Boa Vida* Hacienda, the city of *Vila Bela*, and of course, Manaus and *Eldorado*, the vessel.

The cities of Manaus and Belem materialize El dorado. As Arminto himself comments, "uma mentira repetida não é um arremedo de verdade?" (36).<sup>293</sup> However, signaling a critique of the financial euphoria, *Órfãos do Eldorado* also represents Manaus through its decay and ruins.<sup>294</sup> "Uns anos antes da morte do meu pai, as pessoas só falavam em crescimento. Manaus, a exportação de borracha, o emprego, o comércio, o turismo, tudo crescia," states Arminto. However, soon enough "[N]os bares e restaurantes as notícias dos jornais de Belém e Manaus eram repetidas com alarme: Se não plantarmos sementes de seringueira, vamos desaparecer..." (33).<sup>295</sup> By 1915 the production of rubber in Amazonia came down due to the growing rubber industry in South East Asia, where the species that produced rubber were able to grow in plantation systems lowering the cost of its production. The impact of this change was quickly felt in Amazonia, and particularly in Manaus, as seen in Arminto's memory of it:

Andei de bonde pela cidade, vi palafitas e casebres no subúrbio e na beira dos igarapés do centro, e acampamentos onde dormiam ex-seringueiros; vi crianças ser enxotadas quando tentavam catar comida ou esmolar na calçada do botequim Alegre, da Fábrica de Alimentos Italiana e dos restaurantes. A cadeia de Sete de Setembro estava lotada, vários sobrados e lojas a venda. (*Órfãos* 57)<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> Besides Ana Daou's book *A belle époque Amazônica, Trem Fantasma* by Francisco Foot Hardman offers a thorough examination of the region's inclusion into modernity –and the modernization of the region– through the study of the Madeira-Marmoré train project.

<sup>293</sup> "But perhaps a repeated lie is just an imitation of the truth?" (42).

<sup>294</sup> In *Entre Construções e Ruínas*, José Alonso Torres Freire studies the city as a space in Milton Hatoum's first three novels. Depicting Amazonia through its cities, Torres Freire places Hatoum's work in dialogue with other Brazilian writers such as Dalcídio Jurandir who, in the 1950s and 1960s placed the urban experience in the literature of the region.

<sup>295</sup> "Some years before my father's death, people only talked of growth. Manaus, rubber exports, business, tourism, everything was growing"; "in the bars and restaurants the news in Belém and Manaus papers was repeated with alarm: If we don't plant rubber tree seeds, we'll disappear... So much corruption in politics, and taxes are on the increase" (36-37).

<sup>296</sup> "I went around the city by tram, saw the houses on stilts and the shacks in the suburbs and along the creeks in the centre, and camps where ex-rubber-tappers slept; I saw children being shooed off as they tried to beg for food or

Shantytowns, unemployed rubber tappers, beggars, and abandoned businesses, Manaus' economy soon collapses. What is at stake, however, is the crumbling down of the project of El dorado, and with it, instead of the consolidation of an emancipating progress, the emergence of the ruins of modernity. These ruins are precisely the place and state from which Arminto will articulate his memory and launch a critique of History. As he says, "todo o luxo de uma época acabou numa lembrança amarga" (89).<sup>297</sup> Within the collapse of the rubber economy, the Cordovil empire goes down: the vessel *Eldorado* sinks losing eighty tons of rubber and castanha nuts, and the ongoing evasion of the port taxes requires the unachievable payment of fees that must be paid. In front of this, Arminto, "ingênuo o irresponsável" (56)<sup>298</sup>, needs to become *the father* and take charge of the business. He, however, deliberately loses all the fortune that is left.

However, as Arminto himself says in a revealing statement, he didn't belong to this "história." Rejected by his father, the narrator is an orphan who sees and experiences the world from the outside, for he himself decided to walk away from it. "Ninguém reconheceu [em mim] um Cordovil do passado. Eu até podia estar na pele de um dos marreteiros; a diferença é que minha história era outra. Mas isso não é tudo? Por vingança e por prazer pueril eu tinha jogado fora uma fortuna. E olha só: não me arrependo" (101).<sup>299</sup> Against History as a civilizing endeavor, against his father, the victor, and against writing as a form to legitimize their violence, Arminto's voice—a voice made out of many other voices—tells us his own version of history. His voice and memory oppose, precisely, the *Façanhas de um civilizador* and reveal the other side of the golden city of El dorado.

### **Orphanhood – or the Unwriting of El Dorado**

In this section I will focus on the ways in which *Órfãos do Eldorado* undermines the discourse of History. Some pages ago I specified the notion of History to which I believe the novel's critique is aimed at. That is, History as Hegel conceived it, as a progressive emancipation leading to an ultimate goal, the liberation of the individual and the triumph of his reason. I have also explained how this type of narrative is signaled in the novel by the mention of the document *Façanhas de um civilizador*, which encapsulated the discovery, conquest, and consumption of Amazonia, and symbolized, particularly, the installation of "civilizatory" practices, a drive towards 'progress and development', and by doing so, the integration of Amazonia into capitalism. By a critique I mean, obviously, that the novel points to the idea that the "civilizatory" practices, the notion of progress, and the idea of emancipation were, at their best, vague illusions that did not deliver the liberation they promised. They created, instead, a state of precariousness that is symbolized in Arminto's poverty, and in the solitude and isolation of his maturity. On the other hand, the novel also points to undermining the temporality of History as

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money in front of the Alegre Bar, the Italian Food Manufactory. The prison of Seventh of September Street was full, and several houses and shops were for sale" (76).

<sup>297</sup> "the luxury of a whole era ended in a bitter memory" (126).

<sup>298</sup> "naïve or irresponsible" (74).

<sup>299</sup> "No one recognized a Cordovil from the past. I might as well have been in the skin of one of the peddlers; the difference was our stories. But isn't that everything anyway? For vengeance or puerile pleasure I'd thrown away a fortune. But I'm not sorry" (145). In Portuguese the word for story and history is the same, which allows for an ambiguity that is lost in translation.

just one more within an array of alternative time experiences. In this sense, albeit the dominance and universality of the category of History, *Órfãos* presents experiences, voices and rhetoric that are *different* –that belong to the *other*- and that resist its inscription into the teleology of “civilization.”

To speak of a critique of History, as Hegel conceived it, is not a small task. My aim is not to summarize or historicize the many ways in which some of Hegel’s ideas on History have been received, transformed, and questioned. Rather, I want to explain, and in doing so, adhere, to only one, but equally productive, critique of History: that which emerged around post-colonial theory, and more specifically, around subaltern studies, and that complicates the inscription or marginalization of the subjected *other* into the temporality of History. To this extent, the critique I want to articulate is based on the presumption that History is a written narrative whose content and rhetoric is far from objective, implying a politicized account of the past. To this extent, I adhere to Ashcroft (et al) when he affirms that the category of History is, above all, a form of legitimation concomitant to European colonialism, an “instrument for the control of subject peoples” (317). The main question that structures its critique asks, thus, about the mechanisms of resistance and the alternatives against the temporality of the colonizer.

The starting point, then, is questioning the universality of History as a category that describes and includes all experiences. In *Provincializing Europe* (2000), Dipesh Chakrabarty underlines that the idea of History responds to a very particular European locale and tradition, and thus questions its validity as a universal tool. He explains that History became the promise of liberation yet to come, a goal timeline into which colonized countries had to be integrated; a mode that became the “waiting room” of the soon-to-be-like-Europe (8). Historicism –the mode of thinking that assumes the universality of History-

enabled European domination of the world in the nineteenth century. Crudely, one might say that it was one important form that the ideology of progress of “development” took from the nineteenth century on. Historicism is what made modernity or capitalism look not simply local but rather as something that became global *over time*, by originating in one place (Europe) and then spreading outside it. (Chakravarti *Provincializing* 7)

As he explains, this idea of History was a *local* category that spread *over time* and responded to the very specific European context. By identifying it as a *local* drive that responds to a specific locale, context, and politics, Chakrabarty debunks the universality of the category of History and opens up the possibility of an alternative narrative, or of a variation from it. This model opens the space for the appearance of narratives or “devices of collective memory that were both antihistorical and antimodern” (Chakrabarty “Postcoloniality” 340).<sup>300</sup> Being antihistorical entails being antimodern to the extent that ‘to have a History’ or to ‘be part of History’ equals to the adherence and integration into processes of modernization; to be “modern” is, in this sense, to inscribe into “civilization” and to be part of a western time frame. As Chakrabarty reminds, then, a “critique of historicism therefore goes to the heart of the question of political modernity in non-Western societies” (*Provincializing* 9).

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<sup>300</sup> Chakrabarty complicates the idea of History as a narrative you can opt out of by pointing to its impossibility. In this sense, he proposes the project of “provincializing Europe” as one rooted in a “politics of despair” (Chakrabarty “Postcoloniality” 344).

José Rabasa further expands this by arguing that modernity –that is, the promise of History- is just one more of the possible experiences and narratives of time.<sup>301</sup> Considering the possibility of a subject either *outside* of History or *without* History, Rabasa explores the epistemological limits of the notion of History itself. The outcome –and the founding principle of Subaltern studies- appears as “the possibility of interrupting narratives that end up in single histories,” and enabling the appearance of the possibility of residing “elsewhere” or in a non-modern state (*Without 5*). Both José Rabasa and Chakrabarty coincide that to articulate an out-of-History or an alternative to it, the subject has to do it through alternative mechanisms that do not coincide with the framework through which History itself is constituted. In other words, the subject has to articulate his claim against History through a rhetoric and voice that resists its assimilation into the discourse of History itself. The possibility and effectiveness of this, however, can be questioned, and its effectiveness could be ultimately reduced to a negotiation and translation between the non-modern and the western form of expression.<sup>302</sup> What I am interested in highlighting, however, are the ways in which Chakrabarty’s and Rabasa’s thoughts offer a possible frame to understand the articulation of a voice and rhetoric outside and against the idea of History. Taking this into consideration, I am interested in tracing the ways in which Milton Hatoum’s novel reveals an outside, a parallel, and an alternative narrative to that proposed by the discourse of El dorado.

My analysis of the novel focuses on three instances that articulate a resistance and that reveal an alternative to the total integration into the category of History. More than revealing *another* History –this would entail falling into a contradiction-, the instances that I propose reveal nuances that escape either the form of the written narrative that defines the discourse of History, or the identification with the values, beliefs, and processes that configure the experience of modernity. The first of them focuses on the way in which Arminto constructs himself through an experience of *orphanhood*, marking a difference with his father –the civilizer- and locating himself at the outskirts of his domain. It is from this marginal distance from which Arminto will understand Amazonia’s History. To this extent, I will consider the idea of *orphanhood* as an out-of-History position. The second instance focuses on the articulation of the narration through an oral and polyphonic texture. In here, orality opposes to the written aspect of History. The third instance focuses on memory and nostalgia as elements that challenge the timeline of progression. Given the proximity between memory, nostalgia, and ruins, this part of the chapter will delve into a reflection of the latter two as part of the novel’s critique of modernity. The third instance focuses on the presence of the *encante* stories, mostly organized around Arminto’s lover, Dinaura. These stories appear as re-appropriations of the myth of El dorado, undermining the one sided construction of the region as a site of wealth. In addition to this, the *encante* stories complicate the idea of History by offering a system of beliefs and a vision of nature that opposes to a way of representing the world concomitant to a Western idea of modernity. On this section, Chakrabarty’s ideas on the ‘time of History’ and the times of the gods’ will become helpful to describe *Órfãos* articulation of a resistance.

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<sup>301</sup> See Rabasa’s *Tell Me the Story of How I Conquered You* (2011) and *Without History* (2011).

<sup>302</sup> See, for example, Chakrabarty’s claim that the subject “cannot speak itself as ‘theory’ within the knowledge procedures of the an intellectual western debate. (“Postcoloniality” 341).

## *Orphanhood*

In *Órfãos do Eldorado* orphanhood is literal and symbolic. Arminto, as well as Florita, the indigenous maid, and Dinaura, the mysterious lover, are all orphans. In Arminto's case, orphanhood is not only the result of his mother's premature death, but of the unaffectionate and distant relationship with the father, who constantly pushes him away. However, orphanhood is also seen in the novel as the impossibility, and sometimes resistance, to identify, belong, and partake with the History of Amazonia as the site of progress and wealth. In this sense, orphanhood becomes the metaphoric idea through which the novel shows how certain characters become and remain marginal to processes of modernization.

A starting point is through the analysis of the forms of orphanhood of the female characters. Florita and, perhaps, Dinaura (therein lays her secret) expose a common topic in the novel: young indigenous women with violent pasts who are displaced from their families and who come into the cities to serve white men. These stories denounce systems of power organized around gender and race in which young indigenous women are used by white male colonizers, and highlight the inequity of economic systems that push these girls into urban spaces in search of a better life, risking their own integrity and freedom. However, these women could also be interpreted as symbols of Amazonia. The idea of Amazonia as an indigenous women –a fertile, exotic, and sexualized female- comes from as far as the identification of the region with the myth of the warrior women, the Amazonas. As Candace Slater explains, the Amazonas are another form of “giant” myths that represent Europe's anxiety against a fertile nature that is also threatening and dangerous. The construction of a sexualized Amazonia finds echoes in the ideas of a “virgin” forest that needs to be “penetrated,” and they resonate in ideas of the region as a female nature defined by abundance and fertility. In the particular case of the novel's female orphans, however, these warrior women have transformed into fragile and abused “damsels in distress” (Slater *Entangled* 139). This type of symbolic association, perhaps fully developed in Orlando Senna's and Jorge Bodansky's 1976 film *Iracema, Uma transa Amazônica*, appears throughout the 1970s and 1980s associated with the emergence of an environmental discourse that seeks to alert about Amazonia's ecological fragility.<sup>303</sup> In this sense, the form of orphanhood that Florita and Dinaura represent speaks of the vulnerability of a region that has been left to wander and, at the same time, pressured to keep up, with the demands of modernity and globalization. The poignant end of Florita in the novel speaks for itself: lost in nostalgia and melancholy, she spends her last years pushing a cart through the city of Vila Bela, selling fruits and snacks to European tourists. The last scene in which she appears is highly revealing: Arminto finds her dead, lying on top of the cart on which she sold fruits as if she was, also, a product to be consumed by the tourists and passers by.

Yet, it is through Arminto's own personal story that orphanhood becomes a form of political resistance. Growing up under the shadow of his father, he longs being acknowledged and loved. The narrator's relationship with his father is defined by despise and silence (20), and

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<sup>303</sup> The movie tells the story of Iracema (her name recalls José de Alencar's 19<sup>th</sup> century national foundation novel), who becomes a prostitute that travels along the Transamazonica interstate. In her travels she is witness of the region's industrialization along with the environmental and social decay connected with it. Iracema could be interpreted as Amazonia, now a prostitute facing multiple dangers, and in the hands of white abusive males. The movie is one of the most relevant contemporary films about Amazonia in the context of environmental crises.

by a constant desire of proximity -“queria que me abraçasse ou conversasse comigo” (18)<sup>304</sup>- marked by fear and anxiety (27). As Arminto explains about his youth, “[M]inha maior dúvida naquela época era saber se o silêncio hostil que nos separava era culpa minha ou dele” (16).<sup>305</sup> The father’s rejection comes because his father sees him as responsible for his own mother’s death at his birth. In addition to this, Amando’s rejection comes from finding out that Arminto and Florita were having sexual relationships. “Meu filho é louco pelas indiazinhas” (24)<sup>306</sup>, Amando hurtfully mocks about his son, a condition that sets him apart from the family as Arminto is not the prototype of the white dominant male, but an individual ambiguously located in an intermediary position between whites and indigenous people.

After the father’s death, Amando becomes a haunting presence that threatens to make of Arminto the same kind of man: “Sem que eu percebesse, estava sendo tão teimoso e bruto quanto Amando Cordovil. Queria ser diferente, mas uma sombra do meu pai estava dentro de mim, como um caroço numa fruta podre. Eu teimava em ser a casca, queria ser jogado fora, e assim não faria dano a ninguém” (78).<sup>307</sup> The awareness of becoming his own father, highlighted by the fact that he inherits the vessel transportation business, develops into Arminto’s necessity to differentiate himself. After receiving the money left by selling all his properties, the narrator finally achieves the power his own father had. However, instead of continuing with the legacy of the “civilizing” leaders of his family, Arminto deliberately spends all his fortune: “Podia sentir o prazer que Amando sempre me proibiu. E podia gastar sem a vigilância de um pai ou tutor [...] Fiquei enjoado de tanto comprar, gastar, farrear, de comer e beber nos melhores restaurantes” (80-81).<sup>308</sup> In this sense, Arminto’s wasteful endeavor is a conscious effort to end the history of his family. As he explains, “[E]u, sozinho, era o passado e o presente dos Cordovil. E não queria futuro para homens da minha laia. Tudo vai acabar neste corpo de velho” (94).<sup>309</sup>

What is at stake in Arminto’s differentiation from his father is a resistance to continue his father’s legacy and to situate himself at the margins of the “civilizing endeavor.” The narrator’s option to step away from the family’s history is a form of exile that recalls Milton Hatoum’s discussion about being an Amazonian writer both as an insider and an outsider, from where a critical perspective on History can be articulated. In this sense, as Joyce Silva explains, there is an estrangement to what was once familiar that re-emerges as a critical re-understanding of the region (Silva 698). It is also the materialization, into a narrator, of da Cunha’s construction of Amazonia as a place situated at the margins of History. This marginalization, however, does not constitute a form of expulsion, but rather a *different* way of belonging to it. As Milton Hatoum comments on an essay about da Cunha’s work, “o conceito do isolamento é um dos pilares do

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<sup>304</sup> “I wanted him to hug me and chat with me” (12).

<sup>305</sup> “My greatest worry at the time was knowing if the silent hostility between my father and myself was my fault or his” (10).

<sup>306</sup> “My son’s crazy about little Indian girls” (22).

<sup>307</sup> “Without realizing it, I was being as stubborn and brutish as Amando Cordovil. I wanted to be different, but there was a shadow of my father inside me, like a stone inside a rotten fruit. I was determined to be the rind, to be thrown aside, and that way I’d do no harm to anyone” (109).

<sup>308</sup> “I could taste the pleasure that Amando had always refused me. And I could spend it without a father or a guardian looking over my shoulder... I was sick of so much buying, spending, carousing, eating and drinking in the best restaurants” (114).

<sup>309</sup> “And I alone was the past and the present of the Cordovils. And I wanted no future for men of my kind. Everything will end in this old man’s body” (135).

seu [da Cunha's] pensamento sociológico... Estar à margem não significa excluir-se do processo histórico, mas dele participar de uma outra forma" (Hatoum "Expatriados" 333).<sup>310</sup> This form of inclusion and exclusion becomes a political positioning where History can be articulated and questioned at the same time, and it recalls Chakrabarty's idea of an alternative experience within modernity: Arminto is the heir who abdicates, and in doing so, he gives voice to those left behind.

### *Orality and Polyphony*

Through its narrative texture and its structure, *Órfãos do Eldorado* undermines the idea of a lineal progressive narrative of History. Against the act of writing, orality; against the presence of one hegemonic voice, polyphony; against the narrative of progress, the circularity of memory. Together with the point of enunciation of a literal and symbolic orphanhood, the voices of memory appear as subjective testimonies that work against the hegemonic forces of modernity. The contradictory nature of these voices, however, constitutes the modern experience by revealing its heterogeneous difference and its inability to be comprehended into the narrative of History.

The first sentence that opens *Órfãos do Eldorado* is the following: "A voz da mulher atraiu tanta gente, que fugi da casa do meu professor e fui para beira do Amazonas" (11).<sup>311</sup> This inaugural quote is symbolic for the entire novel: Arminto, against the Amazonian landscape, listens to the voices of those around him and appropriates them as part of his experience. "Florita traduzia as histórias que eu ouvia quando brincava com os indiozinhos da Aldeia" (12)<sup>312</sup>, he recalls; stories and tales "que eu e Florita ouvíamos dos avós das crianças" (13).<sup>313</sup> Besides the voices of the indigenous companions, there is also the voice of literature and law of Estiliano, and the voice of his own father, against which he wants to differentiate his own voice and subjectivity. These multiple voices appear in the text not as dialogues, but as indirect speeches integrated into the single –but polyphonic– voice of Arminto Cordovil, who integrates them and controls the narrative. In this sense, his voice functions as the *alternative archive* that contrasts with that of his father and his civilizing endeavor. In relation to this, the urban space appears as the site where multiple voices collide, and where gossip and tales run from mouth to mouth.

Gabriel Albuquerque, in his lucid essay on the use of voices in Milton Hatoum's work, explains that the voices integrated into the writer's narratives are often "vozes de segunda plana" that reveal "[A] extensão da bastardia... em um país que prima pela negação de si mesmo," and explains that "ao dar voz aos enjeitados, Milton Hatoum faz surgir um Brasil silenciado" (128).<sup>314</sup> In this sense, the alternative archive that constitutes this polyphony is tightly related to a population of marginal –orphan– voices in the hegemonic discourse of the nation (a topic to which I will return later on). By integrating the unheard voices ("Alguém ainda ouviu essas

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<sup>310</sup> The concept of isolation is one of the columns of da Cunha's sociological thought... To be at the margins means to be excluded from the historical processes, but also to participate in it in one way or another (my translation).

<sup>311</sup> "The woman's voice attracted so many people, that I escaped from my teacher's house and went down the edge of the Amazon to see" (1).

<sup>312</sup> "Florita translated the stories I heard when I played with the little Indian children" (3).

<sup>313</sup> "These legends that I and Florita heard from the grandparents of the children in Aldeia" (4).

<sup>314</sup> Second to best voices that reveal the extension of bastardism in a country that constantly negates itself; giving a voice to those left behind, Milton Hatoum makes a silenced Brazil come out (my translation).



vozes?” (*Órfãos* 13))<sup>315</sup>, the polyphonic voice or Arminto Cordovil functions as a mediating voice that negotiates experiences of alterity between marginalized subjects and the dominant race and classes of Brazil. In this sense, Arminto’s is a transcultural voice (as developed by Ortiz, Rama, and Pratt)<sup>316</sup>, or an intermediary voice, as has been stated before. Further than this, in multiple interviews and essays Milton Hatoum has commented on the importance of orality in his construction of a heterogeneous landscape of Amazonia. In “Escrever à margem da história,” Hatoum reveals that

Além da religião, da língua e dos costumes, a cultura do Outro estava delineando-se por um outro caminho, talvez o mais fecundo para mim: o da narração oral. Essa forma de discurso era usada por exímios contadores das histórias que freqüentavam a Pensão Fenícia, lugar da minha infância. Hoje, passados trinta anos, a imagem que faço desses narradores tem alguma semelhança com “o observador errante que percorre a bacia amazônica” e “o homem sedentário”, postado na margem do rio, citados por Euclides da Cunha. (7)<sup>317</sup>

While describing the importance of orality by making a reference to Euclides da Cunha’s observing subjects, Hatoum describes the point of enunciation of his literature as a fusion of the “observador errante” and the “homen sedentario,” (of the foreign traveler and the local resident). The one voice that integrates these two versions of the region would be Arminto’s voice, who sits at the margins of the river and remembers. This highlights the materialization, in Arminto’s narrative, of da Cunha’s construction of Amazonia as a region who has an ambiguous relationship with modernity. On the one hand, this reference inscribes the novel into a literary tradition began by da Cunha, and in the other, it highlights the novel’s ideological position as marginal and/or alternative to the hegemonic discourses of History.

Hatoum’s mention of “contadores” (storytellers) of an oral tradition reminds of Walter Benjamin’s essay “The Storyteller.” For Benjamin, the storyteller was that who mastered the craftsmanship of telling stories, or in other words, the possibility of transmitting a common shared experience. The role and power of the storyteller, according to Benjamin, was threatened

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<sup>315</sup> “Does anyone hear those voices anymore?” (5).

<sup>316</sup> The concept of transculturation was first used by Fernando Ortiz in his book *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (1940), and then re-appeared in the work of the critic Angel Rama in his 1982 *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina*. It proposes that Latin American literature –and its identity, in general- has been constituted by a process of appropriation and assimilation of different cultural sources, including European, indigenous, and African influences. Transculturation describes a process of negotiation in which a new autonomous cultural form is created as a form of post-colonial agency. Later on, in her book *Imperial Eyes* (1992), Mary Louise Pratt speaks of transculturation as a form of contact between cultures. She explains that while subjugated cultures cannot control what is placed upon them, “they do determine to various extends what they absorb into their own, how they use it, and what they make it mean” (7). Ultimately, transculturation describes processes of cultural negotiations that acquire value in the articulation of autonomous post-colonial identities. In Hatoum’s case, the polyphony and the intertwined use of western and indigenous traditions can be read as forms of transculturation in the context of Amazonian worldviews.

In notes 2 and 8 some aspects about the topic on transculturation were also mentioned.

<sup>317</sup> Besides from religion, language, and culture, the culture of the *other* was defining itself through another path, perhaps one that was more fruitful for me: the one provided by oral narratives. This form of discourse was used by storytellers that were frequent costumers at the Fenícia hostel, one of the places of my childhood. Now, thirty years later, the image I have of those narrators has a similarity with the ‘wandering observer that travels through the Amazon basin’ and of the ‘sedentary man’ waiting at the margins of the river, just as described by Euclides da Cunha (my translation).

and disappeared by the secular forces of modernity. In this sense, Benjamin's essay becomes relevant in identifying Arminto as the prototype of an oral narrator that, amidst the forces of modernization, struggles to convey his experience. As Benjamin explains, the disappearance of the storyteller "is... a concomitant symptom of the secular productive forces of history, a concomitant that has quite gradually removed narrative from the realm of living speech" ("Storyteller" 87). In this sense, what opposes the "realm of the living speech" is writing itself. Modernity's reliance on the written form undermines the possibility of the transmission of an intimate experience, such as the one Arminto displays in the novel. Further than that, Benjamin states that "[T]he chronicler is the history-teller" (95). What ought to be highlighted, thus, is the opposition between Arminto as an oral storyteller to a history-teller, which reinforces the narrator's marginal position against the written discourse of El dorado. The oral nature of his narration is a resistance to the modernizing forces that threaten to disappear him.

The identification of Arminto as what Benjamin calls a storyteller undoubtedly aids in situating the character's experience as a form of resistance to the forces of modernization. Yet, the fact that Arminto's oral storytelling finds a form in the novel we read and hold in our hands must not be ignored. For Benjamin, that which emerges at the decline of the craft of storytelling is precisely the novel:

The earliest symptom of a process whose end is the decline of storytelling is the rise of the novel at the beginning of modern times. What distinguishes the novel from the story... is its essential dependence on the book [...] The storyteller takes what he tells from experience –his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale. The novelist has isolated himself. The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual, who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounseled, and cannot counsel others. To write a novel means to carry the incommensurable to extremes in the representation of human life. In the midst of life fullness, and through the representation of this fullness, the novel gives evidence to the profound perplexity of the living. ("Storyteller" 87)

Benjamin's explanation of the emergence of the novel points to a fundamental contradiction in *Órfãos do Eldorado*: it is a written novel of an oral speech. Said differently, it is a representation of an oral speech, a depiction and inscription of orality. In this sense, the novel is a dramatization –a putting into action- not of orality itself, but precisely of the loss of orality. To this extent, the novel is also a ruin, a nostalgic remembrance of experience and speech: the written letter, in this case, stands for that which is already gone. This contradiction reveals, on the one hand, a sort of nostalgia for a world not intervened by the forces of modernity, and also, the materialization of the complicated negotiations (if not the impossibilities) of articulating an experience outside History. It could be possible to argue that orality is being integrated into writing and support this by saying that the novel, after all, is the genre that mimics, swallows, and appropriates other forms of speech and language. While this is true, however, it doesn't give an account of the intimacy of the experience transmitted through the body and the voice (this reminds of the necessity of an embodied 'experience' of the protagonist of *Los pasos perdidos*). What is ultimately highlighted is, then, a desire to reach outside the domain of the written discourse –to touch its limits, to play with its margins, to imply a body and a voice- while grounded in the impossibility of doing so.

## Memory

In *Órfãos do Eldorado* the act of storytelling cannot be disassociated from memory.<sup>318</sup> As Arminto explains when leaving the house where he grew up, “[D]eixe tudo na casa: os móveis, as louças, o relógio de parede, até os lençóis de cama. Só não deixei a memória do tempo em que morei lá” (79).<sup>319</sup> After having lost everything, memory becomes Arminto’s only possession. Sometimes circular, sometimes moving forward or jumping back, the narrator’s memory reconstructs his own past and that of his family. As quoted before, the inaugural moment of memory becomes space itself: “Quando olho o Amazonas, a memória dispara, uma voz sai da minha boca, e só paro de falar na hora que a ave graúda canta” (14).<sup>320</sup> The spaces of the house, the city, and the entire Amazonian landscape are invested of a subjective history. On the one hand, this subjective appropriation of the space implies a certain historicization of the place, denoting a sense of human occupation that undermines the idea of a pristine and virgin Amazonia so often found in narratives of the region. On the other hand, this subjective appropriation of the space renders a personal experience that competes with the construction of the region as the empire’s garden. In other words, there is a personal investment in the space; that is, a sense of personal history and identity that is associated with Amazonia. This becomes noticeably important when one compares the relationships that the other authors or characters studied in this dissertation maintained with the space. Da Cunha or the narrators of *La vorágine* and *Los pasos perdidos* did not relate to the space through a sense of belonging and memory, as Arminto does. Their constructions of space were ideological and subjective projections, very much inherited from the romantic tradition, but they did not convey a sense of personal history and roots. In this sense, memory not only becomes the way through which Arminto’s subjectivity is revealed and constructed, but it also delivers a common shared experience of the region that competes with the written History of the civilizing patrons.

It is worth examining the tone with which Arminto’s memory appears in the text. As a form of reconstruction of the past, it would be possible to say that *Órfãos do Eldorado* engages in a nostalgic reconstruction of Amazonia as El dorado. This would imply that Arminto longs for a moment in which the region was subjected to the forces of an alienating modernity. This is true to a certain extent. Arminto’s narrative is a deep longing for his father’s recognition and approval, a form of legitimization that would find for him a place within his family and, as such, within the legacies of the “civilizing” endeavors of his family’s history. This is the type of nostalgia present in the novel’s title: longing for Eldorado. However, although it is hard to differentiate between his father and his enterprise, it must be highlighted that Arminto longs for his father’s warmth, and not for his money, which he deliberately rejects. In addition to this, with few exceptions (like his remembrances of his lover Dinaura, which will be the focus of analysis later on), and his memories as a city wanderer, Arminto’s memories are not the joyful

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<sup>318</sup> Perhaps the most significant collection of essays about the topic of memory in Hatoum is the 2007 collection titled *Arquitetura da memória* edited by Maria da Luz Pinheiro de Cristo. Other relevant essays are “Os labirintos da memória em *Órfãos do Eldorado* by Milton Hatoum” by Vivian de Assis Lemos and Diana Junkes; “Tempo mítico e tempo histórico em *Órfãos do Eldorado*” by Ana Lúcia Trevisan; “Memória e identidade nos romances de Milton Hatoum” by Sylvania Telarolli.

<sup>319</sup> “I left everything in the house: the furniture, the crockery, the clock on the wall, even the linen sheets. The only thing I didn’t leave behind was the memory of the time I had lived there” (110).

<sup>320</sup> “When I look at the Amazon, my memory takes flight, a voice comes from my mouth and I only stop talking at the moment the big bird sings” (6).

recollections of a glorious past, but of a life that has already changed. Arminto goes back from the present to a time that is not brighter and better, but that seems already ruined. They function as a *mis en abyme* of memories: Arminto remembers remembering. In the following examples he remembers moments in the past where that particular present of the memory is already in decay:

Fazia tanto tempo que eu não pisava Boa Vida. Florita olhou com tristeza o antigo pasto: um capizal com tacos de árvores queimadas. Os cacauzeiros, com folhas enferrujadas, mortos. Os cupinzeiros avançavam nos tabiques e vigas da casa. Enquanto Florita e o prático limpavam os quartos e a varanda, eu olhava a velha sumaumeira na margem do rio. (67)<sup>321</sup>

Armei a rede na varanda e deitei. As lembranças da Boa Vida me deixaram de olhos abertos: os sons das cigarras e dos sapos, o cheiro das frutas que eu arrancava das árvores, o estalo das castanhas que caíam das mãos dos macacos. Antes de clarear, eu escutava os gritos dos patos-do-mato e via a sumaumeira crescer no céu avermelhado pelo sol ainda escondido. (69)<sup>322</sup>

Arminto passively observes the objects, nature, and people that surround him. They are all signs of times gone by, ruins, of which he can't do anything about. The life that seemed to belong to these elements (the trees, the house, Florita) has been lost, and memory, more than a way to recover them, seems to be the way through which their decay materializes. This form of memory, then, is not that which testifies a celebrated past, and it is not organized through *saudade*. Rather than that, as Benjamin writes, it seems to be a memory that expresses “the profound perplexity of the living” (“Storyteller” 99). In this sense, Arminto’s memory, set within ruins and remembering ruins, once again emphasizes the always already marginal place from which the character articulates his narrative.

Ruins make the past present only as an incomplete presence in decay. They reveal the transitory nature and precariousness of power and they signal that modernity is not only a narrative of success and achievement. As Julia Hell and Andreas Schonle affirm, the ruin invokes “a critique of the spatial organization of the modern world and of its single-minded commitment to a progress that throws too many individuals and spaces into the trash” (8). Like this, ruins signal the decay of value of certain objects and what they entailed, and they point to “vacuity and loss as underlying constituents of modern identity” (6-7). To this extent, borrowing the words of Andreas Huyssen, “an imaginary of ruins is central for any theory of modernity that wants to be more than the triumphalism of progress and democratization or the longing for past greatness” (21-22). *Órfãos*, through its thematization of ruins, furthers on this critique.

More than that, ruins also offer the possibility of a political and ethical intervention and interruption of the model of modernization that created them in the first place. They can lead, as Lazzara and Unruh explain, “to historical revision and the creation of alternative futures” (3). To this extent, as Francine Masiello affirms, ruins remind us “that we are composed of heterogeneous times in contradistinction to the singularity of the efficient public clock” (29).

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<sup>321</sup> “It was such a long time since I’d set foot in Boa Vida. Florita looked at the old pastures with sadness: nothing but wild grass and the old stumps of trees. The cocoa trees, their leaves rusted, were dead. The termites had overrun the walls and beams of the house. While Florita and the pilot were cleaning the rooms and the varanda, I looked at the old silk-cotton tree besides the river” (91).

<sup>322</sup> “I hung the hammock on the veranda and lay down. Memories of the Boa Vida kept me awake, with my eyes open: the noise of the cicadas and the toads, the smell of the fruit I pulled of the trees, the crack of the Brazil nuts falling out of the hands of the monkeys. Before it grew light, I listened to the cries of the Muscovy ducks and watched the outline of the silk-cotton tree grow in the reddening sky, the sun still hidden beneath the horizon” (95).

Seen like this, ruins not only entail a critique, but they also hold the potential to signal the limitations of a narrative of progress, modernization, and History. In other words, they underline what Chakrabarty has called as the process of “provincializing” Europe’s historicism.

Following this, the look into the past that ruins force us to make entail, it is true, a nostalgia for times gone by, but most importantly, as Svetlana Boym suggests, a “nostalgia [that] is [a] rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress. The nostalgic desires to obliterate history and turn it into private or collective mythology, to revisit time like space, refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues the human condition” (xv). The nostalgic tone of Arminto’s narrative, as I have explained before, is not exactly a lamentation that desires to go back to a better time, but precisely as Boym describes, “not a nostalgia for the ideal past, but for the present perfect and its lost potential” (21). Seen like this, both the presence of ruins and the nostalgic tone are elements that point to the disjointedness of Arminto with the history of El dorado and, as such, they help in the articulation of a distrust and a critique of History.

Together with Chakrabarty, Rabasa, and the previous reflections, Benjamin provides a critical model that furthers the critique of History to which this chapter wants to arrive. In “Theses on the Philosophy of History” Benjamin engages on a discussion of historical materialism against historicism. In it, the philosopher articulates a critique of History as a “homogeneous, empty time” (261) filled with a narrative of progress, which leads to redemption (this is, actually, the definition of History that serves Chakrabarty as a model for her theory). “The concept of the historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogeneous, empty time,” explains Benjamin: “A critique of the concept of such a progression must be the basis of any criticism of the concept of progress itself” (261). In addition to this, Benjamin argues that historicism –the completion of a narrative of progress–celebrates “the rulers” and their “heirs” and “those who conquered before them,” making all documents of civilization documents of acts of barbarism (256). A critique of this form of historicism must be achieved by a “cautious detachment” in the analysis of the “cultural treasures” that make up the sum of History. As Benjamin explains, “[T]o recognize the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was’ (Ranke)” (255).

Following this, Benjamin proposes one of the most poignant images for the understanding of History: the horrified angel who can’t escape from the storm of progress.

His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (257-258)

Benjamin’s angel of history has a relationship with Arminto and *Órfãos do Eldorado*. As the angel does, Arminto looks back into the past only to find the ruins and the wreckage of a story –that of El dorado– that once stood as the narrative of progress. The fact that Benjamin uses the expression “a storm is blowing from Paradise” brings an uncanny resemblance to the construction of Amazonia as Paradise as a site of endless wealth, the same kind of imagery that would transform into the idea of the region as the site of golden riches to be conquered and

consumed. It is as if Arminto were contemplating the History of the region constructed through the ruins left by a narrative of conquest, appropriation, and consumption; said differently, contemplating the *Façanhas de um civilizador*.

Arminto's circular, multidirectional, polyphonic, and incomplete narrative, launched from a subjective and intimate experience, opposes the notion of a lineal, homogeneous, and empty timeline on which History's progressiveness is built. In this sense, memory works, as Hatoum himself explains, as a form of resistance and as a form against the forces of modernity (Hatoum Entrevista Revista *Magma* 31). His memory is a sign and a prove of a shared experience that is not the one that celebrates the triumph of modernity and "civilization." It is an *other* experience of time.

Instead of a History of progress, Hatoum's novel seems to exemplify Marshall Berman's statement of what modernity seems to be (and in doing so, brings once again the Marxist criticism of historicism): "To be modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, 'all that is solid melts into air'" (15). The evanescence of that which is melted into air is seen in the novel in the *mis en abyme* of Arminto's memory in which the ruins speak of a solid project ever elusive and indistinct –El dorado- yet important enough to leave its ruins in the present.

#### *The encante stories*

*Órfãos do Eldorado* threads in its narrative stories that come from local oral traditions and that have strong roots in mythical imageries of the region. These *encante* stories talk about enchanted magical places and/or creatures or people that appear and disappear in the human world. The *encantados* are usually shape-shifter magical beings that can acquire the form of an animal, like a river dolphin or a giant snake, and interact with humans, often tricking them into coming into their world. One of the most "popular" places around where these *encante* stories happen is a magical city beneath the surface of the water. This city, very much like the city of El dorado, is full of wealth and comfort, and its inhabitants seem to live in a trouble-free world with constant diversion and luxury.

The first scene that opens Arminto's narrative is that of an indigenous woman at the edge of the river, sad and tired, walking slowly into the waters. "Dizia que tinha se afastado do marido porque ele vivia caçando e andando por aí, deixando-a sozinha na Aldeia. Até o dia em que foi atraída por um ser encantado. Agora ia morar com o amante, lá no fundo das águas. Queria viver num mundo melhor, sem tanto sofrimento, desgraça" (11).<sup>323</sup> Candace Slater, who has studied *encante* tales thoroughly, explains that these stories circulate in communities of mixed blood, although their similarities with indigenous Amazonian mythology suggest that they have an origin in indigenous cultures, though with both African and European influences (*Entangled* 17). The enchanted city under the river and the narrative of El dorado are similar in that they both summon the idea of wealth and excess, and that they are both ever elusive, transforming, and mysterious. In the novel, these two are threaded together, although they emerge with different

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<sup>323</sup> "She was saying that she'd left her husband because he spent all his time hunting and wondering here and there, leaving her alone in Aldeia. That is, until the day she was seduced by an enchanting being. Now she was going to live with her lover, deep in the riverbed. She wanted to live in a better world, without so much suffering and misfortune" (2).

significations.<sup>324</sup> While El dorado stories are part of the narratives of foreign conquest and consumption, *encante* tales reveal an alternative conception of Amazonian nature “very different from that of most outsiders” (Slater *Entangled* 73). As Slater explains, these stories do not represent nature as something to be conquered and consumed, but rather, they “[affirm] the limits of human definition and control” (*Entangled* 26), and they often function as “a sort of supernatural rain forest police who regulate consumption” (*Entangled* 74). They do so in the sense that they are profoundly mysterious; they function according to a logic that escapes human control and understanding. Instead of portraying men as somehow in charge and in control, *encantes* subject humans to their powers and their magic.

The main question that ought to be asked is the following: what role do *encante* stories play in *Órfãos do Eldorado*, as a novel immersed in a literary tradition and ideologically positioned as a critique of Amazonia’s modern History? I believe *encante* stories undermine the discourse of History –the *Façanhas de um civilizador*- by showing a competing vision of the region, and by destabilizing the idea and enterprise behind El dorado. Ultimately, the decay and ruin of the Cordovil family is tightly intertwined with Arminto’s obsession for Dinaura, a character whose mystery and elusiveness is associated with the *encante* world. In addition to this, Dinaura represents that which remains a secret, which cannot be written or revealed, that which resists to be comprehended and apprehended, and that cannot be part of the archive from which History is constructed.

Arminto’s narrative integrates *encante* stories through his polyphonic voice: “ a história do homem da piroca comprida, tão comprida que atravessava o rio Amazonas,” or “[a] história de uma mulher que foi seduzida por uma anta-macho” (12).<sup>325</sup> However, the main story that is told is that of a “cidade encantada” under the waters of the river, and mainly through the presence of Dinaura. She is an orphan who lives in the city of Vila Bela, taken care by a congregation of nuns dedicated to the care of young, mostly indigenous, women who have been violently taken away from her parents. She appears in the story at the moment of Amando Cordovil’s death, and from that moment on Arminto falls deeply in love with her, an obsession that determines his entire life. Throughout the story it is revealed that Dinaura was taken to the nun’s orphanage by Arminto’s father, and it is suggested that she could be his daughter (Arminto’s half-sister) or even Amando’s lover. Yet, her origins and identity remain elusive: “Uma india? Procurei a origem, nunca encontrei.” All that is known from her, however, is that she is “uma mulher que vino do mato” (31).<sup>326</sup> In this sense, Dinaura, like the other versions of the Amazon woman warriors that were mentioned some paragraphs above, becomes a symbol of

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<sup>324</sup> As Slater explains, “[T]he boundaries between the Encantado stories and native narratives, and between these stories and accounts of El dorado, are blurred enough to have no doubt about the continuing interplay between various groups within and outside of the Amazon” (*Entangled* 68). In this sense, “giant” imageries of the region “clash” and “converge” with local visions (Slater *Entangled* 27). This speaks of the deep integration of different populations and traditions, itself a reflection of the way in which Amazonia has not been isolated from the forces of a modern globalized world. It also highlights the deep footprint left by foreign representations of Amazonia –like that of El dorado- even in local traditions, and the difficulty of discarding it when thinking the region from within. In Slater’s perspective, *encante* stories like that of the city beneath the water and the myth of El dorado function as “competing images” of the region (*Entangled* 6).

<sup>325</sup> “the story of the man with an enormous cock, so long it crossed the Amazon: the story of a woman who was seduced by a male tapir” (3).

<sup>326</sup> “An Indian? I tried to find out where she was from, but never did”; “a girl from the jungle” (33).

Amazonian nature. More than a damsel in distress, she represents the region as an elusive and enchanted being whose apprehension and comprehension is a challenge.

Dinaura is constantly associated with the underwater enchanted city. Rumors travel through the Vila Bela voices claiming “que a órfã era uma cobra sucuri que ia me [Arminto] devorar e depois me arrastar ara uma cidade no fundo do rio” (34).<sup>327</sup> She appears in Arminto’s dreams, talking about “um mundo melhor” in the depth of the waters, and then “ficava muda, assombrada com alguma coisa que o sonho não revelava” (41).<sup>328</sup> In spite of the mystery that surrounds her, Arminto and Dinaura develop their relationship with weekly meetings controlled by the nuns from the orphanage. One day, the day in which they have their first sexual relationship, however, Dinaura disappears. Her last words are unheard: “Querida tocar a pele, beijar o corpo dela. Querida mas. Os olhos diziam não. Encostei o ouvido nos lábios de Dinaura, mas a chuva nos ensurdecia. E o que pude ler nos lábios: uma história. Qual? Ele se vestiu e fez um gesto: que a esperasse, voltava logo,” but she never did (51).<sup>329</sup> Obsessed with her location, Arminto looks for her desperately, precisely in the moments where his attention to the family’s business is urgent. However, Dinaura’s mystery only increases:

Dinaura estava viva, mas não nosso mundo. Morava na cidade encantada, com regalias de rainha, mas era uma mulher infeliz. Ele ouviu isso nas palafitas de beira do rio, nas freguesias mais distantes; ouviu de caboclos solitários, que vivem com suas sombras e visões. Dinaura foi atraída por um ser encantado, diziam. Era cativa de um desses bichos terríveis que atraem mulheres para o fundo das águas. E descreviam o lugar onde ela morava: uma cidade que brilhava de tanto ouro e luz, com ruas e praças bonitas. A Cidade Encantada era uma lenda antiga, a mesma que eu tinha escutado na infância. Surgia na mente de quase todo mundo, como se a felicidade e a justiça estivessem escondidas num lugar encantado. (64)<sup>330</sup>

In an ambiguous resolution, the fate of Dinaura is apparently resolved when it is known that she lives in a place called Eldorado (the name of an actual town located in the state of Pará). By locating Dinaura in this town, the novel points to the interconnections between El dorado and the enchanted city, highlighting the way these two stories mingle. When finally Arminto finds her and engages in a conversation, the narrative is interrupted and the conversation remains out of the novel. The secret that surrounds Dinaura, that which is not revealed in dreams and which Arminto cannot hear, remains unwritten and mysterious.

From a certain perspective, Arminto’s entire narrative can be seen as an attempt to understand and reveal what happened to Dinaura, who she really was, and why and how she disappeared. At the end of the novel, we follow Arminto’s memory to the point of revelation.

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<sup>327</sup> “that the orphan was an anaconda who was going to devour me and drag me off to a city at the bottom of the river” (39).

<sup>328</sup> “of a better world”; “suddenly she would grow silent, frightened by something the dream wouldn’t reveal” (49).

<sup>329</sup> “I wanted to touch her skin, kiss her body. I wanted more. Her eyes said no. I put my ear close to Dinaura’s lips, but the rain deafened us. So did what I could hear on her lips – a story. What about? She got dressed and made a gesture: I was to wait for her, she’s come back soon” (66).

<sup>330</sup> “He swore that Dinaura was alive, but not in our world. She was living in the enchanted city and was treated like a queen, but she was an unhappy woman. He heard this in the riverside houses, in the most distant settlements: he heard it from solitary *caboclos* who live with their shadows and visions. Dinaura had been seduced by an enchanted being, they said. She was the prisoner of one of those terrible animals that lure woman to the bottom of the river. And they describe the place where she lived: a city with so much gold and light it gleamed, and with pretty streets and squares. The enchanted city was a legendary place, the same one I’d heard about in my childhood. It rose up in almost everyone’s mind, as if happiness and justice themselves were hidden in this charmed place” (87).



However, the secret is never revealed. While Arminto is capable of articulating a narrative of his father and the history of conquest that he and his family led (he reads the archive left by his father), he is unable or unwilling to articulate Dinaura's story. Dinaura represents Amazonia as an elusive entity that cannot be easily comprehended or apprehended. In addition to this, she is the link to the enchanted city, a perception of Amazonia that seems to defy the limits of any civilizing endeavor. As Arminto poignantly states, "[A] gente quer entender uma pessoa, só encontra silêncio" (47).<sup>331</sup> In the mystery and silence that the *encantes* and Dinaura represent, lays the resistance to articulate Amazonia into a comprehensible –consumable– narrative. In this sense, they destabilize the notion of the Amazonia as a region easily inscribed into a narrative of History. If El dorado stands for a version of the region that entails an appropriation and consumption of nature, the enchanted city entails the opposite, the resistance to control and writing.

In "The Times of History and the Times of Gods" Chakrabarty tries to complicate the inadequacy between a secular Western narrative of History, and a narrative of a collective experience dominated by a non-secular, religious and mythical understanding of time and the world. Her approach asks how both of these opposing visions coexist; how could the presence of a divine and supernatural world be translated and reduced to a singular timeline when translated into a narrative of History? Chakrabarty answers this by pointing to the ways in which this problem forces us to think in terms of singularities within pluralities. This problem also points to "provincializing" Europe and its historicism by the interruption of a plurality of timelines, epistemologies and realities. In addition to this, Chakrabarty recognizes the difficulty of avoiding a translation of the "history of the gods" into History, and thus poses the idea of an ethical challenge in which the process of translation itself is marked and complicated (48). This debate serves to illuminate the presence of *encante* stories in the novel. *Órfãos* does not pretend to be a historical narrative; however, the conflicting and competing versions of nature present in the novel, together with the impossibility of revealing and translating into the text Dinaura's secret, underline, precisely, the tensions and contradictions between a local Amazonian experience and the Western timeline of History.

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These elements –the idea of orphanhood, a non-linear narrative of memory articulated by an oral polyphony, and the presence of *encante* stories– stand as counter forces of History as a written hegemonic narrative of progress. They all undermine and destabilize the vision of Amazonia as a region whose destiny was to be conquered, tamed, and exploited by the civilizing forces of western expansion and values. Brought together into the novel, they reveal a different form of representing and understanding the region that co-exists, but also opposes, to the vision of Amazonia as El dorado. In other words, they stand as forms to complicate the time and the experience of the *other* against the time machinery of Europe's expansion. *Órfãos do Eldorado* reveals that which does not want to fit in, or that constitutes an alternative, to the western depiction of the region. By doing so, it marks the limitations, re-appropriations, and subversions of western discourses into contemporary literature.

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<sup>331</sup> "You want to understand someone, but all you find is silence" (59).

### **The *literarization* of Amazonia now- closing da Cunha's Cycle**

Throughout this chapter it has been clear that Milton Hatoum engages in a deep dialogue with da Cunha's work. On a first level, Hatoum finds deeply compelling the idea of being located at the margins of history as an ideological position that describes the idea of being a local and a foreigner, both inscribed in the region's history and out of it at the same time. In relation to this, Hatoum uses da Cunha's idea of marginality to build his own identity as that of an exile, both *from* and *foreign to* Manaus and Amazonia. Yet, there are other ways in which Hatoum's work enters in a dialogue with da Cunha's vision of the region: the ambiguity through which Amazonia is represented in *À margem da história*.

Da Cunha inaugurates the representation of Amazonia as a site that, although doubtful and resistant to it, however, awaits modernization. The vision for the future held in *À margem da história* predicts Amazonia as one of the most important sites for the growth of the economy in Brazil, where economical and urban development equals progress, generating a social, financial, and political reorganization and integration of the region. However, at the same time, Amazonia is represented as a space that defies and challenges the inscription into modernity. As it was seen in the first chapter, da Cunha inaugurates the modern literary tradition of the region representing it as space unable and unwilling to be comprehended into a rhetoric of control and apprehension, and as a space unwilling to be rendered into the cartographic practices that would facilitate its territorialization. Da Cunha's Amazonia is unstable, always changing, and contradictory. In this sense, it is a region that defies human comprehension and consumption, challenging and resisting the modernization process.

This contradictory movement also structures Amazonia's vision in *Órfãos do Eldorado*. The novel is structured around a longing for El dorado, as if Arminto's narrative was the story of being expelled from Paradise, a (mythical) time and place that ought to be recovered. Arminto's marginality and isolation are a statement of a desire of belonging that needs to be recuperated. In this sense, the novel functions as the denunciation of a debt; as if the region were somehow still awaiting the unfulfilled promises of modernity once envisioned by da Cunha. Yet, there is an attempt to articulate a vision of the region where *other* voices telling *other* stories are heard: the *encante* stories integrate a representation of the space that is an alternative of most of European narratives. In addition to this, the novel destabilizes the idea of a written representation and History of the region, which in itself undermines the predominance of the idea of Amazonia as El dorado.

More than an ideological contradiction, this tension speaks of the difficulty in representing Amazonia outside the discursive paradigms that have shaped its history. The corpus of discourses that have represented and claimed the region as a site of consumable resources determined an economical and globalizing enterprise that shaped the region beyond the rhetorical realm. It would be a mistake to comprehend and speak of Amazonia today without understanding that the myth of Paradise or of the golden city were not just metaphors, but symbols and tokens for the inclusion of the space into capitalism and extraction. It is through this contradiction that Hatoum brings Amazonia into the realm of the literary. This implies, on the one hand, a close dialogue with the discursive history of the region and an inclusion of its historical processes, and in the other, a questioning and critique of the same.

The re-evaluation of the historical processes that integrated the region into the modernization process brings back the topic of the nation into discussion. As many critics have noted (Lúcia Sá, Candace Slater, Sussana Hecht), da Cunha's *À margem da história* tried to integrate Amazonia into the modernization process of Brazil. What was at stake was the consolidation of Brazil as a modern nation through the redefinition of its identity and through its depiction as a nation fully equipped to compete in global economic arenas. Da Cunha proved to the urban centers (Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo) that the northern territories were occupied by hard working Brazilians and that Amazonia was a new frontier to be developed. In a way that no other book studied in this dissertation shows, Hatoum's novel depicts how the financial development of Brazil's Amazonia turned out. The focus on Manaus' cosmopolitanism and decay, its economy and social atmosphere, are all vivid examples of this.

The integration of Amazonia into the nation's economy only began with the rubber extraction system. In the 1920s and 1930s, after the decay of the rubber euphoria, the region became the site of agricultural and mining expansion. In the 1940s, due to the Second World War, there was a second upraise of rubber extraction economy followed by a rapid decay. In the Getulio Vargas presidency (1930-1954) and in the political eras that followed, including the military dictatorship that lasted from 1964 to 1985, Amazonia became a focus for national development. Some of the most impactful projects that occurred during these years include the construction of the Transamazônica road across five of the Amazonian states, and the polemic Hidreletrica de Belo Monte. Throughout the twentieth century Amazonia was fully integrated into a national and global economic system and it was positioned as one of the nation's competing assets.

Part of this twentieth century history of Amazonia's integration into the politics and economy of the country is referenced in *Órfãos do Eldorado*. This is seen in those references that go beyond the 1910s rubber economy, like the emergence of complex urban spaces, other commerce and industries, and even in the allusions to tourism. Let me give a specific example to ground my analysis: the novel's mention of the raise of the rubber economy in the 1940s, with a specific mention to president Getulio Vargas:

O presidente Vargas disse que os Aliados precisavam do nosso látex, e que ele e todos os brasileiros fariam tudo para derrotar os países do Eixo. Então milhares de nordestinos foram trabalhar nos seringais. Soldados da borracha. Os cargueiros voltaram a navegar nos rios da Amazônia; transportavam borracha para Manaus e Belém, e depois os hidroaviões levavam a carga para os Estados Unidos. Os sonhos e as promessas também voltaram. O paraíso estava aqui, no Amazonas, era o que se dizia. O que existiu, e eu não esqueci nunca, foi o barco o Paraíso. Atacou ai embaixo, na beira do barranco. Trouxe dos seringais do Madeira mais de cem homens, quase todos cegos pela defumação do látex. Lá onde ficava a Aldeia, o prefeito mandou derrubar a floresta para construir barracos. E um novo bairro surgiu: Cegos do Paraíso. (94-95)<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>332</sup> "President Vargas said that allies needed our rubber, and that he and every Brazilian would do all they could to defeat the countries of the Axis. Then thousands of people from the Northeast went to work extracting rubber. Rubber soldiers. The freighters sailed the rivers of Amazonia again: they carried rubber to Manaus and Belem, and then flying boats took the cargo to the United States. The dreams and promises came back too. Paradise was here, in the Amazon region: that was what was said. What did exist, and I never forgot, was the ship Paradise. It moored just down there, at the edge of the ravine. It brought more than a hundred men from the rubber stands at the Madeira, almost all of them blinded by the smoke-curing of the rubber. There, where Aldeia was, the major ordered the forest to be knocked down so that shacks could be built. And another neighborhood appeared: Cegos do Paraiso, the Blind Men of Paradise" (136).

President Vargas' enthusiastic call for rubber production in the context of the war ends in the deforestation of the old indigenous part of town where Arminto grew up, and in the construction of "barracas" for the blind. Once again, the text focuses on those who were expelled from Paradise, those who become marginal and outcast and that end up living in the ruins –the "barracas"- of modernity. As can be seen in this example, and in the entire novel, what is at stake in centering the attention of the historic processes is the re-evaluation of the project of the nation, and its desire to include Amazonia into its domain.

Benedict Anderson, in his now classic analysis, defines the nation as an imagined political community that, as Partha Chatterjee explains, is also imagined as living in a "homogeneous empty time" (4). The modern project of nation building was structured around the idea of a "simultaneous experience" of modernity, in itself centered around the idea of the establishment of capitalism. "Empty homogeneous time is the time of capital," explains Chatterjee (4). This "empty homogeneous time" is also the basic concept behind the idea of History as progress that Benjamin and Chakrabarty critique, as it was seen in the previous pages. However, Hatoum's novel, in the same way in which it undermines the idea of History as an empty homogeneous time, engages in a critique of the nation. The presence of the ruins and of those at the margins of its system reveal the construction of the modern nation not as a hegemonic and inclusive process, but as a heterogeneous, incomplete, and marginalizing endeavor unable to integrate all sectors of society. In this sense, what emerges out of Arminto's experience and narrative is a critique of the nation as a homogenizing experience. In "The Nation in Heterogeneous Time," Chatterjee explains that

People can only imagine themselves in empty homogeneous time; they do not live in it. Empty homogeneous time is the utopian time of capital. It linearly connects past, present, and future, creating the possibility for all of those historicist imaginations of identity, nationhood, progress, and so on that Anderson, along with many others, have made familiar to us. But empty homogeneous time is not located anywhere in real space- it is utopian. The real space of modern life consists of heterotopia. (My debt to Michel Foucault should be obvious, even if I am not always faithful to his use of the term.) Time here is heterogeneous, unevenly dense. (6-7)

Arminto's symbolic orphanhood, the variety of voices that make up his voice, and the reluctance of his world to be inscribed into a lineal and complete narrative –into the narrative of El dorado- attest the impossibility of a homogeneous time, the time of the nation. By integrating a different experience of modernity, it interferes with the homogenizing imaginations of the nation building processes. If da Cunha wanted to integrate Amazonia into Brazil's nation building momentum, then, in many ways, Hatoum's "at the margins of history" narrative of *Órfãos do Eldorado* is a continuation and a closure of da Cunha's representation.

Da Cunha's texts function as an opening act. Amidst doubts, da Cunha proposes a productive Amazonia for a modern nation. His is the Amazonia of the future Brazil: the land of resources of a competing capitalist nation in a global arena. When proposing the Transacrea he states, for example, that "o que se deve ver naquela via férrea é, sobretudo, uma grande Estrada internacional de aliança civilizadora, e de paz" (*A margem* 84).<sup>333</sup> In *Órfãos do Eldorado*

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<sup>333</sup> "what should be seen in that project rail line is, above all else, a great international avenue of civilizing alliance and of peace" (90).

Hatoum closes this opening act. His novel works as a closing remark that looks back to what has been happening, and articulates a critical vision of its history. In this sense, Hatoum's "at the margins of history" works as a 180° turn that reevaluates the modernization process that opened Amazonia to Brazil, at least in terms of its discursive history. Hatoum returns to a re-evaluation of the nation and reveals the ruins and the voices of those left aside, of those never fully integrated, of those never fully acknowledged. In doing so, he destabilizes the power of the hegemonic projects that claimed possession and consumption of Amazonia.

In his essay "Rios do abandono" [Rivers in Abandon] Euclides da Cunha says the following about the Purús river: "Precisamos incorporá-lo ao nosso progresso, do qual ele será, ao cabo, um dos maiores fatores, porque é pelo seu leito desmedido em fora que se traça, nestes dias, uma das maiores linhas da nossa expansão histórica" (28).<sup>334</sup> Da Cunha speaks here of a river that must be *incorporated* into the *nation's progress*, which is, as he says, part of Brazil's *historical expansion*. Although da Cunha's discourse is always ambiguous and contradictory, in here, at least, he engages with very specific notions of History as progress, and of it as an endeavor that seeks to integrate peripheries into a homogenizing project. History here appears as the lineal empty time that needs to be filled with the happenings that lead to the consolidation of capitalism. The Purús River will only enter and be part of History as long as it becomes navigable and exploited. The Purús is, in other words, the river of Brazil's future. In *Órfãos do Eldorado* the Amazon River becomes not the landscape of the future, but the site of the past, where that *historical expansion* and the desire of *incorporation* and *progress* are re-evaluated. Beholding it under the shade of a *jatobá* tree, Arminto remembers. "Quanta cobiça e ilusão," he melancholically states (21).<sup>335</sup> The project failed; the ruins in which he stands and the ruins of his life attest to it. If da Cunha's call was an extension and materialization of El dorado, Arminto's is its denial, it carries its degradation and loss. History is revealed by those who are not fully incorporated in it, and through a story that is not quite the narrative of progress. Adhering to Chatterjee's criticism of the nation, Hatoum's novel reveals a nation in a *heterogeneous time*: a nation integrated by the *other* times of *others*. It reveals the ruins of a nation –and a nation in ruins- where, as ruins usually do, they uncover how the future is not an even landscape that fits into one single timeline. Ruins, too, set a tone, that of times gone by, and of that which approaches its end. "Quando olho o Amazonas, a memória dispara, uma voz sai da minha boca, e só paro de falar na hora que a ave graúda canta. Macacauá vai aparecer mais tarde, penas cinzentas, cor do céu quando escurece. Canta, dando adeus à claridade. Aí fico calado, e deixo a noite entrar na vida" (Hatoum *Órfãos* 14).<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> "We must incorporate it into our progress, within which it can in the final analysis be one of the major factors. For it is along that river's gigantic course that one of the boldest lines of our historical expansion is today taking place" (30).

<sup>335</sup> "So much greed and illusion!" (17).

<sup>336</sup> "When I look at the Amazon, my memory takes flight, a voice comes from my mouth and I only stop talking the moment the big bird sings. The tinamou will appear later, with his gray wings, the color of the sky at dusk. It sings, saying goodbye to the daylight. Then I fall silent and let night enter my life" (6).

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