

Knots like Stars

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The ABC of Ecological Imagination in our Americas

By

Roberto Forns-Broggi

Translation by Dr. Karen Rauch

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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To our beloved seeds.

Nudos

Nudos que nadan
En misteriosos océanos
De nada

Nudos que son sombras
De infinitos nudos
Celestes

Divinos nudos nacidos
Entre dos manos
Unidas

Nudos que no dicen nada
Y nudos que todo lo dicen

Jorge Eduardo Eielson

Knots
Swimming knots
In mysterious seas
Of nothing

Knots that are shadows
Of infinite celestial
Knots

Divine knots born
Between two hands
United

Knots that say nothing
And knots that say everything

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In her poem “Traducir,” Ida Vitale opens with a stanza that perfectly encapsulates my feelings about this translation project:

Alguien al centro de la noche
llega
en un orden de palabras ajenas,
las reviste de nueva piel
y con amor
las duerme en nueva lengua.

In so many ways, this project has been a labor of love/*amor*. It has allowed me to work with the author, my friend Roberto Forns Broggi—and a more generous person is not to be found on this, his beloved Earth—and to know his wife and his lively, intelligent daughters.

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INTRODUCTION

Writing affords new angles of perception and above all helps me to organize my mania for seeking connections—for finding the positive in everything because life is precisely that: nurturing yourself, fighting, enjoying, facing pain, feeling, evolving. So, why write a book about the ecological imagination? Writing is like fluttering around the meaning of life. I choose the word “fluttering” because I do not know the best way to write if I begin to think that a bird’s flight continues to be the very incarnation of freedom in movement. While writing this *abecedarium*, I have gained a wealth of perspectives through which to rehearse multiple destinies, to try out different angles and scales, and to poke around in other worlds.

The art that intrigues me demands a passion for learning, which in turn demands a dismantling of all that we learned so that our capacity for response may be as vital and inclusive as possible. That is why I seek out new forms, new horizons. And in this search, the ecological perspective is my way of broadening the limits of what is human. But, please, do not think that this means that I am an “anti-humanist” or a “post-humanist.” I am only establishing a point of departure that does not leave behind what we have all internalized as separate from ourselves: nature. I write this book because I believe that nature is not merely a resource, or a scene for our escape from urban noise, or the strange or inferior Other to our own subjectivity. We know very little about birds, for instance, no matter how much we may wish to possess wings. In other words, I write against the current, in order to know more about the environment, which ultimately is us.

Why ignore the advantages that the insect’s perspective gives us? I would like to flutter and hover like insects, at the very least because they incite me to pay attention to details, a skill which had seemed to me impossible to perfect until I began to become aware of what ants, bees, lobsters, spiders, worms, and the interminable and infinitely numerous list of tiny agents—all interconnected with life—are capable. How not to think about a poem or a short film about flight if I do not possess the bird’s or the insect’s capacity for movement and beauty?

I conceive of art not as an object of study, but as a program for life. And I do not conceive of life as a matter only for humans. That is another

reason why I have written this ABC book: to unshackle the mind from domesticating formats. I nurture my imagination with examples that deserve to be emulated so that my writing will have foundation and depth. I am not only referring to a critical stance, but also to a daily practice that does not refuse to face the incommensurate and unrepresentable global ecological crisis. I do not want to act like the majority of mortals as if the crisis had no lasting consequences for daily life, either at an individual or a collective level. I want this book to serve as an invitation to a reading of cultural artifacts such as poems, films, videos, narratives, and other creative forms. It is obvious, though, throughout the reading of my ABC book that I have a predilection for poetry. I am not going to attempt to list here all of the master poets and the poets I count among my friends that have shaped me as an active reader. Suffice it to state, though, that nothing else has taught me the pleasure of connecting and of trying on other identities like poetry has. I know that the reading of any poem has to be provisional, dependent on the particular context, and that this reading is nurtured by the intellect but also by the intuitive writing that I pursue in this ABC book. I beg the reader to pardon me if I do not give too many clues or “instructive” interpretations regarding the poems that I include herein. At times I do indeed comment, but I am not sure if I am going way out on a limb or if I am forcing unfounded approaches to the texts. I do not want to seek in these poems a catalogue of images and particular formulae, but rather it is my hope that the reader dares to experience the poem as an opportunity to find new angles and to open a space for whatever he may find there, for whatever may affect him whether it be on the first or subsequent readings. I am proposing a life-long perspective like that assumed by the well-known child poet Luis Hernández in his work *The Beach that Doesn't Exist*:

You were a child,
Abandoned
Always
You were so.

You were familiar with
the most elevated poetry
difficult, subtle; but
also the path
direct and gentle (138)

What I would like to highlight in this brief poem is the long-term perspective that in reality has to do with imagining the entirety of life in a

way that is open to vital contradictions. The poet, therefore, responds not only to “high” culture, but also to daily life. The reader, in turn, does not have before him a fixed, decipherable signifier, but rather an exploration of possible answers. As I bring up different poems or other artistic artifacts, I reveal a magisterial intention in the montage that I am constructing as in Diana Bellessi’s “Silent Teaching”:

They say that Lao Tse said to Wen Tzu:
All things mysteriously
are the same, just as one stares
straight ahead like a newborn
calf does in order to see
what appears to be absent always and already there;

in the kindly look of the master
I imagine his love for all things
Above all those that are smooth and small
Rising up in their swaying motion
Where what is lost is recovered
Just like the breeze among the reeds (“Poems,” 59)

The lyrical “I” proves herself to be sensitive and in tune with the movement of all things. Perhaps by underscoring this ecological focus I am able to inspire an attitude toward reading that I hope will not be diluted in an unsuccessful attempt to seek academic clarity. I seek subtlety, the nuance, the underside of things, the connections between two things that have never been united, “the smooth and small,” the coexistence of irreconcilable opposites. At times I do not really know what I seek given that I have gotten into the habit of being open to whatever I find, and that affects me oftentimes in surprising or astonishing ways; what the artist Abigail Child calls the “strategies and forms of creative opposition,” “deselective attention,” “multiple positionality,” and “cross-referencing the units of film and language.” That is what I do when I read poems. By projecting this searching onto other areas of life, what I propose is a poetic focus on existence.

I have armed this book with the pieces that I scatter like seeds throughout; and also with disperse reflections, readings, fragments, and notes about the topic of ecology, which, as applied to the literary field, I have expanded until I have accumulated infinite projects and renewed my searching attitude toward all life. I see, for instance, that the list I have collected of videos and films in the section entitled “Eco-cinema” illustrates concrete struggles for environmental justice, brings to the fore the nearly invisible effects of slow violence, or simply reveals the

extraordinary courage of the communities that incarnate the notion of “good living.”

Advance Warning to the Reader

I want the reader to take her time with this variety of proposals, recommendations, and approaches, since I cannot hope that anyone could assimilate all of the information in just one encounter with an entry and in an instant. I recall a quote from Mark Twain, so apt for those of us who have spent years working on some initiative:

Realism is nothing more than close observation. But observation will never give you the inside of the thing. The life, the genius, the soul of a people are realized only through years of absorption. (173)

The entire gamut of reflections on and questioning of the norms that regulate our notions of family, community, and nature will seem absurd and unintelligible if we do not take into account the process of absorption. Thus, I am opting for a fragmentary structure for my ABC book that obviously responds to my own reading, research, and creative preferences. The reader should not expect that the artists whose works I chose to investigate always deal with the theme of nature, nor are they self-proclaimed or famous environmentalists. Or that because I am interested in ecology and I admit that I prefer poetry that it is inexcusable to omit poets who are rather well-known for their treatment of nature, such as José Watanabe. Certainly I will have to leave out numerous excellent poets, and although I may not cite poets whose work I value, like my friend Roger Santiváñez, something of his work will be present in my selection and in the way in which I approach poetry. The format of this ABC book responds to this strategy of absorption. On the one hand, I want the reader to take his time. The entries can be read in any order that the reader chooses. Let the reader, in an opportune moment, select any entry or reread one that is particularly interesting. Ideally, I would prefer the reader to write his own poem or compose her own creative work.

On the other hand, my purpose is to introduce key concepts of ecocriticism and to apply them to the reading of literary texts and films made in Latin America as well as the United States, in part to test if ecocriticism has productive possibilities in the area of literary and cultural studies that do not simply shore up current hegemonic powers. I also aim to produce a book that inspires many readers and authors to cultivate a receptive attitude, as Ida Vitale suggests in *On Plants and Animals*:

Perhaps my unconscious purpose is to discern the reserve of spiritual tension that nature holds forth. To be attentive in order to accept the multiple things that it gives us in the form of spectacle, the lessons and the warnings it offers, would be the proper response to what we find upon coming into this world and would constitute, it seems to me, a natural courtesy offered in kind. (17)

To discern that aspect of mutuality is as important as thanking someone for a heartfelt favor. To observe what surrounds us, and at the same time, to think about what cannot be seen but still affects us. To follow the path of what whatever does indeed work. And also what may not work. To tend to our wounds, our errors, our slips, and our failures. I would also love to carry out what José Emilio Pacheco has called “focused attention” on those worlds that are imperceptible, because they are microscopic, mysterious, and immeasurable, but I know that what I place in the reader’s hands in what follows is rather a series of pages of good intentions, in which I seek an honest reflection on the ecological imagination not only through the word, but also through the visual image, given my creative interest in crossing and mixing creative genres such as poetry and film. A reflection that encompasses the most obscure and incomprehensible zones of our being, a being that includes its place of dwelling and its very process of becoming. A reflection like Antonio Ramos Rosa makes in *The Secret Apprentice*: poetic prose about the complex construction of life. The apprentice is whoever imagines and constructs while remaining alert to the tyrannies of mind and vision. I want this imagination to be understood as a means to cross through a garden with many paths, with many caves or grottoes, with many possibilities. My hope is that the reader will be able to open all of the gates, or at least many of them, and to find himself swept away by the productive discomfort that changes whatever in his behavior promotes waste and squandering.

From The Margins

Some Latin American authors have produced work that articulates a challenging imagination with regard to nature, and yet it has been barely noticed. Such is the case of Armando Rojas Adrianzén’s poems that I have recovered from a very slim, yellowed edition of *Rogues’ Art*; these poems find echoes in other entries or poems from the present ABC book. My intention is also to speak the inexpressible of this imagination by including the work of some filmmakers and ecoartists that have expounded interesting points of view concerning nature that challenge stereotypes and concepts of nature that continue to shape our vision of the issue. Since the

first few days of my university studies, I have had to confront that sensation of existing in the margins, since I was intrigued by matters and forms that interested very few; perhaps I must assume the blame for not finding any interlocutors. What is certain is that I also perpetuated that feeling of low self-esteem by publishing my ecological point of view in diverse journals. And I suppose that I continue laboring in the margins, although it might sound like a cliché.

Almost Reason

I write about what is wrong in the world; about what the majority of people do not even realize, which is equally wrong. At least I seek in my own contexts and surroundings what works and what does not work, what is stagnant and what needs to be nurtured. Yet, how can one come up with a sound idea that is free of ethnocide and atrocities that societies cover up unconsciously or out of fear? And how do I achieve this without dragging along environmentalism's halo of insufferable austerity and unappealing self-sacrifice? I will make completely mine the enlightenment achieved in Patricio Guzmán's documentary *Nostalgia for Light* (2010) with respect to the silencing and the brushing aside of the indigenous question in Chile as a forgotten past while other more remote pasts, such as the archeological or the astronomical pasts, are recuperated. Where can we write about such things? Why should we continue that tendency to unearth and uncover? Am I as crazy as those women in *Nostalgia for Light*, who search for their loved ones in the driest desert on Earth? I would have to return with renewed enthusiasm to the work of José María Arguedas or Roberto Juarroz, whose most moving voice unleashes a yearning for a life-affirming encounter. My intention is that this book be a tiny grain of sand in that type of fruitful reconsideration.

In principle, as part of a practice of reading without borders, this book ought to give an account of the infinite number of books and other creative works that forge what I will call the ecological imagination. In and of itself, it is contradictory to propose a book on that theme and to restrict it only to Latin America—Gamaliel Churata's revalorization questions my use of the term "Latin America," which makes me think about "Indo America," but that makes me uncomfortable insofar as it, in a deliberate and provoking fashion, excludes the linguistic and cultural diversity of the continent.

I accept the contradiction into which I, too, sometimes fall innocently as I comment on my various sources of books, videos, websites, film festivals, and many other forms of art. I accept the limitations that derive

from it and I therefore propose a book that brings together my eclectic spirit, but also the critical principle of refusing to produce authoritative discursive formulas. I know that little by little, having accumulated many essays about ecological themes, I have realized that I need a different format for rewriting those essays, for questioning their rhetorical language; or that I need to leave it all by the wayside to defend itself. I had definitively begun to absorb the styles of perception and affinity upon my first contemplation of the stones of Cusco and my readings of José María Arguedas, of the river poetry of Juan L. Ortiz, and of Roberto Juarroz's continuous reflection of imaginary composition in his vertical poetry. Many decades have now passed and I realize that these imaginative hints of contact and exchange have taken seed in me, they have branched out and they are giving fruit. At times in the form of an encounter, at other times in the form of an interruption, oftentimes in an experience of reciprocity. Some of these fruits have, in turn, transformed into something else altogether. I am now more attune to the birds; I grow enthusiastic about flavors, both new and familiar; I feed the compost pile with scraps from my kitchen. I know that the roots that interest me also grow in the air and build bridges. I reread even more fervently the entire world, as well as the book on my nightstand.

But all of this would suggest to anyone that I am not willing to deviate from the theme that I consciously pursue: the ecological imagination. What happens when I immerse myself completely in Lucrecia Martel's films, which challenge and nurture my ecological perspective in such a profound way? What do her non-linear films and her brilliant declarations—such as “All that is alive, flows, it breaks down boundaries. Just a few *yuyos* can crack concrete. We've all seen it” (*El Tribuno*, Salta, Argentina. July 26, 2010)—rouse in me?

I am also interested in the audiovisual production done by community and indigenous organizations that are making headway in confronting the traditional oblivion into which these cultures have been relegated. I proceed by attempting to think with the most workable, personal, and productive concepts, while eschewing those that are less collaborative. I also want to listen to new voices, to proceed as I have learned since I left my native city, through the association and intuition of my own imagination and thereby to use and reuse the connections that I continue discovering as part of a vital, daily praxis. I want to learn about the existence and the substance of thousands upon thousands of relations that form the foundation of our imagination. Such an undertaking requires a great deal of time and is based on the relationships that define us: with our mother language and with other languages that we learn later. The relation

with the various animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms. The relationship with those we love. The relationship with our bodies and the space we inhabit. The relationship between teachers and students, parents and children. In short, all the relationships we establish throughout life. I also refer to new relationships and the relationships that we renew or seek: our relationship with the dispossessed; our relationship with the nurturing of relationships; our relationships with “good living.” Certainly in order to unlearn all that is taken for granted—such as the notion that humans are separate from nature and the masculine form is the generic form in language—we have to cultivate an attitude of mindfulness. To be mindful of ideas. Of automatism and images. Of systems. Aware of planned obsolescence. Of the lack of care. Life-long. Staying alert. Sharing returns and departures, leaping over borders, growing, healing, composing with freedom, solidarity, creativity, and improvisation.

It is time for imagination to be more important in our lives than escapist fantasies or illusions produced by reason or promises of power. We have become lost; the multitude of losses have left us speechless and stuttering, suffering, overcome by complaints, and we act as if we were in the know, but we have no idea what is happening to us. Thus, it is essential to cultivate an ecological imagination—strange, perhaps, but vital—that cuts through everything. I present it simply as an irresistible, never-ending passion for creating and composing, an uneasy love with a good sense of humor, a celebration of body and soul, molecular and planetary. I am interested in writing about the benefits of water, earth, sun, and my love for life. I endeavor to translate all of this excitement and absorption of readings, experiences, and cares into an ABC of ecological concepts that responds with thematic, historical, geographical, and cultural relevance to the environmental challenges of the twenty-first century. I want to provoke existential questions about the loss of mountains and other sacred landscapes, of species, of failed relationships, with the intention of sketching out an affirmative life path, to readjust its typical course, just as migratory birds know exactly how to arrive at their destination. Along the way they live, they know how to live with their faces to the sun and stars, the wind and the vast expanses of sand or water or trees or mountains. Those flights scatter seeds in my soul. Seeds for the imagination and for traveling through this imperfect present.

ACCLIMATIZATION

The accommodation of things as motivated by a close relation with the Other, which is the environment. The sensitive adjustment under the effects of daily alienation and agonies, adaptation of the species, slow rooting in a place, familiarity with changing circumstances, acceptance of what is incomplete, openness to the unknown. But also the state of being fed up with disruptions, with the abuse of paralyzing intrusions brought about by slow violence.

Successful acclimatization implies a capacity for evaluating the climatic surroundings and an opportune knowledge of basic necessities, without losing sight of the diversity of living beings or the diversity of the methods of classification and knowledge. It also implies accepting the limits of the process of said adaptation: for example, not being able to control or understand adaptation at the cellular level. Coexistence of a conscience that is informed about environmental deterioration and the imperfect ability to recuperate and repair life that is expressed as a survival strategy. A poem from *Tiny Kingdom* (1983) by Ida Vitale embodies the complexity of this survival tactic:

Acclimatization

At first, you withdraw,
 you wither,
you lose your soul in the dryness,
in what you don't understand.
You try to reach the waters of life
to illuminate a minute membrane,
a tiny leaf.

 Do not dream of flowers.
The air stifles you.
 You feel the sand
reign in the morning,
all that is green dying
the sere gold rising.

But, without her knowing
from somewhere far away

a voice takes pity, moistens you,
briefly, happily
like when you brush by
a low-hanging pine bough
right after a rain.

Then,
 against the deafness
you rise up in song,
against dryness you flow forth.

ALIENATION

Emotional distance or dominant discourse's firm belief in the autonomy of the human subject, a belief that causes individuals to perpetuate the idea that humans are one thing and nature quite another. This idea includes the notion that nature can be summed up in the stereotypical image of a landscape without people, in nature's incarnation as a seductive female figure, or in the idea of nature as a necessary escape from the madding crowd of the city. For the poet Galway Kinnell, humans have already spent centuries thinking of nature as a type of inert matter, since the time when the sacred was fused with the concept of heaven or the celestial. This instance when everything on Earth was no longer considered sacred is the source of what we call alienation:

We are part of nature just like anything else, and it is only our particular self-image that makes us delineate an absolute division between man [sic] and nature. (111)

Anthropologist Rocío E. Trinidad echoes this thought in her interesting article "The Perverse Connection: Domestic Violence and Violence against Animals:"

We are not alone; plants and animals also make up this planet. If until now we have made them invisible, it is time to see them. If until now we have not learned to treat them with dignity and respect, it is time to learn. (128)

The inexhaustible enumeration of this separation's deplorable effect on the human soul is the fodder for a great deal of poetry and meditations on the way to overcome that separation through writing. In that regard, I like poet Claudia Masin's (b. 1972) thought:

...writing is joining back together whatever is already united, what was always united, it is confronting the great forces of separation: fear and pain, not in order to vanquish them but rather to tie them to a loving breath, to a breath that makes them part of a living breath that renders us indiscernible from the rest of the universe. (74)

In a poem from 1973 by Luis Hernández, such divisions do not exist due to the chromatic action of the sea, the sun, the sky, and the mist:

What the Flowers Told Me

One way of living
Is to live
Without pausing
Over the grass
Over the naked
Grass. And the afternoon's

Gentle sea breeze
Brings birds
upon the sand,
Birds in multitudes

And something else atop
The stones
On the beach. (*The Island Novel*, in *Vox Horrisona*, 61)

Sea of flowers, of reflections, or of water? The irony of this poem emphasizes the alienation of color, the alienation of life.

Nevertheless, alienation is much more complex and deeply rooted in today's world. It takes on its most scandalous and insidious form in what seems to add credence to the lie: the eco-cynicism of the extractive industries, which contaminate not only the environment, but also language, in the process. The sense of alienation that their activity projects, as it flows through the economy and through globalized communication systems, crosses all boundaries. This is what we cannot call by any other name than "greenwash," a term officially accepted in English in 1999. In any case, it is a falsification of the principle of sustainability on behalf of those companies. Such lies multiply through the language of marketing and push environmental organizations to envision a law that regulates such flagrant falsification. The Totobiegosode tribe demanded justice for the lies told by the Brazilian ranching company, Yaguarete Porá, which, according to the group Survival, was awarded the "Greenwashing Award" of 2010 for its proclamation that it was concerned about the conservation of the environment while it quietly deforested immense expanses of the Totobiegosode ancestral lands.

On an avenue in Lima, though it could have been any roadway in any large city in Latin America, a huge billboard sponsored by Toyota says "Listen to Nature," while displaying the latest car model in the center of the image. This type of alienation is smooth, subtle, attractive, and

constantly renews itself, prospers, and floods the city on billboards and signs. The promise of harmony with nature that it proffers is a flagrant lie that also serves as a convenient screen to shield us from urban squalor—the billboard that I saw on my way to the Jorge Chávez Airport hid a bridge that has been blackened by pollution.

Coincidentally, at that time I was reading a book published in Lima—whose title, *Smoke of Distant Fires*, I associated with the image of ecocynicism that glossed over the traces of pollution—and I thought about the ironic look at reality that would be an ideal way to disarm this type of environmental alienation. Eduardo Chirinos (1960-2016) knows how to translate the alienating process via ingenious images of separation and decay into a deep reflection on language, as has been the case in all of his sizeable poetic production, a personal inspiration that is always generous in suggestion and form:

once the leaves broke free from their branches
it was spring they could not support the weight of the snow
the sun shone darkly the deer came down from the mountains
the rats fled the swamp everything before me was an allegory
but I did not write at all. (“What the Birds’ Song Reveals,” 85)

This critique of language in the hands of the poet is no simple play of Quevedian contradictions. It is a sensibility, a call to abandon our role as consumer, not only of falsifying language, but also of a world of values and materialistic habits in consonance with the economic cogs whose logic does not accept those flights of the imagination, which, in the case of this poet, are neither ingenuous nor indifferent to that capitalist manipulation. What the birds’ song tells us does not matter in that mechanism of greed; which, by way of contrast, is only interested that this type of discourse not be understood beyond its own logic. In that sense, we could say that the poem discourages, or at least wrings the neck of the swan¹ of, the prevailing alienation. The poem relies on the reader’s creation; the author confesses that he does not write. So, was it the reader who wrote . . . ? The poem is a call to venture into the process of production rather than consumption.

¹ This phrase refers to the first verse of the famous sonnet by Enrique González Martínez (Mexico, 1871-1952): “Tuércele el cuello al cisne” [Wring the swan’s neck]. The poem attempts to “kill off” *Modernismo*, a Latin American literary movement whose most exemplary author is the Nicaraguan Rubén Darío. The swan emblemizes the movement due to its appearance in several of Darío’s poems.

THE AMAZON

The Amazon is a vastly diverse story of conquerors and naturalists; of rubber barons and rubber tappers, of indigenous people and shamans, of river dwellers and prospectors, of freed or marooned slaves, of novelists. The river dwellers, for instance, are a population of indigenous descent who no longer possess an identity that is clearly “native” and who no longer speak any of the native languages. Michael Uzendoski distinguishes them from colonists in that the river dwellers have a profound knowledge of Amazonian ecology and of the cultural paradigms of the river area. Throughout the Amazonian region, asserts Uzendoski, we find a continuum of rich and complex relations between natives and non-natives (“Fractal Subjectivities,” 55).

For Candace Slater, a pioneer in combating stereotypes of the region, the Amazon is an encounter of waters, a giant for foreigners, a shape-shifter for various inhabitants. Slater understands the complex Amazonian reality as a convergence of images and histories of earth and water, and of golden utopias and enchantments, which, according to the critic, provides the foundation for effective action with respect to the preservation of peoples, plants, and animals of Amazonia.

According to Ana Pizarro, who has expertly compiled this diversity of voices, the history of the Amazon region is a paradoxical paradigm of the weakness of the geographical, cultural, and symbolic borders on the international scene. The Amazon is a terrain of contradictory voices whose destiny is debated by the drug trafficker, the guerrillas, paramilitary groups, and the State military. And amid such huge disputes, the voices of its common inhabitants are heard: river dwellers, indigenous peoples, and rubber tappers who confront the challenge of modernization. If in the collective imaginary the Amazon is the last bastion of an earthly paradise, in the imaginary of some of its inhabitants and some culturally sensitive visitors it is the land that holds the promise of new utopias where diversity, cultural plurality, and pristine spaces are harbored. For some poets, the Amazon is an errant polyphony that is occluded by the thick cloud of our prejudices. Without a doubt, it is also the ideal place for lifting up one’s voice, as Néstor Perlongher (1949-1992) does in his book *Aerial waters* (1991), a verbal act that summons forth life forces rather than outline a catalogue of voices to name:

XXII

This winged pine in changeable wilderness
Count of Villamediana

Forest Asceticism:

the water only as a excuse or channel for the trunking of the trunk among the branches, fluvial subtly, the flow of the canoe romping through the branches, making it a sibilant shell case, wine-red sparks were born from the loving encounter of the bend of the canoe and the knot of the ladylike tree, stooping to encase or feminize her nets, on the other side of the stream, enveloped, vegetation that entered the water, an aquatic transformation of the branch, they sail through the forest.

Through the naming of its components, the representation of the tropical forest resists being described in personalized terms. Rather, the poetic voice opts for channels, currents, and flows, to characterize the jungle in a sensual language; in other words, to characterize the jungle as an opening to climatic ecstasy, to syllabic pleasure, and to rhythmic meditation.

XXXIV

The Man Fish enticed the Amazonian lady who threw herself swiftly to the furthest reaches of herself of those sounds (musky ivory) that enveloped the pleats of her skirt and rings of her earrings and the arms above all the naked arms of those smooth dolphins that pull her caressingly distracted attracted by the spiral eddies tossed thoughtlessly into the tide of the river's mud content to devour her erecting a multicolored border on the banks of the jungle.

Whereas Perlonger's poetry chooses an open and sensualist route, which we could characterize as environmental wisdom rather than a neobaroque literary program, Pizarro's essay, in a more academic vein, traces a political and semantic map of Amazonian voices in order to conclude with an environmental wisdom slant:

To study these discourses is also to position oneself from a perspective that allows us to visualize future humanity's pressing problems stemming from the current power plays in the international political arena. (239)

I am not going to refer to the novels that represent this diversity of voices from the perspective of a learned aesthetic. Pizarro studies a few of them that are quite interesting (160-171), like William Ospina's novelistic series about the conquest of the Amazon. I ought to mention that there are many scholars and artists intent on recovering the stories of the Amazonian

peoples, and they are publishing recom compilations of Amazonian myths, such as Juan Carlos Galeano's poetry collection or children's books like Cristina Sono's *The Whistling Forest* (2010). Although I know little about the poetry production of Amazonian authors, I am interested in commenting on a few poetry collections that I hope will pique the reader's curiosity about their promising diversity, as exemplified by the anthology of Amazonian poets that Jeremy Larochelle recently published (2014).

Josemári Recalde (1973-2000), a high school friend of mine from Lima, wrote Amazon poems that have to do with the jungle in a mythical-hallucinogenic sense. Poetry and life come together in an irreproducible fire that perhaps is but a pale reflection of the life-giving heat of the cultural construct that encompasses dozens of languages and a wealth of biodiversity. His poem "Wampach" picks up this idea, along with the daily sensation of carrying a bag—a thing—and converting it through a strange metamorphosis into part of human sensibility:

Wampach

How well the wampach grows accustomed
 How well the wampach grows accustomed
 To the granite of the park benches in Lima
 Whether night or the day
 When the Sun bends toward me.
 All of it shifts to the generous roughness of the solid;
 ...

At the moment I take the wampach
 Once again I'll feel like an aishman,
 And I will wander the ways
 Each sense leaping from one entity to another;
 it is the hour of every hour
 wampach
 it is the high hour, the one that throbs with pure durability,
 the one where we will appear leaving behind this time
 the hour of vitality and maturity;
 wampach...
 the natural hour of happiness and tenderness,
 the hour to embrace one's neighbor, to kiss
 at every moment that
 from our heart a light radiates
 to fall upon us serenely
 wampach
 in order to see ourselves...

It is then that I carry you like a child,
Papoose-wampach,
For the nakedness and
In the dexterity of life,
For the naturalness of green magic
And also for the magic of beautiful offerings.
Wampach,
Authenticity and palm tree
Music seduction
That over there on the mountainside could be heard.

....

Wampach,
History and hunt,
Wampach
Tobacco and sadness,
Patience and simplicity,
Annihilation: wampach
Wampach of the everlasting day
Wampach of the century
A star's entire trip,
Desired lily of freshness.
Encounter: wampach,
Dawn: wampach,
Recognition: wampach,
Wampach revealed as strength and softness,
Conceived in the mathematics of forest gladness,
Wampach,
Adventure
Wampach
Adventure and weave
Wampach of rites
Wampach of myth,
Unusual wampach of love and peace,
I doze to your warmth and I go my time,
Before your light I bow down,
Former trophy and friend,
Successor of other natural
Worn-out bags,
When the Earth
Is a clear expression
Of the nakedness of perfection.

Sadly, Recalde died very young. Yet despite his limited poetic production, he introduced us to a natural sensibility, rendered magical by his use of myth, which creates and personalizes an object, as in the poem

“Wampach.” In this poem, we witness the creation of a personal time that is simultaneously ecological, melding a verbal summons similar to that invoked in Perlongher’s *Aerial Waters*. The lyrical “I” translates his jungle environment into a narrative failure and a suggestive opening for existential thought. Recalde echoed many Amazonian poets and prose writers that defined subjectivity by means of fractal relations with animals, plants, waters, and spirits. This fractality can be observed on different scales in the repetition of the form of cosmic dimensions seen in a tree trunk, a cloud formation, a mountain, or riverbanks.

Would it be too much of a usurpation to think of the jungle as something that is already mine? As I read poems from the Amazon, I feel an enormous desire to familiarize myself with the oral traditions and the languages of that region, to transport myself to that environment, but all I can do is recognize that desire in myself. Yet, how can I describe what I feel? How can we incorporate this connection that recognizes itself as part of denied and marginal history of cultural recounts into ecocriticism? Although Pizarro’s essay indicates a renewed look at Amazonia, I now invoke a type of imagination manifest in Juana de Ibarbourou’s “The Ice-Cold Pitcher:”

I am convinced that in some ancestral life, now thousands of years past, I had roots and boughs, I flowered, I felt the heaviness in my branches, which were like juicy, green arms, smooth fruit, heavy with sweet juice; I am convinced that a very long while ago, I was a humble and happy bush, rooted in the hilly shore of a river. (“Premonitions,” *Complete Works*, 421-422)

Why does this type of extended voice grow increasingly mute on our continent? First, I want to make a personal observation. If I have continued thinking about the jungle, it is not only due to my brief trip to Iquitos or the abundance of Amazonian images that I have available to me in pictures, photos, and videos, but also to poetry’s power to revive this vital intensity in an urban context and to the capacity for finding such vitality in other habitats. In other words, what is most important is to cultivate that ecologist’s passion that takes me from the dazzling of my own imagination to the compassionate complicity with my eventual conversation partners. Although it begins as an imaginative process, it nevertheless focuses on natural elements and from there incorporates the experiences of the senses. That is why I always feel like a stranger, with a desire to write “poetry without a country,” whenever I disconnect from my feelings and in my imagination I find not a single echo of nature’s presence. Could it be the need to fill the void that impels me to write about the secular lack of

interest in nature poetry? The good thing is that one can always find such mental and moral meditative exercise, which leads us to more remote, more beloved regions, that are simultaneously contemporary. Resistance to the consumerist dynamic is incarnated in the reading/writing of a poem. Perhaps I am being too naïve when I think about the importance of remembering what our societies have so stubbornly forgotten, such as respect, fear, and veneration with regard to nature in Latin America. And the following questions that Juana de Ibarbourou asked resonate within me:

How many trees have been felled so that I may have all of this? What enormous jungles have been knocked down to furnish all the houses of the world? I am filled with sadness thinking about the mourning of the dew, of the bird, of the wind. I am filled with anguish imagining the pain of the injured branches, of the mutilated trunks, of all the Earth's jungles chopped down by the shining axes of the loggers. This wood, now immobile and silent, how it must have whispered and flourished once upon a time! ("Trees." Complete Works, 432)

The historical and cultural references that abound in the titles and poems in Carlos Reyes Ramírez's *The Owl's Glimpse* (COPÉ Prize, 1986) do not drown out the ancestral voice that flows through the poetic "I." The metamorphoses of the historical subject go hand in hand with the ancient alliance among "man, plant and stone" (33). The jungle terms barely invoke the same continuity compared to the ruin caused by Western progress, but they do not demand a solidarity worthy of privileged citizens. Such a solidarity would be on the side of paternalism among superior beings (we, the humans) and inferior beings (animals, whatever is "wild"); but *The Owl's Glimpse* is a courageous approach to the vegetable, mineral, and animal world, a desire for belonging and a passion for environmental justice. Why read *The Owl's Glimpse* so many decades after its publication? Why do I find its conciliatory perspective so necessary? The conciliatory perspective is contaminated by history and subtly denies the conception of the word as a manifestation of an external essence and myth. The affirmation of life is fragile and tenuous, although it always openly proffers the signs of collective memory, with a thirst for justice and bewildered by the apocalyptic disgraces of the twentieth century. In the poem "Yarapa," for example, the poetic voice appears to expand in the landscape:

From Moyombamba climbing up a fragile rope
I blurred the outlines of your image, Yarapa, sweet water

Among waters,
 Song that was broken, song that was broken,
 Cloth dyed by luminous Capanahua hands.
 The Moon is still and you call me.
 I have seen not only this,
 But also your name bottled in red clay,
 Since then resentment took breath from my lips
 And I hated you and loved you
 Like an animal covered in waxy spines. (37)

The fragment can scarcely give an idea of what an attentive reading of the entire work offers. Nevertheless, the tone that insists on revealing something that memory has forgotten can easily be traced through this excerpt. The rivers grow quiet, but “the song that pants out a brutal report” is heard (42). There is always something that reminds us of lost battles, a vague awareness of nation, the lyrical “I’s” struggle, not as an emblem of individualism but rather as a product of a natural history, filled with ruptures and oblivion.

Although there is a specific temporal reference in one poem (the year 1983), the most important reference therein is to dreams: “the gravely injured body’s unforeseeable ascent / and our impossible stone a rain that breaks / the windowpanes of memory that ventures forth” (“1983/Years,” 20). The poems from the collection’s second section (which lends the book its title) invoke allegorical beings that are rooted in vegetable, animal, and mineral nature, such as the poems “In praise of Sinacay” (33-35), “Yarapa” (36-38), “In Which We Speak of an Expedition to Yaquerana, the Siege and other Adventures” (39-42), and “On the Exhibition of a Suit Made from a Yagua Palm” (45). For example, in this last poem, the suit in question resists being an object for “immemorial Archeology” and becomes simply “material steeped in humours that the earth / recognizes” (45). The item stops being looked upon as an object that has been uttered and agreed upon verbally and becomes merely an “intrepid thread,” “a piece of enchantment,” which sadly burns up like a dry leaf. This poem’s success lies in its presentation of the jungle, not as a possible symbol of otherness or as something that could easily be assimilated into urban life, but rather as a revealing vision of the temporal and material condition present within the historical context of looting and destroying nature in the name of progress. The lyrical “I” attempts to retain the sense of a biodiverse community beyond any possible historical reading, in which violence obliterates the dispossessed.

With María Fernanda Espinosa’s (Ecuador, b. 1964) *Jungle Tattoo*, I experienced something much more intense and complex than with Reyes