

Present Trajectories in Amazonian Studies: Intimate Frontiers

Daniel Hernández Guzmán

Stanford University

Felipe Martínez-Pinzón and Javier Uriarte. *Intimate Frontiers: A Literary Geography of the Amazon*. Liverpool, England: Liverpool UP, 2019. 275 pp. ISBN 978-1-78694-183-1

The book *Intimate Frontiers: A Literary Geography of the Amazon*, compiled by Juan Felipe Martínez Pinzón and Javier Uriarte, is a crucial work on Amazonian history and literature. Published in 2019, in the midst of a global environmental crisis, this book emerges at a critical moment in which the Amazonian territory takes on particular relevance both for its biological diversity and for being a space where myriad native and non-native peoples coexist. *Intimate Frontiers* offers a detailed look at the Amazon archive through a compilation of articles dealing with texts from diverse Amazonian origins and different historical periods. From an oikographic perspective, the essays collected in this book propose an image of the Amazon as an inhabited space in contrast to two metaphors traditionally linked to this territory: uninhabitable Green Hell and utopian El Dorado. Although organized in chronological order, three thematic lines run through the book's structure: territorial disputes over the region, forms of transculturation, and domestic and intimate Amazonian experiences.

First, the book examines how the Amazon has been territorially perceived, represented, and mapped by different nations. These analyses continue Mary Louise Pratt's tradition by looking at how this territory's history emerges from gazes and descriptions from metropolitan or foreign audiences. The first three essays in the book unpack how authors from Colombia, Perú, and Brazil have represented and mapped the Amazonian territory for the sake of national interests and claims. In his essay, Felipe Martínez-Pinzón compares how early twentieth-century Colombian writers Miguel Triana and Rafael Uribe Uribe's texts serve different political projects that seek to integrate the Amazonian territory and its inhabitants within Colombian national borders. Similarly, Cristobal Cardemil-Krause analyzes how Peruvian writer Hildebrando Fuentes omits reports of the violence caused by rubber extraction in his Amazonian writings, seeking the central Peruvian government's support of modernizing projects in Loreto.

From there, Cynthia Torres uses the emblematic case of Euclides da Cunha to examine the narrative mechanisms through which metropolitan Brazil justified its governance

of Acre. Torres argues that da Cunha, like the Brazilian state, questioned Peruvian government's presence in the Amazon, arguing against its rubber industry, while, due to the historical cessions of territory to Brazil, he mediated in favor of Bolivia's authority over this territory. Finally, through an analysis of Disney's documentary *The Amazon Awakens* (1944), Barbara Weinstein unveils an interventionist rhetoric that appeals to the figure of the "good neighbor" and presents the Amazonian people's interests as aligned with those of the global North, lacking only foreign intervention to achieve modernization. These studies offer new perspectives on the modalities used by several nations in the Amazon to (re)claim the Amazon as a national space.

By inquiring about the literature stemming from transculturation between European and Native American narratives, some essays in this collection answer to a tradition that includes Ángel Rama and Ana Pizarro. In her article, Charlotte Rogers looks at *Órphãos do Eldorado* (2008) by Brazilian Manuel Hatoum rewrites mythical Amazonian narratives in conjunction with the European myth of El Dorado. Rogers highlights Hatoum's uses both traditions to question and reimagine the hybrid history of Amazonian modernity. Similarly, Rick Bolte analyzes the translation and reception of *Yuruparí*, arguing that this indigenous narrative acquires the form of a legend by virtue of translation, first into Italian and then into Spanish. By exploring the intersections between a Native American narrative form and western gender expectations, Bolte questions the character of *Yuruparí* as a legend and as a foundational literary text in Colombia. Likewise, Lucía Sá departs from the theoretical frame of perspectivism, developed by the anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, to revisit the Penón myths compiled by Theodor Koch-Grundberg. Sá focuses on a text in which Amerindian and Western ontologies converge; she highlights the ontological possibilities that hybrid narratives offer to think about the intimate relationships between humans and non-humans. In this way, she reflects on the forms of habitability in the Amazon from a non-anthropocentric relationship between humans and environment.

The book also looks into a third theme: domesticity and intimacy in the Amazonia. This approach distances itself from the more traditional analyzes regarding the Amazon from a cartographic perspective rather than a bodily experience. Javier Uriarte's essay explores Irish diplomat and activist Roger Casement description of the physical space of the jungle as amenable to homoerotic relationships. In Uriarte's analysis of Casement's diary, in the Amazon jungle, within the context of rubber exploitation, pain and extreme bodily violence are conflated with the possibility of satisfying a restricted pleasure. Uriarte's engagement with the intimate facet of Casement's work is complemented by Leopoldo Bernucci's study of prominent "rubber" barons' personal lives. Similarly, Alejandro Quin touches on the American photographer Sharon Lockhart's captures of the interior of Amazonian homes to refute the popular imaginary of the Amazon as an untamable (undomesticated) place.

The last two essays center on the intimacy and bodily effects of illness. André Botelho and Nisia Trindade Lima explain how Mário de Andrade, specifically in his journal *O Turista Aprendiz* (1928), uses malaria, the epitome of tropical diseases, to symbolically suggest a form of modernity that incorporates the experience of its most remote regions. De Andrade inverts the metropolitan hygienic discourse to symbolically celebrate malaria and its contagion as mechanisms through which Brazil can incorporate the Amazon as

part of a modern nation. In a similar vein, Leslie Wylie argues that the Peruvian author Arturo Burga Freitas uses the notion of “vegetative state” in his novel *Mal de gente* (1943) to contrast a regenerative way of life amid jungle vegetation with prejudices regarding the Amazon as a degenerative space. Burga Freitas responds to a literary tradition that describes the Amazon as a site of corruption, though the protagonist of *Mal de gente* finds in Amazonian vegetation an escape from the reification of modernity and capitalism. Like the previous essays, these two texts examine works that reverse prejudices about the Amazon and its effect on human bodies. In doing so, these essays dignify the condition of this region as habitable space.

In sum, *Intimate Frontiers* is a timely book crucial to contemporary Amazonian studies and Latin American studies at large. In particular, the book’s focus on domesticity and habitability complements the cartographic studies that preceded it. Likewise, the corpus treated in *Intimate Frontiers* reflects the varied languages and ethnic origins present in the Amazonian archive. However, the only work produced by a woman analyzed in this compendium is that of an American photographer. More than being a reproach to the book, this lacking is symptomatic of a blind spot in current Amazonian studies and demands a future exploration that includes more works by women authors within the region’s archive.