

## ENCUENTROS



*Jungle Fever:  
The Ecology of Disillusion  
in Spanish American Literature*

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Lecture by  
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JUNGLE FEVER:  
THE ECOLOGY OF DISILLUSION  
IN SPANISH AMERICAN LITERATURE

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*Jorge Marcone*

In the stained face of the forest goddess  
I saw hidden the heavenly blaze (we all quest for  
in books) in the eyes of the nameless animal  
whose everyday form, or tread of whose passing  
I could never know, or hear, or imagine.

Homero Aridjis  
“An Anonymous Conquistador Recalls His Passing through the New Land”  
*(Images for the End of the Millennium)*<sup>1</sup>

On February 12 of this year I received an e-mail from Venezuela with the following request:

Me tomo el atrevimiento de escribirle sin conocernos para hacerle una pregunta. Yo soy venezolano, graduado en Física con un MBA

en USC y, ahora, vivo en Caracas. También me gusta leer mucho, sin embargo, por razones que no valen la pena analizar, yo leo muy poco en español. Le escribo para preguntar lo siguiente: a mí me gusta mucho el género “Nature Writing”. Autores como Thoreau, Barry Lopez, John

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Muir; y, desde hace un tiempo, quiero saber quiénes escriben en este género en español. Pero la verdad es que ni siquiera sé cómo traducir el nombre del género al castellano. . . .

Deseo pues preguntarle:

(1) ¿Cómo se conoce al estilo “Nature Writing” en español?

(2) ¿Quiénes, si existen, son los equivalentes de, por ejemplo, un Barry Lopez; y que escriban con “literary elegance and spiritual sensitivity with a profound awareness of the natural world” pero en el idioma de Cervantes.

Para mí el estilo como tal no existe en español. Pero, no siendo la literatura mi profesión, a lo mejor estoy muy equivocado y hay muchos autores de los que yo no tengo conocimiento.

Without our ever having met, I dare to write you with a question. I am Venezuelan, with a degree in physics and an MBA from USC, and now live in Caracas. I also like to read a lot. However, for reasons not worth analyzing, I read very little in Spanish. My purpose in contacting you is to ask the following: I really enjoy the “nature writing” genre (authors like Thoreau, Barry Lopez, and John Muir) and for some time now I have wanted to know who writes in that style in Spanish. But the truth is that I don’t even know how to translate the name of the

genre into Castilian Spanish. . . .

I would therefore like to ask:

(1) How does one refer to the “nature writing” style in Spanish?

(2) Which authors, if they do in fact exist, would be Barry Lopez’s equivalents, for example: writing with “literary elegance and spiritual sensitivity with a profound awareness of the natural world” but in the language of Cervantes?

As far as I am aware that style does not exist, as such, in Spanish. But since literature is not my profession, perhaps I am quite mistaken and there are many authors of whom I have no knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

I could not reply to the questions raised by the author of the e-mail until a few weeks later, and I am not sure whether it is due to that discourtesy on my part or his disillusionment with my response, but my Venezuelan friend never wrote back, not even to thank me for my trouble. Perhaps he was puzzled by the first part of the response, which was categorical and yet ambiguous at the same time. On one hand, “nature writing” does not exist in Spanish. To date, studies in Latin American literature have not compiled, under that name or any other, a corpus of what said term identifies in U.S. literature: essays, travel stories, diaries, and generally, nonfictional prose that focus on the experience of perceiving and contemplating nature. On the other hand, this void does not imply that such texts do not exist but testifies to the lack of critical interest in them, be it justifiable or not.

Perhaps what ended up irritating my Venezuelan friend was not only my appearing to want to dodge his question, but my suggesting in the second part of my response that it would be advisable to rethink his question. The verses by Mexican author Homero Aridjis that I cite in the epigraph remind us that there is literature, and a lot of it, that meets the requirement of “literary elegance and spiritual sensitivity with a profound awareness of the natural world.” And it could not be any other way, given the very weight of nature in literature generally, and the special fascination throughout literary history that the nature of the Americas has aroused in authors on both sides of the Atlantic. Also, if we carefully read between the lines of my friend’s original message, what he really wants me to do is identify literature that responds to a more general question: is there or is there not environmental/ecological thought in literature written in Spanish that is comparable to that of other literatures, that relates closely to current conservationist efforts, and is relevant with respect to contemporary environmental problems? It would be naïve of us to think that our “nature writing” reader is only interested in practicing his Spanish. So, in conclusion, in my reply I indefinitely postponed giving him a simple and direct answer to his question, but in exchange, I offered to study the topic in depth, as a form of compensation.

Throughout the twentieth century, particularly since the 1960s, Latin Americans have become used to seeing their literature address the most important problems in the region. Indeed, literature has consis-

tently displayed bold perspectives that have brought underrepresented problems in public discourse to light. However, when it comes to paying attention to environmental changes, conflicts and debates, there is the impression that Latin American literature is not fulfilling these expectations. Its well-known firm stance against colonialism and rushed modernizations or its recurrent vindication of natural landscapes as a source of cultural identity are useful, but not enough for developing and promoting cultures of sustainability. A case in point is the frequent representation in this literature of the Amazon as a Green Hell, the Garden of Eden, El Dorado, or a New Natural World of Lost Civilizations, among other edenic or messianic metaphors. Surprisingly, for developers, destroyers, and defenders of the Amazon alike, these images are disappointing evidence of an overall ecological misunderstanding of the jungle and of its interaction with society, and furthermore, the unintended reiteration of colonialist Western discourses. Such severe criticism of these images exemplifies what geographer Paul Robbins, in his *Political Ecology* (2004), calls a “radical” constructivism approach to cultural representations. In radical constructivism, he explains, “The environment is arguably an invention of our imagination. What we know from experience of much of the world, moreover, is related to us through stories, conventions, and idea systems that we learn from other people” (113).

In order to begin to recognize environmental perspectives in Latin American literature that has contemporary resonance,

it is worthwhile to pause for a moment, precisely on the subject of how the Amazon is depicted in said literature. We see key aspects of this environmental criticism in the so-called jungle novel classics from the first half of the twentieth century that enjoyed extraordinary public and critical success: the “cuentos misioneros” (1914–1924) by Horacio Quiroga (Uruguay, 1878–1937), *La vorágine* (*The Vortex*, 1924) by José Eustasio Rivera (Colombia, 1888–1928), *Canaima* (1935) by Rómulo Gallegos (Venezuela, 1884–1969), and *Los pasos perdidos* (*The Lost Steps*, 1953) by Alejo Carpentier (Cuba, 1904–1980). More than one person familiar with some of these titles will ask, how is it possible that books famous for depicting the tropical forest using the images mentioned earlier, for relating journeys of escape into the wilderness that end in failure, in which the protagonists die, disappear or go crazy in the forest, or return, at some point or other, to the modern city that they rejected with their tail between their legs, are recommended as being “ecological” or “environmental”? Worse yet, would I not be doing a disservice to other writers and intellectuals who have emerged from the very Amazonia by demanding the validity of a literature written by foreigners, and in the shadow of which they have suffered isolation and little recognition even within their own national literatures? In fact, this past September 24, in a report in *The New York Times*, a Brazilian writer from Manaus complained about this sarcastically: “‘Maybe we need more deforestation here to get some attention,’ Mr. Souza, the author of picaresque, satirical novels like ‘The

Emperor of the Amazon’ and ‘Mad María,’ added mordantly. ‘That’s how the book world seems to work.’” (Rohter, 2007).

Despite these controversies, there is environmental criticism in the jungle novel genre, and its key aspects can also be seen in more contemporary literature. Before doing any close reading, however, allow me to point out in advance some notions and issues to keep in mind when reading the jungle novel, or any other literature, from an environmental perspective:

(1) In addition to the familiar topic of the alienation of the individual from self and others in the modern city, there is the underlying and yet unexplored connection between a “return to nature” or a “journey to the wilderness” and the trauma of political violence exercised in and from the city.

(2) The “return to nature” engaged in by an urban subject usually follows another and almost forgotten journey: the earlier immigration of said subject from the countryside into the city. Often in Spanish American literature, the “return to nature” is performed by an immigrant who first was lured by the city and later became disappointed with it. In our analysis of the cultural construction of nature in this literature we must factor in, for whatever it is worth, the history of immigration.

(3) These novels usually include an element of disillusionment with the political ecology of the unsustainable “development” of extractive industries. Following Michael J. Watts in his “Political Ecology” (2000), I understand “political ecology” as a category that asks for “the complex rela-

tions between nature and society through a careful analysis of what one might call the forms of access and control over resources and their implications for environmental health and sustainable livelihoods” (257). I suggest, however, remaining open to any other implications linked to the question of access and control over natural resources, including the obvious one of the implications of such access and control for the production of culture.

(4) The climax in the plot of these narratives is the failure, in terms of sustainability, of professional and life projects that ironically were envisaged as alternatives to mainstream ones. The definition of sustainability that I have in mind here is not a technical one, in terms of environmental management, but a notion coming from the ground: for example, sustainability as it was explained by the Kenyan activist Wangari Maathai, on December 10, 2004, in her Nobel Peace Prize lecture.<sup>3</sup> On that occasion, Maathai illustrated the notion of sustainability with the work of individuals and groups around the globe who in their daily life link together the protection of the environment, the promotion of democracy from below, the defense of human rights, equality between women and men, and the hope of planting seeds of peace.

(5) These failures also illustrate, then, the limits of naturalistic, telluric or autochthonous discourses. In his *The Spanish American Regional Novel* (1990), Carlos J. Alonso explains the meaning of such terms, particularly during the first half of the twentieth century:

The many botanical and biological metaphors that were used throughout the century to characterize cultural life and its evolution attest to the organicity that physical and spiritual processes were assumed to have in common; but it is also expressive of the relationship that was presumed to exist between a culture and physical environment in which it obtained. (59)

In jungle novels there is no unity or continuity between environment and culture. Nevertheless, paradoxically, the books often make the point that environment and culture are not independent from each other, either:

(6) As readers, we should not overlook the fact that “journeys to the wilderness” are generally, in the end, “return journeys from the wilderness to the city.” The failure of the characters at living their own utopia in the jungle often leads to self-destruction or to a mournful state because of the loss of this utopia. However, for those protagonists who survive, the ordeal effects a regeneration in their urban life and art.

(7) Frequently we find in literature that environmental crises, changes, or conflicts—or experiencing the environment as a crisis because of travel or immigration—unleash an epistemological crisis that questions what we know and the way we produce knowledge. In this respect, literary “journeys to the wilderness” can be described and analyzed with the help of the notion of “environmental complexity” as it is defined by Mexican environmental-

ist Enrique Leff in “Pensar la complejidad ambiental” (2000):

La crisis ambiental nos lleva a interrogar el conocimiento del mundo, a cuestionar ese proyecto epistemológico que ha buscado la unidad, la uniformidad y la homogeneidad: a ese proyecto que anuncia un futuro común, negando el límite, el tiempo, la historia; la diferencia, la diversidad, la otredad. (11)

The environmental crisis leads us towards interrogating our knowledge of the world, questioning an epistemological project that has sought unity, uniformity, and homogeneity: regarding such a project that calls for a common future and neglects limits, time, history, we respond with: difference, diversity, and otherness.<sup>4</sup>

Let’s take, for example, Alejo Carpentier’s *Los pasos perdidos* (*The Lost Steps*). Like our Venezuelan correspondent, the narrator-protagonist of this novel set in the jungles of Venezuela also struggles with the question of recovering “the language of Cervantes” and writes in a style that would please our reader of nature writing:

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)

I asked myself whether the higher forms of the aesthetic emotion do not consist merely in a supreme understanding of creation. A 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. (211–12)<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the possible identification of our Venezuelan friend with the protagonist of *The Lost Steps*, there is another reason for choosing it for this presentation. On December 3, 2003, biologist Cristián Samper stood here and delivered a lecture that was a synthesis of the history and challenges of human ecology in the Americas. In order to capture his audience’s imagination, Samper invited them to imagine themselves in a journey by plane, and then by foot, from Caracas to the *tepuis* of the Guyana Shield, through hundreds of kilometers of lowland jungles:

If you were to start hiking up the Tepuyes of Chiriquete in the Amazonian jungle you’d suddenly run into pre-historic painting several hundred meters up that face of stone. They are clearly showing a wealth of plants, deer, fish, birds,



and people hunting; you can even see leopards if look closely. We know very little about the people that created these paintings . . . it is just one of those mysteries that we find coming up all over the Americas. (2)

The itinerary mentioned by Samper is essentially the same one that the protagonist of *The Lost Steps* followed by bus, boat and foot for approximately two weeks. A plane did not take him into the jungle. A plane took him away forever from the life he had found for himself in the forest and from the masterpiece that he was writing there. This recurring itinerary, as much as its ultimate destination, seems to hold the key to an ecological culture.

In the remote depths of the jungle, the narrator-protagonist of this novel, whose name we do not know despite his being a successful director of television commercials, finally embraces the idea of leading a simple, unembellished life in the secret “city” of Santa Mónica de los Venados, which was recently founded by El Adelantado. This project is based on his cohabitation with Rosario. She is an authentic and down-to-earth woman, an incarnation of the ethnic and cultural symbiosis that the protagonist discovers throughout his journey, and she has replaced his wife, Ruth, and mistress, Mouche, who are “artificial.” The equilibrium of his new life, however, is affected by a growing worry that will not be satisfied: his artistic creation. In the jungle, the protagonist buries himself in a new orchestral composition, titled *Treno*, which is inspired by his unexpected discovery of the origin

of music among the primitive peoples: an impotent funereal lament articulated in the face of death. The vital regeneration of his body and spirit that the long journey to the jungle and meeting Rosario have occasioned is accompanied by the recovery of his original and authentic vocation.

It is not this idyllic scenario, however, that I propose as being one of the key aspects to the environmental thinking in the novel. In fact, even literary and environmental experts find such scenarios difficult to validate. On one hand, since the mid-twentieth century, Latin American literary criticism has consistently rejected theories that reduce the explanation of artistic creation to naturalistic, telluric, autochthonous, organicist and even evolutionist assumptions, on the suspicion that they are conservative or reactionary efforts to remove cultural production from its historical context. On the other hand, despite the fact that these theories narrate cultural regeneration in the middle of the wilderness, they would maintain a strict dichotomy between culture and nature, between city and wilderness, which is precisely what environmental thought bridges by focusing on the mutual interaction between the human and the nonhuman. In his *Ecocriticism* (2004), Greg Garrard summarizes the matter and refers us to the foundational essay by historian William Cronon titled “The Trouble with Wilderness; Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature” (1996). The passage in *The Lost Steps* mentioned earlier would aptly illustrate Garrard’s (2004) critique on the idea of wilderness, which he formulates in the following terms:

Wilderness is the natural, unfallen antithesis of an unnatural civilization that has lost its soul. It is a place of freedom in which we can recover our true selves we have lost to the corrupting influences of our artificial lives. Most of all, it is the ultimate landscape of authenticity. (80)

*The Lost Steps*, however, is extremely useful for clarifying a point regarding the “radical” constructivism that Garrard seems to be practicing here. In this novel, as in other jungle novels, the journey to the wilderness is not simply the result of an urban fantasy that pulls the character from the city to the jungle and that is detached from the concrete experience of the environment in question. The plan to live in the wilderness is not really conceived within the walls of the city, the result of a desperate ingenuity or idealization, but is an option that matures during the course of escape. Even if the protagonist’s “return to nature” is the performance of a script taken from other jungle novels, or travel narratives, it is nevertheless an actual trip of a body in time and space, and of a subject establishing social relationships along the way. The cultural construction of the jungle is not independent of or indifferent to the displacement of the subject and his or her body via the environment and its insertion into the social relationships that make that journey possible.

Weary of his professional situation, of his marriage to Ruth, the actress from whom he finds himself estranged, and of

the circles of intellectuals he successfully frequents in a major metropolis that resembles New York, the protagonist seizes an opportunity that presents itself to escape the city in the company of his mistress, Mouche. Curador, his former professor from his doctorate in musicology, provides the opportunity, which consists of a trip to South America, financed by the museum for which Curador works, in search of the musical instruments that would support his abandoned thesis on the magical-mimetic origin of music. Truthfully, the original plan consisted of tricking Curador and getting to the South American capital, where he would buy any old trinket in a craft store. Once in that city, which could be Caracas, new circumstances, which in reality are only a variation of those that overwhelm him in the metropolis, encourage him to embark once and for all on a journey to the jungle, the course of which changes with the characters, circumstances, and opportunities he encounters along the way.

Little by little, it is revealed not only that his alienation from the modern city is a product of the corruption of his artistic creativity within a capitalist production system, or of a profound irritation with the philosophical trends of his time, but that at its root is a traumatic memory of the violence of/in modernity in the first half of the twentieth century. One evening on the road, sitting by the fire in the dining room of a cozy inn, while Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony plays on an old radio, the protagonist remembers several episodes of his life, including the day that as a soldier he discovered the Nazi concentration camps:

Lo nuevo aquí, lo inédito, lo moderno, era aquel antro del horror, aquella cancillería del horror, aquel coto vedado del horror que nos tocara conocer en nuestro avance: la mansión del Calofrío, donde todo era testimonio de torturas, exterminios en masa, cremaciones, entre murallas salpicadas de sangre y de excrementos, montones de huesos. . . . A dos pasos de aquí, una humanidad sensible y cultivada—sin hacer caso del humo abyecto de ciertas chimeneas, por las que habían brotado, un poco antes, plegarias aulladas en yiddish—seguía coleccionando sellos, estudiando las glorias de la raza tocando pequeñas músicas nocturnas de Mozart, leyendo *La Sirenita* de Andersen a los niños. Esto otro también era nuevo, siniestramente moderno, pavorosamente inédito. (159–60)

What was new here, unprecedented, modern, was that cavern of horror, that ministry of horror, that preserve of horror whose acquaintance we were to make as we advanced: the Mansion of Shudders in which everything bore witness to torture, mass extermination, crematories, all set in walls spattered with blood and ordure, heaps of bones. . . . Two paces away, a sensitive, cultivated people—ignoring the smoke pall of certain chimneys from which, shortly before, prayers howled in Yiddish had risen—went

on collecting stamps, studying the racial glories, playing Mozart's *Eine kleine nachtmusik*, reading Hans Christian Andersen to their children. This, too, was new, sinisterly modern, terrifyingly unprecedented. (94)

The main environmental criticism in the jungle novel, however, stems from the fact that the idyll in the jungle is not the climax of the story. Although the protagonist of *The Lost Steps* has attained regeneration, three events occur and combine to expedite the crises in both his personal and his artistic plans. First, there is no more paper to continue writing the score, and the little that is available is reserved for the administrative needs of Santa Mónica. Next, there is the bewildering execution of Nicasio, a leper who has raped a little girl in the community. The execution is performed without a trial and with the protagonist's complicity. Finally, a plane arrives that his wife, Ruth, has sent to find him and bring him back to the city. In a moment of weakness in which he falls victim to the nostalgia of the smells and tastes from his previous life, he decides to take advantage of the opportunity and return for paper, ink, and the necessary books to continue with the project. There is also an ethical imperative, the weight of which has been growing throughout his journey through the wilderness: to do what was asked of him by Curador and take him the instruments he finds, and also bring an end to his relationships with Ruth and Mouche, whom he abandoned at some point along the way. As a symbol of his

promise to return, he leaves the score on which he has been working as security and returns to the city not because his transformation has been superficial, as some have said, but because it has been profound. Although it turns out to be a very disappointing return, in the city the protagonist lives up to the ethical expectations he has raised for himself in the jungle. Carrying on his everyday life in accordance to the rhythm of his body has become a habit.

Estas reflexiones me llevan a pensar que la selva, con sus hombres resueltos, con sus encuentros fortuitos, con su tiempo no transcurrido aún, me había enseñado mucho más, en cuanto a las esencias mismas de mi arte, al sentido profundo de ciertos textos, a la ignorada grandeza de ciertos rumbos, que la lectura de tantos libros que yacían ya, muertos para siempre en mi biblioteca. Frente al Adelantado he comprendido que la máxima obra propuesta al ser humano es la de forjarse un destino. (310–11)

These reflections led me to the conclusion that the jungle, with its resolute inhabitants, with its chance encounters, its accidental meetings, its not yet elapsed time, had taught me far more of the essence of my art, of the profound meaning of certain texts, of the ignored grandeur of certain trends, than the reading of so many books that lay dead forever on the shelves of my library. The

Adelantado had taught me that the greatest challenge a man can meet is that of forging his destiny. (254)

Unfortunately, he does not meet the four-week deadline that he had set to return to the jungle. Once more, he finds himself trapped in the city. Circumstances conspire to involve him once again in the lies of appearances and the betrayal of his own creativity (he writes a book about his adventures that he has to sell). He suffers Ruth's spite and substantial economic hindrances in his effort to leave the city. Months later he finally manages to escape again, but on this occasion it is deliberate, although he is too late to trace his steps to Santa Mónica de los Venados. The connecting channel through which he must navigate has disappeared with the swelling of the river and he will have to wait until the rainy season has ended. Worse yet, after a few days have passed he discovers that Rosario has gone on with her life, with Marcos, the son of Adelantado, and he realizes that his alternative life is impossible. "He tratado de enderezar un destino torcido por mi propia debilidad y de mí ha brotado un canto—ahora trunco—que me devolvió al viejo camino, con el cuerpo lleno de cenizas, incapaz de ser otra vez el que fui" (329). ("I had tried to make straight a destiny that was crooked because of my own weakness, and a song had welled up in me—now cut short—which had led me back to the old road, in sackcloth and ashes, no longer able to be what I had been" [277].)

What these lines also emphasize is that the reason behind the return to the city has

less to do with the protagonist's weakness of character in a moment of crisis and more to do with the conflict between his artistic project and the very surroundings in which it has been nurtured. The matter of a lack of paper is merely its most obvious aspect. Despite our composer-protagonist's admiration for folk musicians and their music, which he expresses on various occasions throughout his account, he never considers the possibility of giving free rein to his creativity and composing in these genres. An even more perturbing consequence is that the anxiety that comes with creation isolates the protagonist from everyday life in the community, the very life that he celebrated as a great find and around which he conceived a life plan with Rosario. Simply put, the composition of *Treno* is a project that cannot be sustained in Santa Mónica de los Venados. The crisis of sustainability lies in the protagonist's inability to adapt the project to the environmental surroundings in which he finds himself. It is only when Santa Mónica de los Venados is lost to him the first time that the narrator-protagonist conceives a plan for the production and spread of his music, a plan in which his interests are reconciled and the rhythms of artistic creation adapt to the peculiarities of the village surroundings. But by then this lucidity is useless: without his life with Rosario in Santa Mónica de los Venados it may not even be worth entering the jungle to recover the *Treno* manuscript to finish it in some other similar setting, or on his way back to the city.

Instead of living his pastoral lifestyle, to which he gives priority over purely intellec-

tual labors in his writing, the protagonist is pulled not only by the demands of an urban, modern, musical genre, but by a role that evokes that of an intellectual in the Latin American lettered city: being on the fringes of the government and critical of power but in a privileged position because of this stance, or opposing the church but being a collaborator in the growth or "development" of Santa Mónica de los Venados. The "return to nature" journey in this novel turns out to be a "return to the origins of modernity." Santa Mónica de los Venados still does not understand the challenge of living in a sustainable way with the environment, but it is conscious that by growing, it runs the risk of repeating the contradictions, errors, and shortcomings that have plagued the history of modernity. For example, as a means for social control and despite his personal skepticism, Adelantado allows the growth of not only religion but also the church that Fray Pedro is building in Santa Mónica. The wisdom of his decision is put to the test when Fray Pedro and Adelantado's son, faced with the environmental crisis brought about by the heavy rains, compete for the labor resources of the community in order either to resolve the problem of the flooded fields or to continue with the construction of the church.

In the end, the novel does not explicitly let us know whether the protagonist will return to the city or whether he will try to repeat and correct the experience in some other part of the jungle. Nor does it conclude that his experience has been in vain. On the contrary, failure is the path to a liberating

awareness of philosophies and ideologies, of the intellectualism from which, when all was said and done, he could not escape solely on the strength of his convictions:

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 ésta y no la otra. Prefieren este presente al presente de los hacedores de 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 légameo primero, en la 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)

New worlds have 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 primaeval 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 on him. (277)

All the crises previously outlined lead us to an implicit postnaturalist, or more aptly, environmentalist conclusion. There is neither a telluric nor an autochthonous relationship between art and nature, but paradoxically, the certainty of this conclusion is facilitated by interaction with the jungle itself, even if this interaction takes on the apparent superficiality of a trip. Lawrence Buell, perhaps the most influential environmental critic at the moment, finds no better example than *The Lost Steps* to warn us of the error of autochthony between literature and nature, nor a more perfect opportunity to do so than in his influential *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005):

The failure of Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier's composer-protagonist in *The Lost Steps* (1953) to find his way back to the primeval world he has discovered in the Venezuelan backcountry after he has felt compelled to return home to get paper on which to inscribe the music this excursion has inspired in his head elegantly dramatizes the intractable divide between nature and discourse. (33)

This affirmation requires a brief clarification so that the novel can be defended

as a consistent bearer of environmental thought. The novel comes to this very conclusion long before the failure of the composer-protagonist to reenter Santa Mónica. First, it does not even raise the matter of the portrayal of nature in discourse, in the terms that Buell attributes to it, since nature itself does this in another way. In the jungle, the protagonist discovers from the first that everything is deception:

Lo que más me asombraba era el inacabable mimetismo de la naturaleza virgen. Aquí todo parecía otra cosa, creándose un mundo de apariencias que ocultaba la realidad poniendo muchas verdades en entredicho. . . . La selva era el mundo de la mentira, de la trampa y del falso semblante; allí todo era disfraz, estratagema, juego de apariencias, metamorfosis. (227–28)

What amazed me most was the inexhaustible mimetism of virgin nature. Everything here seemed something else, thus creating a world of appearances that concealed reality, casting doubts on many truths. . . . The jungle is the world of deceit, subterfuge, duplicity; everything there is disguise, stratagem, artifice, metamorphosis. (165–66)

A few pages later we are with him to discover that the origin of music is not in the mimesis and control of nature but in the indescribable lament before death. Finally, it does not escape the protagonist

that a portrayal of the jungle would require multi- and interdisciplinary knowledge that he does not have. Despite the erudite references that he uses to tell us about the jungle, he says: “Hay mañanas en las que quisiera ser naturalista, geólogo, etnógrafo, botánico, historiador, para comprenderlo todo, explicar en lo posible” (269). (“There are 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].)

In order to reveal the “environmental thinking” in Latin American literature, we must read it with the help of notions such as political ecology, sustainability, and environmental complexity. “Environmental awareness” is what happens when the texts, willingly or unwillingly, give up on a preconceived knowledge that does not dialogue with the world and its diversity and otherness. This affinity between “environmental complexity” and literature is not unique to Carpentier or to Spanish American literature. The British writer Aldous Huxley (1894–1963), in an essay titled “Wordsworth in the Tropics” (1929/2000), criticizes the romantic poet William Wordsworth (1770–1850), who is also a Briton from the Lake District in Northwest England, for betraying his intuition about the wilderness in his mature years. In Huxley’s opinion, Wordsworth’s reaction to nature toward the end of his work is really subjected to a preconceived philosophy, as opposed to his first writings, in which he reacted more spontaneously:

The Wordsworthian adoration of Nature has two principal defects. The first, as we have seen, is that it is only possible in a country where Nature has been nearly or quite enslaved to man. The second is that it is only possible for those who are prepared to falsify their immediate intuitions of Nature. For Nature, even in the temperate zone, is always alien and inhuman, and occasionally diabolic. (336)

If Wordsworth had journeyed through the tropical forest, Huxley sarcastically says, that preconceived philosophy would be easily challenged:

It is a pity that he never traveled beyond the boundaries of Europe. A voyage through the tropics would have cured him of his too easy and comfortable pantheism. A few months in the jungle would have convinced him that the diversity and utter strangeness of Nature are at least as real and significant as its intellectually discovered unity. . . . He would have learned once more to treat nature naturally, as he treated it in his youth; to react to it spontaneously, loving where love was the appropriate emotion, fearing, hating, fighting whenever Nature presented itself to his intuition as being not merely strange but hostile, inhumanly evil. (342)

Huxley's criticism of Wordsworth, justified or not, is at any rate an enlightening lesson on the most profound, symbolic meaning of "return journeys to the jungle": the analogy between the jungle experience and the instantaneous dispersal of the perception and experience of the world. Huxley states:

Wearied with much wandering in the maze of phenomena, frightened by the inhospitable strangeness of the world, men have rushed into the systems prepared for them by philosophers and founders of religions, as they would rush from a dark jungle into the haven of a well-lit, commodious house. (338)

Carpentier says:

Al cabo de algún tiempo de navegación en aquel caño secreto, se producía un fenómeno parecido al que conocen los montañeses extraviados en las nieves: se perdía la noción de verticalidad, dentro de una suerte de desorientación, de mareo de los ojos. No se sabía ya lo que era del árbol y lo que era del reflejo. No se sabía ya si la claridad venía de abajo o de arriba, si el techo era de agua, o el agua suelo; si las troneras abiertas en la hojarasca no eran pozos luminosos conseguidos en lo anegado. Como los maderos, los palos, las lianas, se reflejaban en ángulos abiertos y cerrados, se acababa por creer en pasos iluso-



rios, en salidas, corredores, orillas, inexistentes. Con el trastorno de las apariencias, en esa sucesión de pequeños espejismos al alcance de la mano, crecía en una sensación de desconcierto, de extravío total, que resultaba indeciblemente angustiada. . . . Empezaba a tener miedo. Nada me amenazaba. Todos parecían tranquilos en torno mío; pero un miedo indefinible, sacado de los trasmundos del instinto, me hacía respirar a lo hondo, sin hallar nunca el aire suficiente. (224)

After sailing for a time through that secret channel, one began to feel the same thing that mountain-climbers feel, lost in the snow: the loss of the sense of verticality, a kind of disorientation, and a dizziness of the eye. It was no longer possible to say which was tree and which reflection of tree. Was the light coming from above or below? Was the sky or the earth water? Were the openings in the foliage pools of light in the water? As the trees, the sticks, the lianas were refracted at strange angles, one finally began to see non-existent channels, openings, banks. With this succession of minor mirages, my feeling of bewilderment, of being completely lost, grew until it became unbearable. . . . I was beginning to be afraid. Nothing menaced me. All those around me seem calm, but an indefinable fear out of the dim reaches of instinct

was making me short of breath, as though I lacked air. (161)

Can we connect this reading of *The Lost Steps*, the notions that I have borrowed from other disciplines (“political ecology,” “sustainability,” and “environmental complexity”), the insights derived from a close reading of the plot (reflecting the impact of destruction in the twentieth century), to contemporary Spanish American literature? The Mexican writer José Emilio Pacheco leads us into realizing that yes, such connection is possible, in a few verses of his poem “Los vigesémicos” (“The Twentieth-Centurians”), from *Ciudad de la memoria* (1989; *City of Memory, and Other Poems*, 1997):

Llenamos de basura el mundo entero,  
envenenamos todo el aire, hicimos  
triunfar en el planeta la miseria.

Sobre todo matamos.  
Nuestro siglo fue  
el siglo de la muerte.  
Cuánta muerte,  
cuántos muertos en todos los países.

Cuánta sangre  
la derramada en esta tierra.  
Y todos  
dijeron que mataban por el  
mañana. (32)

We filled up the earth with trash,  
Poisoned the air, made  
Poverty triumphant on the planet.

Above all we killed.  
Our century was  
The century of death.  
So much death,  
So many dead in every country.

So much blood  
Spilled on this earth.  
And everyone  
Said they were killing for the sake  
of tomorrow. (33–35)<sup>6</sup>

Pacheco's verses remind me of the late and posthumously published poetry by Pablo Neruda,<sup>7</sup> who, incidentally, on December 13, 1971, narrated in his Nobel lecture, "Towards a Splendid City," a journey back to the wilderness that he was forced to take many years before, escaping political persecution in Chile. In the forest, in the evening around a fire, heading to exile, Neruda discovered the essence of poetry. Nevertheless, a useful starting point for understanding the rise of environmental ideas in current literature is found in the late writings of another Nobel laureate, Octavio Paz (1914–1998), the Mexican poet and essayist. In 1987, he published a book of poetry entitled *Árbol adentro* (*A Tree Within*, 1988), and in 1990 he published a collection of essays under the title *La otra voz* (*The Other Voice: Essays on Modern Poetry*, 1991). Additionally, we should include here his Nobel lecture, "In Search of the Present," delivered in Stockholm on December 8, 1990.

In these texts, but particularly in *The Other Voice*, Paz pays attention to the ecological crisis brought on by modernity, and

he does it within a larger reflection on the future of modernity at the end of the twentieth century:

Incluso puede decirse sin exagerar que el tema central de este fin de siglo no es el de la organización política de nuestras sociedades ni el de su orientación histórica. Lo urgente, hoy, es saber cómo vamos a asegurar la supervivencia de la especie humana. Ante esa realidad, ¿cuál puede ser la función de la poesía? (137)

It can be said, without exaggeration, that the main theme of the last days of this century is not the political organization or reorganization of our societies, but the urgent question: How are we to ensure survival of humanity? In the face of this reality, what can the function of poetry be? (157)<sup>8</sup>

The question of the function of poetry in the age of ecology, as environmental historian Donald Worster used to call modern history since the 1970s, is one of the three lines of reflection in Paz's analysis of modernity at the turn of the century. The first is how to respond to liberal capitalism. Although Paz recognizes the free market's efficiency, he expresses serious concerns in regard to it, in addition to the ecological crisis, for its lack of equity, fraternity, and meaning. It is imperative, therefore, argues Paz, to sustain democracy against the market's contradictions or excesses. A second

line of reflection is the crisis of the philosophy of history brought about by the crisis of utopianism. History and humans are the personification of indeterminism. Thus, we can no longer make claims of knowing and revealing the laws of history, and History can no longer be thought of as the history only of the human race. Modernity's adoration of Change as the ultimate law of history has left us exhausted, and the idea of Progress, as either Evolution or Revolution, has taught us lessons hard to forget.

Poetry, or "poetic thinking," has a role for addressing and responding to environmental crises, but this function is just one more aspect of the role of poetry in this late modernity that competes, and has been competing, with Revolution and Religion, or actually with utopianism and millenarianism. Regarding the former, Paz says:

En la tradición de crítica y de rebeldía de la modernidad, la poesía ocupa un lugar a un tiempo central y excéntrica. Central porque, desde el principio, fue parte esencial de la gran corriente de crítica y subversión que atravesó los siglos XIX y XX... Pero la singularidad de la poesía moderna consiste en que ha sido la expresión de realidades y aspiraciones más profundas y antiguas que las geometrías intelectuales de los revolucionarios y las cárceles de conceptos de los utopistas. (*La otra voz*, 130–31)

In modernity's tradition of criticism and rebellion, poetry occupies

a place at once central and eccentric. Central, because, from the beginning, it was an essential part of the great current of criticism and subversion that ran through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. . . . But the uniqueness of modern poetry lies in its having been the expression of realities and dreams rooted more deeply in the past than in the intellectual geometries of the revolutionaries and the conceptual prisons of the utopians. (*The Other Voice*, 150)

Regarding the latter, Paz adds:

Ahora bien, aunque atada a un suelo y a una historia, siempre se ha abierto, en cada una de sus manifestaciones, a un más allá transhistórico. No aludo a un más allá religioso: hablo de la percepción del *otro lado* de la realidad. Es una experiencia común a todos los hombres en todas las épocas y que me parece anterior a todas las religiones y filosofías. (133–34)

Although tied to a specific soil and a specific history, poetry has always been open, in each and every one of its manifestations, to a transhistorical beyond. I do not mean a religious beyond: I am speaking of the perception of the *other side* of reality. That perception is common to all men in all periods; it is an experience that seems to me to

be prior to all religions and philosophies. (154–55)

A similar argument has been enunciated before in this building. On July 29, 2004, William Ospina illustrated in his own way this view on poetry by connecting Friedrich Hölderlin's poetry to the attitude of the U'wa people of Colombia toward nature:

una humanidad envanecida y trágica se creería dueña del mundo, autorizada a saquear y depredar; convertiría su propia comodidad en el fin último de la historia; tendería a perder el respeto por lo misterioso y lo desconocido, a perder la memoria de los orígenes y a abandonar todo sentido de lo sagrado y de lo divino. (6)

a conceited and tragic humankind would believe itself to be the master of the world, authorized to pillage and plunder; it would make its own comfort the ultimate end of history; it would tend to lose respect for the mysterious and the unknown, lose the memory of its origins, and abandon all sense of the sacred and divine. (5)<sup>9</sup>

In a modern and, at the same time, more-than-modern gesture for responding to the crises of metanarratives and metaphysics that the twentieth century has bequeathed to us, Paz among others calls for a rebeginning of fundamental values of modernity and for an unearthing of the

past that modernity represses. In lines that could be used for describing the journey of the composer-protagonist of *The Lost Steps*, he says:

No asistimos al fin de la historia, como ha dicho un profesor norteamericano, sino a un recomienzo. Resurrección de realidades enterradas, reaparición de lo olvidado y lo reprimido que, como otras veces en la historia, puede desembocar en una regeneración. Las vueltas al origen son casi siempre revueltas: renovaciones, renacimientos. (*La otra voz*, 126)

We are witnessing not the end of history . . . but a rebeginning. The resurrection of buried realities, the reappearance of what was forgotten and repressed, which can lead, as it has at other times in history, to regeneration. Returns to the origin are almost always revolts: renovations, renaissances. (*The Other Voice*, 145)

The parallels and analogies with Carpentier and Huxley are evident. In language that resembles the composer-protagonist's own discourse, Paz concludes, in regard to the origins and universality of poetry:

La relación entre el hombre y la poesía es tan antigua como nuestra historia: comenzó cuando el hombre comenzó a ser hombre. Los

primeros cazadores y recolectores de frutos un día se contemplaron, atónitos, durante un instante inacabable, en el agua fija de un poema. (139)

The relationship between man and poetry is as old as our history: it began when human beings began to be human. The first hunters and gatherers looked at themselves in astonishment one day, for an interminable instant, in the still waters of a poem. (159)

Regarding what he considered the question of greater urgency and graver import to our times—the survival of humanity itself—the poem is a model that unites the “ten thousand things that make up the universe,” as the ancient Chinese put it:

El modo de operación del pensamiento poético es la imaginación y ésta consiste, esencialmente, en la facultad de poner en relación realidades contrarias o disímbolas. Todas las formas poéticas y todas las figuras de lenguaje poseen un rasgo en común: buscan y, con frecuencia, descubren semejanzas ocultas entre objetos diferentes. Comparaciones, analogías, metáforas, metonimias y los demás recursos de la poesía: todos tienden a producir imágenes en las que pactan el esto y el aquello, lo uno y lo otro, los muchos y el uno. (137–38)

The operative mode of poetic thought is imagining, and imagination consists, essentially, of the ability to place contrary or divergent realities in relationship. All poetic forms and all linguistic figures have one thing in common: they seek, and often find, hidden resemblances. In the most extreme cases, they unite opposites. Comparisons, analogies, metaphors, metonymies, and the other devices of poetry—all tend to produce images in which this and that, the one and the other, the one and the many are joined. (158)

Echoes of Paz’s ideas can be found in other Latin American literature that preceded these texts, but especially among authors and books that have followed them. A short list from Mexican literature includes the following well-known names. José Emilio Pacheco, for instance, further addresses the connection raised by Paz between the ecological crisis and poetry. Progressively, in Pacheco the faith in the eternal cycles of nature, and in the poetic tradition that speaks to it tends to disappear.<sup>10</sup> Homero Aridjis,<sup>11</sup> like Pacheco, over the years moved from the cosmic, and the awareness of a holistic interconnection with the nonhuman world, to the dilemma of poetry after the loss of such connection as a result of the ecological crisis. Polluted rivers, sick trees, species in danger, apocalyptic warnings, and nightmare images of Mexico’s future populated his latest poetry.<sup>12</sup> Carlos Fuentes’s insistence on the persistent underlying pre-Columbian cos-

mologies in modern Mexico is explicitly connected with Mexico City's ecocide in his novel *Cristóbal Nonato* (*Christopher Unborn*, 1987). The plot is set in 1992, after a fictional environmental 1990 disaster, although the establishment of corruption and political stagnation has managed to survive the catastrophe. In Carlos Monsiváis, the end of expectations of the city coincides with the fantasy of technology, the consolidation of mass media as an institution of social mediation, and the surge of the "ecology of fear," or "*imaginación del desastre*," regarding the final and total ecological collapse of Mexico City.<sup>13</sup>

Though they perhaps are not as well known outside Mexico as the authors just mentioned, the list should nonetheless include the following three. Carlos Montemayor has journeyed from the countryside back to the indigenous peoples of Mexico through the experience of the city.<sup>14</sup> In his poetry land is a way of being, a sensation in our body forgotten by those living in a state of alienation in the city. The connection between Chiapas, environmentalism, and the Zapatista uprising of 1994 is crucial in Efraín Bartolomé's work. An environmental activist, he has written as well on the Zapatista uprising.<sup>15</sup> Following migration to the United States, Alberto Blanco has taken up residence in El Paso, Texas.<sup>16</sup> Three basic themes in his poetry are the continuity of all living beings and their survival, the notion that the senses are indispensable for reaching awareness of interconnectedness with the nonhuman, and the critique of scientism in social theories and the humanities.

From the Southern Cone, Luis Sepúlveda,<sup>17</sup> from Chile, and Mempo Giardinelli,<sup>18</sup> from Argentina, offer us other journeys to the wilderness, particularly Patagonia, and stories of environmental activism, but always against the background of the traumatic legacy of the political violence that preceded and followed the military dictatorships. From Costa Rica, Anacristina Rossi, the author of the controversial *La loca de Gandoca* (1992), tells us a story of love, loss, and criticism directed towards the bureaucratization and co-optation of environmentalism. This latter issue is, indeed, a common feature in recent literature.

These authors and texts, and so many others, share to different degrees the keys for an environmental reading of Spanish American literature such as the one that I have proposed here. In between Carpentier and Paz there are a number of Spanish American authors worthy of being revisited from an environmental perspective: for instance: Ernesto Cardenal and Pablo Antonio Cuadra (Nicaragua), José María Arguedas (Peru), and Nicanor Parra (Chile). Indeed, they are increasingly receiving critical attention for their representation of environmental issues. Still, I believe it would be useful to read these authors and texts as well as other books in dialogue with a working hypothesis for Spanish American literature that summarizes the environmental vision in it around the following themes: stories of political ecology—including the self-critique of environmentalisms; recording of the unsustainability of rural life under develop-

ment; the lure of and posterior disillusion with the city; the oblivion, nostalgia, or redemption of life in an “original” rural environment; the opening to environmental complexity or the epistemological crisis due to environmental change and conflict; the awareness of the embodiment and environmental embeddedness of the subject. Finally, these authors’ books and those of others are good opportunities for realizing the “ecology” of issues to which environmental ideas are linked: the trauma of vio-

lence in the twentieth century, the criticism of utopianism and millenarianisms, and the unearthing of modern and more-than-modern beliefs and values that have been repressed by modernity.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jorge Ibarra". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'J' and 'I'.

## NOTES

1. Translated by Betty Ferber and George McWhirter in *Eyes to See Otherwise/Ojos de otro mirar: Selected Poems*.
2. Large portions of this lecture were translated by Danielle McClean from an original work in progress in Spanish.
3. Maathai was born in Nyeri, Kenya, in 1940; joined the Green Belt Movement in 1976; and in 1986 participated in the Pan African Green Belt Network. In September 1998 she launched a campaign of the Jubilee 2000 Coalition. In December 2002, she was elected to the Kenyan parliament and was appointed Assistant Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Wildlife in Kenya's ninth parliament.
4. This translation is mine.
5. All translations from *Los pasos perdidos* here are taken from the English version by Harriet de Onís.
6. Translation by Cynthia Steel and David Lauer.
7. For instance, *Fin de mundo (World's End)*, 1969), *Las piedras del cielo (Skystones)*, 1970), *Geografía infructuosa (Barren Terrain)*, 1972), *El mar y las campanas (The Sea and the Bells)*, 1973), and *Libro de preguntas (Book of Questions)*, 1974).
8. All translations from *La otra voz* here are taken from the English version by Helen Lane.
9. Translated by Larry Hanlon.
10. Key titles in Pacheco are *Los trabajos del mar (The Labour of the Sea)*, 1983), *Tarde o temprano (Sooner or Later)*, 1986), *Ciudad de la memoria. Poemas 1986–1989 (City of Memory: Poetry 1986–1989)*, *Album de zoología (Album of Zoology)*, 1991), and *El silencio de la luna (Silence of the Moon)*, 1996).
11. Homero Aridjis, too has spoken from this podium, on September 26, 1995. His lecture was entitled “Hacia el fin del milenio” (“Approaching the End of the Millennium”).
12. In poetry, *Imágenes para el fin del milenio & Nueva Expulsión del Paraíso (Images for the End of the World & New Expulsion from Paradise)*, 1990), *Tiempo de ángeles (Time of Angels)*, 1997), *Ojos de otro mirar (Eyes to See Otherwise)*, 1998), and *La montaña de las mariposas (The Mountain of the Butterflies)*, 2000); in fiction: *La leyenda de los soles (The Legend of the Suns)*, 1993) and *¿En qué piensas cuando haces el amor? (Who Do You Think of When You Make Love?)* 1996).



13. Monsiváis's most important collections are *Días de guardar* (*Days of Obligation*, 1970), *Amor perdido* (*Lost Love*, 1977), *Entrada libre; crónicas de una sociedad que se organiza* (*Free Entrance: Chronicles of a Society Organizing Itself*, 1987), *Escenas de pudor y liviandad* (*Scenes of Decency and Frivolity*, 1988), and *Los rituales del caos* (*Rituals of Chaos*, 1995). A collection of chronicles and essays is available in English (*Mexican Postcards*, 1997).
14. *Abril y otras estaciones (1977–1989)* (*April and Other Seasons*, 1989) reunites three previous books of Montemayor's poetry and adds a new collection, *El cuerpo que la tierra ha sido* (*The Body That the Land Has Been*). A novelist as well as a poet, Montemayor's novels tackle issues of political ecology in northern Mexico but explore as well the relation between labor and nature. *Mal de piedra* (*Blood Relations*, 1981) and *Minas del retorno* (*Gambusino*, 1983) focus on the life and death of miners in northern Mexico.
15. *Ojos de jaguar* (*The Eyes of the Jaguar*, 1982, reissued and augmented in 1990) is poetry on reading the signs of the jungle but mostly the river, the humidity of the forest, and above all, light. Bartolomé's other works include *Ciudad bajo el relámpago* (*City under Lightning*, 1983), *Cuadernos contra el ángel* (*Logbooks against the Angel*, 1987), and *Oficio: Arder* (*Profession: Burning*, 1998).
16. Poet and author of short stories and children's books. Most of Blanco's poetry between 1973 and 1993 has been collected in *Amanecer de los sentidos* (*Dawn of the Senses*, 1993). His most recent titles include *También los insectos son perfectos* (*Insects Are Perfect Too*, 1993), *El corazón del instante* (*The Heart of the Moment*, 1998), and a few bilingual editions: *The Desert Mermaid/La sirena del desierto* (1992) and *El origen y la huella/The Origin and the Trace* (2000).
17. Sepúlveda's works include *Un viejo que leía novelas de amor* (*The Old Man Who Read Love Stories*, 1989), *Mundo del fin del mundo* (*The World of the End of the World*, 1991), *Patagonia Express* (1995), and *Historias marginales* (*Marginal Stories*, 2000).
18. Giardinelli is the author of *Imposible equilibrio* (*Imposible Balance*, 1998) and *Final de novela en Patagonia* (*A Novel's Ending in Patagonia*, 2000).

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**Jorge Marcone** (Lima, Peru, 1959) is Associate Professor at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, where he teaches for the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, the Program in Comparative Literature, and the Latin American Studies Program. He earned a B.A. from the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú and a Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin. Prof. Marcone's current research and teaching focuses on the environmental imagination in literatures in Spanish and in the Americas. He is the author of *La oralidad escrita. Sobre la reivindicación y re-inscripción del discurso oral* (*The Written Orality: On the Vindication and Re-inscription of Oral Discourse*, 1997), among many other publications and lectures related to his area of scholarly specialization. He has been a fellow at the Center for Critical Analysis of Contemporary Culture and at the Center for Historical Analysis. In 2004 he was the Class of 1946 Visiting Professor of Environment and the Humanities at the Center for Environmental Studies at Williams College.

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Felipe Fernández-Armesto (1950-), distinguished British scholar of global environmental history, comparative colonial history, topics in Spanish and maritime history and the history of cartography; Principe de Asturias Chair at Tufts University.  
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Jorge Marcone (1959-), Peruvian Associate Professor of Spanish Literature and Latin American Studies at Rutgers University (NJ). Current research and teaching focuses on the environmental imagination in literatures in Spanish and in the Americas.  
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