

Folktales of the Amazon



Juan Carlos Galeano

Translated by Rebecca Morgan and Kenneth Watson
Foreword by Michael Uzendoski


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FOREWORD

"It would seem that mythological worlds have been built up only to be shattered again, and that new worlds were built from the fragments."

(Franz Boas, 1898)

Juan Carlos Galeano, a poet and translator, grew up in the area of the Caqueta River of the Colombian Amazon. However, like many of us, he made his life far away from his natal home and did not think it a place of much interest. While living abroad, Galeano came to see Amazonia in a different light and as a source of poetic and literary inspiration. He had a change of heart and decided to embark on a project to record and study folktales from places throughout the region — Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Bolivia, Brazil, and British Guyana.

The author taped the stories and, while listening to them, reworked them and wrote them down. He used his poetic sensibilities to draft them in a way that was faithful to their spirit but different from their original form. This is a rather unique way of doing an oral literature or folklore project. The folklorist tries to stay faithful to what is "on the tape," perhaps presenting the story in the original language with a translation of the word-by-word transcription. A linguist might add special terminology to point out the grammatical features of speech involved, or someone trained in ethnopoetics would divide the story into acts, scenes, stanzas, verses, and lines. What often happens in such a process is that the art of the oral narrative and the experience of listening to it becomes lost, since the story has been subjected to the conventions of social scientific or linguistic discourse.

Galeano has offered us another option that derives from how storytellers and poets, rather than social scientists, do things. Storytellers are mostly concerned with telling a good story, and they innovate constantly to reflect both their circumstances and audiences. He has gone to great pains to make these stories readable and aesthetically pleasing while also remaining faithful to the spirit of the mythology that defines them. He has found a way to write down oral literature to convey something of the experience of listening to a tale *en vivo* (live). I can hear the stories as I read them, a feeling I do not get when reading stories done via the genre of social scientific analysis. The lyrical quality of Galeano's writing comes through, but, more than a poet, he engages in a technique of shamanism that he learned from his experiences deep in the Amazon.

Research among shamans in Amazonia shows that sensory crossing-over, or synesthesia, is a core method of how shamans and patients feel the presence of the divine powers and spirits through aesthetic experiences. For example, reflecting on his work with healers in Putumayo (see Taussig 1987), Taussig considers how non-visual senses work mimetically and cross over with vision to create powerful physical reactions (such as nausea, which he experiences working with medicines in Putumayo): "the senses cross over and translate into each other. You feel redness. You see music ... seeing is felt in a nonvisual way. You move into the interior of images, just as images move into you" (Taussig 1993: 57-58). Galeano here has mastered this trick. He is like the shaman, and the reader the patient; the author transports us into a new mimetic reality through his art. The beauty of the folktales, masterfully translated by Rebecca Ann Morgan and Kenneth Watson, allow the English reader to experience these stories as if they were not translated at all. One feels and hears the power of the Amazonian world through a foreign language. It is like dreaming and reading at the same time.

Two further ideas need to be explored for the reader to appreciate these tales. The first is the "perspectivist" nature of Amazonian cosmologies; the second is the rather fluid boundary between mestizo and indigenous cultures throughout Amazonia.

Amazonian cultures have been shown to abide by a complex philosophy termed "perspectivism," the notion that "the world is inhabited by different sorts of subjects or persons, human and non-human, which apprehend reality from distinct points of view" (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 469; Uzendoski, Hertica, and Calapucha 2005; Uzendoski 2005; Vilaca 2002). In telling the story of a mythical event, for example, various perspectives are entailed and their depiction is integral to the art, but the common humanity of all living beings is emphasized. The complexity of this worldview derives from the fact that animals consider themselves as humans and that it is the ontological divide of the levels of the world that makes people see animals as animals. There are moments when the boundary between this world and other worlds cracks, and people can see animals in their true human form. When such corridors do open, there are moments of danger and power.

A common theme of this boundary-crossing involves sexuality and sexual relations—anacondas and dolphins, it would seem, are not only "good to think" as Claude Lévi-Strauss would say, but they are also "good to sleep with." People are sometimes taken to the underworld by their animal lovers and end up living with them in great cities, never to return. They have children and live among family. At other times, animals from below appear in this world and are adopted and raised by human parents. The defining concepts are kinship and a common humanity between people and animals, spirits, and other forest beings.

Transformation and shape-shifting, rather than fixity, are the basic premises of Amazonian existence. What the mythology as a whole conveys is how the world came to be through a series of transformations—often violent and predatory—in which the current boundaries became established. These boundaries, however, can and often are crossed by shamans and others through experiences like dreams, storytelling, humor, illness, tragedy, and ritual ceremonies. Galeano's book conveys the complexity and richness of this boundary-crossing. He also shows that there is such a thing as an Amazonian

aesthetic of the world, one that is still living and perhaps thriving—in spite of what modernist discourses may say—among mestizo peoples as well as the indigenous. Shamanic experience is alive and well in the Amazonian world. Even if one is not a shaman, people still experience shamanic realities through stories and other means.

The last topic is one of cultural and ethnic boundaries. These stories, while told by mestizo people in Spanish, derive from the indigenous world. Much recent research has shown that the boundary between mestizo and indigenous is more fluid than previously thought; this book reveals this fluidity. Stories travel, but so too do the cosmologies represented within them. Underlying this book is the sense that modernity is not simply replacing indigenous realities (in a linear fashion) with rationalistic truths about the world. Amazonian realities are still a present and active part of the lives of the non-indigenous, who now represent the majority of the population in most cities throughout the region. I have described these relations elsewhere as an "alternative modernity," a concept that can be defined as, "sites of creative adaptation by which people are questioning the present by way of cultural knowledge (Gaonkar 2001: 1-23). The indigenous are the background interlocutors of these stories, but they are also a defining part of the present dynamic by which modernity is transformed. In the story "A Gift from Yara, an Underwater Seducer," for example, an indigenous man takes on the role of shamanic interpreter and explains what happened when a man from Lima has a troubling experience with a fish-woman. The man from Lima also possesses a dolphin tooth given to him by an indigenous friend. One can imagine such encounters and interactions throughout Amazonia, where people from the outside are actively taught by natives to see the world, and their experiences, from their perspective.

Indeed, anthropologists are now rethinking the concept of boundaries altogether. I especially like an article by Ira Bashkow (2004) in this regard, who uses neo-Boasian ideas about diffusion and linguistic notions of the "isogloss" (a dialect boundary) to argue for a more nuanced sense of boundaries as sites of "differentiation" but which do not, by themselves, exclude or contain (Bashkow 2004: 450). The boundaries between various cultures in Amazonia are there — I am not suggesting they are not — but their presence invites flow and boundary crossing, a process much like the complex linguistic overlap/differentiation that occurs among dialects of a language. Bashkow (2004: 451), for example, writes that, "contrary to our naive view of dialects as discrete entities, the isoglosses of distinct features often fail to coincide; instead they form tangled patterns of crisscrosses and loops, making it impossible to establish a definitive line of demarcation between dialects." I think this is the case with these stories. They represent a "tangled pattern" of crisscrossing and looping with coterminous indigenous and mestizo worlds.

The perspectivism reflected in the stories herein reflects an Amazonian theorization of this problem in which boundary crossing and "looping" are major themes. The storytellers are less concerned with cultural boundaries than they are with natural ones, but all "boundaries are meant to be crossed" in the Amazonian world, to borrow a phrase from Santos-Granero (2002). This discussion leads me to my final point, which is that these stories contain principles and ideas that are relevant to our own lives. These stories allow readers to see other cultures as part of a greater intercultural world, and also invite

readers to see themselves as part of a greater intematural world as well. People and human reproduction are intimately connected to the environment, which, although not seen as such in normal reality, reflects a deeper and underlying common humanity shared by all living things. These are salient insights relevant to today's world, where boundaries have now become barriers and nature merely an object to be exploited for economic gain rather than human progress. The current trend is one of the impoverishment of our connectivity to others and to our world, a set of relations Karl Marx described as alienation and which is still with us in different historical form (see Gregory 1997). I think it is a great achievement that Galeano has conveyed the deep wisdom and complexity of Amazonian thought through an English-language book. Most of us who are native speakers of English must spend years or decades in Amazonia to see and comprehend such relations. I hope that Galeano's gift will help others to better appreciate the beauty and complexity of the human condition as seen from an Amazonian perspective.

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INTRODUCTION



The Amazon

In 1542, expeditionist friar Gaspar de Carvajal recorded the way he and his shipmates reacted with fascination to native tales about fierce Amazonian women and the riches and wealth awaiting them downstream on their journeys. Today, there are still plentiful accounts of the Amazon, including tales that paint it as a land of wonder and beauty and stories that tell of its destruction and devastation. These accounts include reports from French explorer Jacques-Yves Cousteau, magazine articles, television shows, travel logs, biological and environmental data, and advocacy for indigenous rights by media personalities such as the rock star Sting. Such varying approaches continue to build on our complex perception of Amazonia and lead to the fascination that the inhabitants of the rest of the Earth have with the Amazon. A vast territory almost the size of the continental United States, Amazonia is the habitat of the greatest number of plants and animals in the world. Situated in the equatorial region of the planet, the Amazon is a territory shared by Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Venezuela, and Guyana.

Over the last 500 years, this exuberance of fragile green earth, which has been inhabited for between 40,000 and 60,000 years, has received a parade of conquistadors, travelers, and adventurers seeking riches, as well as immigrants in search of a new home. They have brought with them domesticated animals, tools for working the land, religious traditions, and Western mythologies full of fantastic creatures symbolic of their beliefs. Newcomers came into contact with native inhabitants who practiced slash-and-burn farming in small segments of the forest to produce sufficient food, collected fruits from the trees, and obtained protein through hunting and fishing.

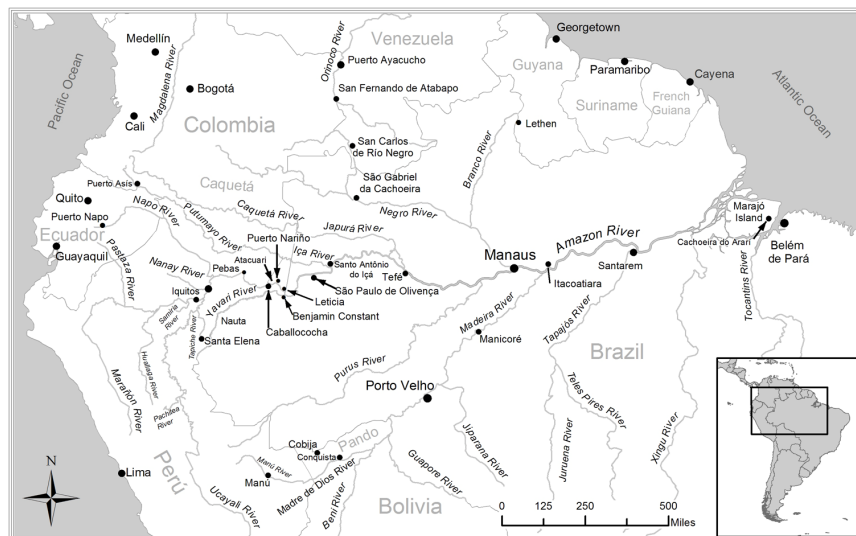
More than 800 indigenous ethnic groups, speaking languages predominantly of the Arawak, Carib, and Tupian families, once lived in this region. They had more than enough to feed themselves, thanks to practices that permitted them to produce food or to obtain animals from the forest without causing major changes to the environment. Their cosmological systems or worldviews about origins, the future, and their place in the universe provided them with their religiosity and explanations about their existence. This belief system also supplied regulations and codes of behavior. Amazonians regarded the rain forest as a world of spirits, animals, souls, and humans whose intermingling of substance or energy binds them together. At night, the natives gathered in huts and around fires to listen to stories told by their elders, who spoke of the world's creation through acts of love, violence, predations, and constant interactions between the natural and supernatural world. Their tales spoke of their adventures and daily negotiations with the fantastic. There, powerful and whimsical creatures, mythical snakes, ogres, defenders of the forests, beautiful females, and handsome males capable of transformation walked the pathways and populated the rivers creating a sense of awe, and also fear. The mythological creatures in their dreams and stories advised adult community members on places for hunting or fishing and warned them about rules of behavior while engaging in these activities, showing them an ecological way to live in the world.

Newcomers brought their traditions and histories along with different ideas about interacting with nature, animals, and trees. Outsiders from distant, modern cities related to the forest by sending orders for medicines or fine materials to improve their quality

of life, make them rich, or bring progress to their cities. Since colonial times, indigenous inhabitants, *mestizos* (people of mixed blood of European and Amerindians), and descendants of African slaves have produced cocoa beans, Brazilian nuts, medicinal plants, lumber, animal hides, rubber, and, more recently, petroleum, gold, cocaine, and other products for export.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the growing need for rubber in the Western world escalated. The bicycle craze began in 1890 in Europe, and later the demand for tires for the first Western cars increased the need for Amazonian rubber. A desire for wealth, embellished by tales about fortunes made by a few entrepreneurs through the extraction of rubber, created a fever for the "white gold" of the Amazon, much like the gold rush in California. This led people from Europe, the United States, and many Amazonians into the forest to tap rubber trees in the wild. The existence of fine wood for furniture in this rich terrestrial ecosystem also attracted the attention of Westerners and led to the harvesting of cedar, mahogany, and many other species of trees. Sales of heron feathers and alligator, jaguar, and manatee skins for the fabrication of shoes and other goods to be sold in the finest shops initiated new hunting practices and transformed the way of life for many indigenous people.

Now, at the turn of the twenty-first century, Amazonian forests and rivers have experienced unprecedented population growth and deforestation as cattle farming and large-scale cultivation increase and encroach. Extraction of timber, drilling for oil in the forest, and the search for minerals such as bauxite and gold have given employment to the local population, but have also had negative effects, devastating in some places, on the biological richness, as well as having a drastic impact on the lives of the indigenous groups and the cultural traditions of Amazonians. The results of systematic destruction of land containing such a vast diversity of life threaten humans who live far from the rain forest and have brought international attention to Amazonia.



How the Amazonian Tales in This Book Came to Be

In the area of the Caquetá or Yapurá River, one of the biggest tributaries of the Amazon, I lived on a small farm with my grandparents, a couple of miles from the settlement where I went to elementary school. In those days, I liked to hear stories about the spirits of the forest and underwater world that the native people who helped my grandfather would tell at the dinner table. I always listened and asked them to tell more, though as the evening grew late, I would pay a high price, for I couldn't sleep afterward. I thought the spirits would come get me for asking too much about them.

In 1983, I left Colombia, but I didn't forget the tales I had heard. After spending years abroad, I decided to investigate the stories told by people in different parts of the Amazon. In 1996, I traveled to the region to collect more stories, or story fragments, and recast them. I was inspired to do this because I was not content with the written versions of Amazonian folktales I had read. I was displeased with the way stories had been recreated or retold, warped from their local oral traditions and often describing the indigenous inhabitants as savages and classifying the forest within the dichotomy of heaven or hell. I didn't like the excessive flowery and ornate language used by the Amazonian writers who had retold the folktales, heavily influenced by the traits of so-called French Parnasianism (the artistic mode of poetic writing adopted by Latin American writers at the turn of the twentieth century). Furthermore, existing collections of folktales were specific to only one area of a single country. There were numerous illuminating studies of native folktales done by linguists and anthropologists, but they were critical studies specific to those fields.

Since my literary work has been in poetry, the project was not only a trip to the past but also a writer's challenge. I imagined that some of these tales from my past were still available. My quest started in Leticia, a Colombian port on the Amazon River at the border of Peru and Brazil. The night I arrived, I began to search for the folktales. I met Manuel Sangama in one of the floating restaurants. He told me his mother knew a lot of stories.

The next day after playing soccer with his brothers in front of the house, we ate dinner and Manuel's mother told us about spirits of the jungle and pink dolphins. "These *bujeos*," she said, employing the word used for dolphins that I heard from Uitoto descendants in my childhood in Caquetá, "would come out at night in the form of handsome fair-skinned young men to charm girls."

From then on, my search for folktales took me to other places in the Amazon basin. In Brazilian towns along the Amazon and Yavari rivers, I learned about the *Mapinguari*. This animal protector is a hairy beast with one eye, a feature introduced most likely by Europeans out of Greek mythology. According to María Bezerra, a woman who made her living by running a food stand for boatmen, passengers, street vendors, and the long-shoremen unloading lumber boats, the Mapinguari is very dangerous to stubborn hunters. I heard more stories about the Mapinguari while staying in the hut of Don Luis Da Silva, an old hunter who hadn't been out lately because of new regulations and advancing blindness.

Traveling on long trips in the Amazon and its tributaries offered me an opportunity to find out about the different guardian spirits, medicinal properties of plants, and lore about the river. On a five-day trip upstream in a big cargo boat on my way to Iquitos, I had the opportunity to hear stories from one of the crewmembers about the *Yakumama*, a supernatural snake able to produce big waves and hold the boat on her body for a few minutes. Other members of the crew swore to the veracity of the tale.

Two years later, I heard a similar story about a giant anaconda from the Brazilian captain and crewmembers on a bigger boat on my way from Tefé to Manaus. They spoke of the giant anaconda as *Cobra Grande* (Great Snake). As usual, people volunteered to tell me more stories than I expected. Realizing that in the Amazon basin the best repositories of folktales are natives and those who still live in close contact with rivers, trees, and animals, I visited indigenous communities. I also stayed in hotels near ports or marketplaces to be able to inquire about the supernatural from people coming from forests or rivers to sell products, visit relatives, or run errands in town. In those lodges, I would strike up informal conversations with people about the area where they lived. Many times I received invitations to spend a few days in their homes. There, I would partake in their fishing activities, go to their plot gardens and, on a couple of occasions, accompany them on hunting excursions. Whether helping them uproot manioc roots or sitting with them on a tree trunk to take a break, I had the opportunity to listen to tales and see firsthand the way they lived and their aspirations for themselves and their children. I was also able to hear *in situ* their detailed and in depth knowledge of trees, plants, animals, creeks, sounds, and weather. It was an opportunity to learn much more about their land than what is available through television programs, history books, and maps produced by our culture or their governments.

On one of my trips to the city of Iquitos in the Peruvian Amazon, I talked to Doña Corina Rodríguez. She was the owner of a family restaurant, and had spent several years making a living washing clothes for coca leaf gatherers in Tingo Maria on the Huallaga River. I had trouble sleeping while I was staying in a room at the back of her house, and she explained to me that a *Tunchi*, or spirit of the dead, lived there and didn't like people who stayed in that room. Every night, after I came back from talking to other storytellers in town or in nearby communities, Doña Corina entertained me along with others who came to eat there by telling stories of pink dolphins or *bujeos colorados*. The stories were about female dolphins who would transform into beautiful blonde women and show up at parties in Iquitos on Saturdays. Men would fall madly in love with them. Doña Corina told many other stories as well, including those about the Yanapuma, the Jaguar of the Devil, lupuna trees, and the Chullachaki.

On the outskirts of Iquitos I met Don Manuel Murayari, an urban *vegetalista*, the Spanish name for healers who treat patients with herbs and sacred plants. He was also a shaman and had a clinic where locals with various illnesses came to be treated with medicinal plants and his singing of *icaros* or incantations taught to him by plant spirits and the Chullachaki. The Chullachaki is the spirit of the forest who appeared initially to give him healing powers, "showing up like a little deer with a star on his forehead." Don Manuel Murayari told me about his experience of fasting and obtaining wisdom for healing. He said he was allowed to tell me only superficially how his powers worked.

"There are many things that I can't tell you unless you enter a process of fasting and sexual abstinence," he explained. "No women, no spices, no lard," he advised me. Thanks to him I was able to understand the important role played by hallucinogenic plants like the vine Ayahuasca, *Banisteriopsis caapi*, and other plants used for the same purpose such as Toé, *Brugmansia suaveolens*. I learned through him, and later from other medicine men from the Amazon basin, that by consuming these and other potions from trees and plants and by following special diets, shamans gain access to the worlds where the "mothers" of trees and animals live. There in contact with forest spirits he not only obtained healing powers but also gained knowledge to advise people on their relationships with the natural world. In the Amazon forest where people depend on hunting, fishing, and cutting trees for protein and shelter, and where, according to the myths of indigenous cosmologies, trees and animals are considered people, interactions between human dwellers and "mothers" or "masters" of trees and animals have the potential to become conflictive and when this occurs the mediation of a shaman is needed.

Don Manuel Murayari also told me how he had learned much of his art in Peru and later had continued his studies in São Paulo de Olivença, Brazil, with a great *macumbero*, a practitioner of African religiosity, who was also involved in black arts.

As my interest in listening and gathering folktales grew, I began to take trips to the Amazon each summer and sometimes during winter break. Whether on the Madeira River near Porto Velho, Brazil, Tena, Ecuador, Riberalta, Bolivia, or in San Fernando de Atabapo in Venezuela, the people I met were very much like those I knew from childhood. On the island of Marajo, at the mouth of the Amazon in the Atlantic Ocean, and in Guyana, there lived many descendants of Amazonian-African unions. Through an anthropologist friend who had done extensive fieldwork and lived for a prolonged period in the Ecuadorian Amazon, I met Don Fermín Shiguango and spent time with him and his family at the Cusano River. Walking in the forest, he told me about the medicinal properties of certain plants as he used them in the ritual baths he gave. He told me more about the visionary plant Toé, known among his fellow Ecuadorian shamans as wanduc, *Brugmansia suaveolens*. There it was widely known to have hallucinogenic powers and to be beneficial for treating arthritis, rheumatic pain and cough. Like ayahuasca, wanduc has been used as a visionary plant for thousands of years by indigenous people and is currently used in the Ecuadorian Amazon by shamans for divination and to communicate with forest spirits.

On all my trips, I met native people who had come to live in small settlements and cities as a result of the displacement caused by the presence and pressures of the modern world thirsty for oil, timber, gold, cocaine, and other Amazonian products. I witnessed them roaming the streets of buzzing frontier towns without any sense of belonging in the new places. Their loss of dignity caused by the destruction of the trees and animals considered part of their spiritual world was also evident. Regard for the animals and plants as living feeling beings is a part of their conception of a world as a place where humans are kin to animals and trees. This drastically differs from our Western assumption of humans as masters of the world. Their way of experiencing the world, which results from their religious and ethical attitudes toward the land, entails necessary rules and practices for living intimately with nature while coping with illness, evil human nature and other malaises. If for us in the Western world markers of happiness are the

amount of wealth and fame a person is able to amass, for indigenous Amazonians and their descendants it is maintaining healthy social relationships with the natural and spiritual world. Supernatural entities are sources of knowledge that inhabit invisible worlds within the physical realm and share their wisdom with humans. Many natives however, have lost much of their ancestral forests, the necessary and essential dwellings of these spirits who also protect the trees and animals easing the pressure from human activities. A forest dweller in the Brazilian Amazon near Tefé once pointed out to me: "With all the clearing of the land, the Curupira and all the mothers of the trees and animals have gone to live deeper in the forests, but let me tell you, they are still alive, they just have moved away from the noise of chainsaws and people."

In many parts of the basin, the memory of the cruelty brought to Amazonia by the rubber boom is still recounted by elderly storytellers when talking about spirit guardians of the forests. I heard the same tales while growing up in the areas of the Caquetá and Putumayo rivers, where a Peruvian rubber company, known as Casa Arana, had contributed to the enslaving and genocide of thousands of Uitoto indigenous peoples. In my childhood, I heard stories about the rubber boom as told by the elderly father of my friend Alfredo Castro; and in my travels as an adult visiting the abandoned rubber trading post of Cachuela Esperanza, on the Beni River in the Bolivian Amazon, I heard stories about the ruthlessness and wealth of rubber barons.

I was lucky to hear live folktales throughout the region and returned from each trip with notes and recordings of many hours of tales and conversations with Amazonians about their lives. I spent a great deal of time with each of the stories, reconstructing them from multiple fragments, and also pondering how to reconstitute each one as a whole. It is also true that having various fragments and versions of the same story has granted me room for creativity. My written versions are simply one more step in the process through which folktales are born, travel, and change with time. In my attempt to craft individual narratives, instead of presenting the many repetitions found in the raw variants, I have recreated each one as a succinct tale. A poetic approach involving imagery and an avoidance of flowery descriptive prose leaves space for the reader's imagination. To keep the Amazonian flavor and sense of wonder in each story, I have attempted to incorporate and maintain the tone I heard in the original versions. I made an effort to conserve intriguing twists and unexpected endings. It was a privilege for me to witness the moment when the stories were created, as each performance of the same tale morphed into a new story. My objective in each recasting was to trigger in the reader the same awe conveyed by live storytellers.

In gathering and recasting these folktales from the living tradition, I attempted to illustrate the unrecorded history of the natural world of Amazonians and the desires and memories of their ancestors, unveiling for us their continuing assumption that trees, animals, and rivers are sentient beings, and that we humans are simply a single part of the world.

Mapinguari: One-Eyed Ogre



Near Tefé, on the banks of the Amazon River in Brazil, there was a man who loved hunting so much that he went almost every day of the year. One Sunday, he told his wife, "I'm going to a place where the hunting is good."

"It would be better to wait until tomorrow," his wife said. "It's not good to hunt on Sunday."

"*No domingo também se come*. One must also eat on Sundays," the man said as he grabbed his rifle and left.

On his way to the forest, the man stopped by a neighbor's house to invite him. The neighbor didn't want to go and also told him, "It's not good to hunt on Sundays."

The hunter persuaded his neighbor by saying, "*No domingo também se come*. One must also eat on Sundays."

The two men crossed a small river and walked for some time through the bush without finding anything. It was as if all of the animals had disappeared. Toward the end of the afternoon, the men were frightened by some terrifying screams followed by noise and footsteps. At first, they thought it was a big man, but when it came closer, they saw that it was an animal, a black-haired, ape-like creature with a turtle's shell and one big green eye in the middle of its forehead. The men were terrified. The hunter started to shoot, but the bullets could not penetrate the beast's shell. He kept shooting, but to no avail.

The animal walked toward the hunter, grabbed him, and threw him to the ground with one of its enormous arms. The other man climbed a tree and watched in horror as the animal tore apart his friend. As it gnawed his friend's arm, it said, "*No domingo também se come*. One must also eat on Sundays." Then, gnawing a leg, it repeated, "*No domingo também se come*. One must also eat on Sundays." After the creature devoured the hunter and walked away yawning, the man who survived ran to the town and gave an account of his friend's death. Some people tried to guess what kind of an animal could have eaten the hunter. "If it has only one green eye and its feet are as big as a pestle, the creature must be the Mapinguari," said the dead hunter's cousin.

"Surely it didn't eat you, Don Luis, because you didn't have a rifle," added the others. One of the men, who knew a great deal about this sort of thing, said the hunter could have saved his life if he had shot the creature in its belly button, "because that is where its heart is." The people from the town were so outraged that they organized a search party and went hunting for the creature. They didn't have to look too hard, because the Mapinguari had come back to lick and chew on the bones of the hunter.

As soon as it saw the group of men, the beast attacked. It wanted to eat them, too. The men fired, not as their friend had done, but straight into its belly button to hit its heart. Shrieking with rage, the Mapinguari took off running and disappeared into the forest. The men gathered the uneaten bones of the hunter, put them in a sack, and took them back to town. His wife put the bones in a small coffin, and after she and her children mourned him for two nights, she took them to the cemetery. "If only he had heeded my warning," sobbed the poor widow. They say that later she took her children to Manaus where the rest of her family lived.



The Mapinguari, also known as Cape-lobo in the Pará and Maranhão regions of Brazil, is a terrifying supernatural creature with physical features similar to the cyclops of Greek mythology. Stories about this monster, considered to be one of the animal protectors in the Brazilian Amazon, also reveal the influence of Christian beliefs in the observance of the Sabbath as a day of rest. In other varieties of this tale, the Mapinguari is presented as having a foul smell, a giant mouth on its stomach, and feet pointing backward like the Curupira, another forest guardian of the Colombian and Brazilian Amazon.