

# The Amazon: Literature, Culture, Environment

## Autumn 2021

### Syllabus

Instructor: Victoria Saramago, Assistant Professor of Brazilian Literature

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Office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 10:30-11:30am. Students may attend office hours in person at Wieboldt Hall 226 or on Zoom (you will receive a Zoom link once you sign up). For both in-person and Zoom office hours, please sign up in advance at [calendly.com/saramago](https://calendly.com/saramago).

Course Assistant: Thomaz Amancio

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Office hours: TBA

#### Course Description

From colonial travelers to contemporary popular culture, the Amazonian forest has been a source of endless fascination, greed and, more recently, ecological concern. The numerous actors that have been shaping the region, including artists, writers, scientists, anthropologists, indigenous peoples, and the extractive industry, among others, bring a multifaceted view of this region that has been described as the paradise on earth as much as a green hell. This course offers an overview of Amazonian history, cultures, and environmental issues that spans from the sixteenth to the twenty-first century. What are the major topics, works, and polemics surrounding the ways the Amazon has been depicted and imagined? How can the region's history help us understand the state of environmental policies and indigenous rights today? What can we learn about the Amazon from literature and film? What is the future of the Amazon in the context of Brazil's current political climate? From an interdisciplinary perspective, we will cover topics such as indigenous cultures and epistemologies, deforestation, travel writing, modern and contemporary literature, music, photography, and film, among others. Authors may include Claudia Andujar, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Euclides da Cunha, Ciro Guerra, Milton Hatoum, Susanna Hecht, Davi Kopenawa, Andrea Tonacci and the project Video in the Villages, among others. Taught in English.

## Objectives

At the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Have a panoramic understanding of the Amazon's history;
- Identify and discuss major works, authors, and theses on the Amazon;
- Make connections between topics, concepts, and works from different periods and parts of the region;
- Discuss major issues related to the region, such as environmental policies and indigenous rights, from the perspectives offered by cultural objects;
- Develop an informed opinion on the current state of the region and its future challenges;
- Contextualize the Amazon within Brazilian and South American frameworks.

## Required Materials

Students are responsible for purchasing or borrowing a library copy of the following book:

- Vargas Llosa, Mario. *The Storyteller*. Translated by Helen Lane. Picador, 2001.

This novel is available on Amazon, in print and Kindle formats.

All the remaining materials will be available on Canvas. Students are encouraged to read works in Portuguese or Spanish if possible. Students taking this course towards Spanish- and/or Portuguese-related degrees are required to read works originally produced in these languages in Spanish and/or Portuguese.

## Calendar

### Week 1. Introduction

### Monday, September 27

- Introduction: Content, syllabus, course structure, evaluations

### Wednesday, September 29

- Candace Slater. "The Meeting of the Waters", "Roots of the Rain Forest" and "Lakes within Lakes." In: *Entangled Edens: Visions of the Amazon*. University of California Press, 2002.

### Optional reading:

- Hecht, Susanna, and Raoni Rajão. "From 'Green Hell' to 'Amazonia Legal': Land use models and the re-imagination of the rain forest as a new development frontier." *Land Use Policy* 96 (2020): 1-12.

## **Week 2. Travelers and Chroniclers**

### Monday, October 4

- Carvajal, Gaspar de. Selections from *The Discovery of the Amazon according to the Account of Friar Gaspar de Carvajal and other Documents*. Translated by Bertram T. Lee. New York: American Geographical Society, 1934.

### Wednesday, October 6

- Cunha, Euclides da. Selections from *The Amazon: Land without History*. Translated by Ronald Sousa. Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Photography by Flavio de Carvalho.

### Further readings (required for graduate students, optional for undergraduate students):

- Torres, Cinthya. Contested Frontiers: Territory and Power in Euclides da Cunha's Amazonian Texts. In: *Intimate frontiers: a literary geography of the Amazon*. Liverpool University Press, 2019.

**Research/Creativity Project: Theme, type of project, and tentative main questions due on Friday, October 8, by 11:59pm.**

### **Week 3. The Amazon in Cinema**

Monday, October 11

- *In the Country of the Amazons*. Dir. Silvino Santos. Joaquim Gonçalves Araújo, 1922.

Wednesday, October 13

- *Iracema*. Dir. Jorge Bodanzky and Orlando Senna. Stop Film, ZDF 1975.

Further readings (required for graduate students, optional for undergraduate students):

- Martins, Luciana. "Silvino Santos and the mobile view: documentary geographies of modern Brazil." *The Brazilian Road Movie: Journeys of (Self) Discovery*. Edited by Sara Branderello. University of Wales Press, 2013. Pp. 3-25.
- Furtado, Gustavo. "The Borders of Sense: Revisiting Iracema, Uma Transa Amazônica (1974)." In: *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 4 (2013): 399-415.

### **Week 4. Indigenous cultures: Film, Poetry, Myth**

Monday, October 18

- Selections from the project *Video in the Villages: Video in the Villages presents itself, Unnamed Xavante Women, and From the Ikpeng Children to the World*

Wednesday, October 20

- Selections from Villas Boas, Orlando, and Claudio Villas Boas. *The Indians, their myths*. Edited by Kenneth S. Brecher. Translated by Susana Hertelendy Rudge. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973. pp. 13-17, 21-27, 53-71, 88-93.

Further readings (required for graduate students, optional for undergraduate students):

- Dennison, Stephanie. Screening the Indigenous Experience in Brazil. In: *Remapping Brazilian film culture in the twenty-first century*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2020.

**Research/Creativity Project: Project Description due on Friday, October 21, by 11:59pm.**

**Week 5. Amerindian Cosmologies**

Monday, October 25

- *The Embrace of the Serpent*. Dir. Ciro Guerra. Diaphana Films, 2015.

Wednesday, October 27

- Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo. "Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. Vol. 4, No. 3 (Sep., 1998), pp. 469-488
- *Traditional Knowledge of the Jaguar Shamans of the Yuruparí*. ACAIPI, Fundación Gaia Amazonas, 2010.

Further readings (required for graduate students, optional for undergraduate students):

- D'Argenio, Maria Chiara. "Decolonial Encounters in Ciro Guerra's *El abrazo de la serpiente: Indigeneity, Coevalness and Intercultural Dialogue*." *Postcolonial Studies* 21.2 (2018): 131-153.

**Week 6. Testimonials: Writing and Photography**

Monday, November 1

- Albert, Bruce, and Davi Kopenawa. Selections from *The Falling Sky*. Harvard University Press, 2013.
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Wednesday, November 3

- Albert, Bruce, and Davi Kopenawa. Selections from *The Falling Sky*. Harvard University Press, 2013. (Continued)
- Photography by Claudia Andujar.

Further readings (required for graduate students, optional for undergraduate students):

- Guzmán, Tracy. "Unraveling Indianist Hegemony and the Myth of the Brazilian Race" and "A Native Critique of Sovereignty". In: *Native and National in Brazil: Indigeneity after Independence*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2013.
- Santos, Cecília MacDowell. Legal dualism and the bipolar state: challenges to indigenous human rights in Brazil. In: *Latin American Perspectives*. Vol 43, No 2. *Deconstructing the post-neoliberal state: intimate perspectives on contemporary Brazil*.

**Research/Creativity Project: Annotated List of Secondary Sources/Interlocutors due on Friday, November 5, by 11:59pm.**

**Week 7. Contemporary Fiction**

Monday, November 8

- Vargas Llosa, Mario [1987]. *The Storyteller*. Translated by Helen Lane. Picador, 2001.

Wednesday, November 10

- Vargas Llosa, Mario [1987]. *The Storyteller*. Translated by Helen Lane. Picador, 2001. (Continued)

Further readings (required for graduate students, optional for undergraduate students):

Sá, Lúcia. "The Machiguenga and their Heritage" and "The storyteller (1987)". In: *Rain Forest Literatures: Amazonian texts and Latin American Culture*. Minnesota University Press, 2004.

**Week 8. Deforestation**

Monday, November 15

- *Belo Monte: After the Flood*. Dir. Todd Southgate. International Rivers, Amazon Watch, and Cultures of Resistance, 2016.
- Artwork from *Arpilleras: Embroidening the Resistance*. Memorial da América Latina, 2015.

### Wednesday, November 17

- Hecht, Susanna. Cockburn, Alexander. Chapter 8 from *The Fate of the Forest: Developers, Destroyers, and Defenders of the Amazon*. University of Chicago Press, 2010. pp. 180-216.
- *Grazing the Amazon*. Dir. Marcio Isensee e Sá. ((O))eco, 2018.

### Further readings (required for graduate students, optional for undergraduate students):

- Center for International Forestry Research. "Forests, land use trends and drivers of deforestation and degradation". In: *The Context of REDD+ in Brazil*. 2016.

### **Research/Creativity Project: Partial draft or detailed outline due on Friday, November 19, by 11:59pm.**

## **Week 9. Between Bolsonaro and COVID-19: Amazonia in the Present**

### Monday, November 29

- Artwork by Denilson Baniwa
- Selection of newspaper articles (available in English) by Eliane Brum, Vanessa Barbara, Salomé Gómez-Upegui, and others.

### Wednesday, December 1

## Conclusion

### **Research/Creativity Project: Final version due on Tuesday, December 7, by 11:59pm**

## Office Hours

- Office hours with the instructor will be held tentatively on Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 1 to 2pm, or by appointment. Depending on external factors, students may require or be required to postpone office hours or use the chat instead of the video.
- Office hours with the CA will be held on Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 2 to 3pm

## Evaluations

### 1) Research/creativity project - 40%

Students will develop a project related to Amazonian topics whose progress will be shared with other students in small groups over the quarter. The goal of the project is open: students may develop a paper, a presentation, a blog, an article for a newspaper or magazine, a local intervention, a grant proposal, a video (documentary or fiction), an artistic project, etc. Graduate students are required to choose projects related to their professional plans, such as a research paper or a grant proposal. Other types of projects may be accepted with the instructor's approval. All students are strongly encouraged to discuss their projects with the instructor and the CA during office hours, especially in the first weeks of the quarter. Every other week, students will discuss their progress in groups of about 4 students. Students are expected to submit the following materials on Canvas:

- Week 2: Theme, type of project, and tentative main questions;
- Week 4: A description of the project including: theme, main questions and/or objectives, materials and/or people to be tentatively analyzed or interviewed (2-3 paragraphs);
- Week 6: A list of secondary sources and/or interlocutors with a brief explanation (1-2 sentence per source or interlocutor) of their content and importance to the project (minimum of 4 for undergraduate students and 8 for graduate students);
- Week 8: a partial draft of the project (about 50%), or an outline in the case of multimedia projects;
- Week 10: Final submission on Canvas. Students are encouraged but not required to make their projects visible to the whole class on Canvas.

This schedule may be adjusted to meet the demands of specific projects. If students wish to adopt a different schedule for their specific project, they are welcome to create and propose a new one by October 15. Students may also work in groups of 2 or 3 with prior approval of the instructor, provided that their project will clearly benefit from group work. Students who want to change their project topic must do so by October 15 as well. Minor changes to the topic and the schedule may be done throughout the quarter with instructor's approval. Regardless of the assignment chosen, students are expected to develop their own ideas and provide secondary sources whenever needed.

Summaries and purely descriptive assignments will receive a lower grade. Written assignments should follow MLA or Chicago styles.

GRADING: The instructor will not give an individual grade to each portion of this assignment but will indicate a grade range to which the project is headed, so students can make adjustments at every step so as to improve their final grade.

## 2) Online Forum - 30%

This portion of the grade refers to the student's participation in the online forum as a whole, including weekly comments and replies to other comments.

- Wednesdays by 11:59pm: Students are required to post a comment on the online forum addressing the materials for the week. The expected length is about 200 words for undergraduate students and about 400 words for graduate students.
- Fridays by 11:59pm: Students are required to post a reply to comment by another student on the online forum. The expected length is 100-150 words for undergraduate students and 200-250 words for graduate students. Students can also write shorter responses to multiple comments. Students can reply anybody's comment, regardless of whether that comment has already received other replies. Instead of replying to an original comment, students can also reply to other responses. The more dialogue we have, the better.

GRADING: The instructor will not provide a weekly grade for forum participation, but will be happy to provide a grade range at any point of the quarter upon request.

## 3) Participation in class - 30%

This portion of the grade refers to students' attendance, participation in class discussions and activities, and overall commitment to the course.

GRADING: The instructor will not provide a weekly grade for forum participation, but will be happy to provide a grade range at any point of the quarter upon request.

## **Attendance, Late Work, and Plagiarism Policies**

- Students are expected to attend all classes, arrive on time, and participate in discussions and activities.
- Late deliveries will be accepted by 11:59pm on the third day after the due date, with one grade deduction (e.g. an A would become an A- and so on). After this second deadline, late deliveries will no longer be accepted if the student does not communicate with the instructor in advance to request an extension.

- Any case of confirmed plagiarism will result in an F for the assignment where it occurred. Two or more cases of confirmed plagiarism will result in automatic failure for the course.

Plagiarism takes various forms, and it can occur not just intentionally but also through carelessness about the attribution of others' ideas and the citation of sources. The following resources are helpful in explaining what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it, and in providing guidelines for citation practices:

<http://guides.lib.uchicago.edu/c.php?g=297265&p=5784497>  
<http://guides.lib.uchicago.edu/c.php?g=297265&p=5784465>

- I understand that students' performance may be impacted by factors beyond their control. Special arrangements can be made depending on each student's individual situation, as long as they communicate in advance with the instructor. Communication has never been as important as it is now!

## **Disabilities**

Students with disabilities who need accommodations should contact me as soon as possible, as well as the Student Disability Services at [disabilities@uchicago.edu](mailto:disabilities@uchicago.edu) or 773-702-6000, so that any needed arrangements can be made in a timely fashion.