

THE MYSTERIOUS AMAZONIA: MOREAU'S LEGACY IN BRAZIL

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The contribution of H. G. Wells's romances to the emergence of European science fiction as a literary genre is undeniable, but he was also a significant influence internationally. Research by Patrick Parrinder, John S. Partington et al. on the reception of Wells's work, including translations and adaptations has focused on Europe – but both Portugal and France too had an enormous impact on literary production in South America, especially Brazil, from the beginning of the nineteenth century to at least the first half of the twentieth.¹

The Time Machine and *The Island of Doctor Moreau* were first translated into Portuguese by the half-Brazilian, half-French publishing house Garnier. Owned by a French family, Garnier was responsible for the publication of many Brazilian and foreign books from 1844 to 1934, usually gathering interesting original texts around both continents, then editing them and printing the finished titles in Paris or London. Curiously, however, Wells's novels may not have been translated from the original English original printed text. The chapter division and titles (22 conflated to 14, only six of which remain with the same nomenclature as the English equivalent) of *The Island of Doctor Moreau*'s 1910 Brazilian edition are the same as in the Colonial Edition discovered by Robert M. Philmus². As Philmus states, this version of *Moreau* was first published in French around 1900-1, as a result of the dealings between Wells and the translator of *Mercure de France*. It is possible to infer, on this evidence, that Garnier had its first encounter with Wells's novels through their French translations.

Whilst England and France were establishing the genre of scientific romance, colonialism delayed the development of this genre as Brazilian authors tended to produce only fantasy literature with a few hints of science fiction. British authors such as H. G. Wells and Arthur Conan Doyle were read by Brazilians alongside French ones such as Jules Verne and Camille Flammarion. Verne was particularly visible from the turn of the century in French literature classes taken by adolescent readers at *lycées* and boarding schools, in which national scientific research and education were focussed on the ideal of recreating European experiments rather than any pioneering projects of their own. If laboratories were thought to be the place for proving that a 'colonised' country could emulate what being discovered in Europe, the same process of refraction was taking place in the domain of creative literature.

¹ *The Reception of H. G. Wells in Europe*, ed. Patrick Parrinder, John S. Partington (London: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005).

² Robert M. Philmus, 'The Strange Case of Moreau Gets Stranger' (1992), available at: <http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/backissues/57/philmus57art.htm>, accessed 23rd March 2014.

Augusto Emílio Zaluar is perhaps the first author to consider the possibility of writing scientific romances within a Brazilian context.³ His *O Doutor Benignus* (*The Doctor Benignus*, 1875) is clearly inspired by Verne and Flammarion and presents the story of Benignus, a scientist in pursuit of a breakthrough in knowledge. Wandering through the woods on a naturalist expedition, he finds a papyrus at the bottom of a cave with inscriptions that hint the existence of a superior civilisation that lives on the surface of the Sun. He draws on premonitory dreams, the help of an Englishman, and an American with a balloon in his attempts to prove his theory; in terms of verisimilitude and a sense of wonder Zaluar's work, however, compares poorly with the motifs of European science fiction.

Amongst the early Brazilian the lost world/lost race subgenre the works of the physician and writer Gastão Cruls might be highlighted, for they endeavour to create fresh science fiction plots stimulated by Latin-American myths and territory. Born in 1888, in Rio de Janeiro, Gastão was the son of the famous Belgian astronomer Luís Cruls, who was responsible for the scientific analysis of the region that would later become the current capital of Brazil, Brasília. In 1905, Gastão entered the University of Medicine, graduating five years later. After working in hospital wards, clinical medicine and dermatology, he decided to abandon his medical career, claiming that the shocking contrast between the study and the practice of medicine made him sceptical about his ability to be responsible for others' lives. The author never regretted this decision, remarking 'in my time as a student there weren't any Schools of Philosophy and Letters here yet [in Rio]. Therefore, even for those that wished to dedicate themselves to Literature, the best course would still be Medicine. At least this course – with the mandatory frequency at hospitals - would give them a rich field of observation, a grand contact with life and with its painful countenances. And not always physical pain. But also many moral dramas.'⁴

Subsequently, Gastão published a series of short stories and novels, his stories appearing in newspapers and magazines and in collections under his own name. A reader of Wells's work, he was inspired by *The Island of Doctor Moreau* and wrote a parody of it: *A Amazônia Misteriosa* (1925), or *The Mysterious Amazonia* (as translated by Joseph Thomas Wilson Sadler in 1944). The text begins as a compilation of lost pages of a travel diary, dating from 'December 17th., 191...' to 'January 5th., 191...'. The narrative shows the exploratory voyage of a medical student and his team of assistants through the Amazon Jungle. The verisimilitude of the story's exotic setting is conveyed to the reader through careful description of the rainforest's fauna and flora, as well as a rather prolix quantity of language regionalisms in its dialogue (from the Brazilian

³ Zaluar was Portuguese but became a naturalized Brazilian in 1856.

⁴ Gastão Cruls's interview, 'Lembrança de Gastão Cruls', *Correio da Manhã* (Brazilian contemporary journal), 20th June 1959.

Northeast Portuguese dialect to the Tupi native idiom)⁵ The epistolary narrative then shifts from the form of ‘lost document’ and to that of a novel, much like Wells’s transition from the preface of Prendick’s nephew relating the Lady Vain accident to the following chapters of *Moreau*.

After days wandering in the wild, the team of men are tired and long for the trip to end. They have to quench their thirst and hunger with the resources they have: drinking water from leaves and the milky secretions of tree pulp, cooking fishes, tapirs, armadillos and even monkeys. The latter, however, is not eaten by the narrator, as, at an unspoken Darwinian level, such behaviour would almost feel like cannibalism. The protagonist and two of his helpers suddenly become lost when deciding to explore the woods while the rest of the group is fetching materials to repair their canoe. In a further turn of bad luck, the trio is surrounded by tribespeople armed with bows and arrows. The Doctor tries to communicate their desire to return to their camp but his mimicry only makes the Natives lead them to an even more unknown route, and an encounter with a tribe composed of almost exclusively men. The natives are very healthy warriors with ‘evolved traits’ such as great stature, prominent muscles and straight noses, and are covered in *muyrakytans*, vividly green animal-shaped amulets famous for magical curative properties. After a night of tribal drinking, dancing and smoking, one of the three vanishes adventurers into the wild.

As their journey proceeds, they reach a vast clearing occupied by a majestic lost city in the jungles of Amazonia. Pacatuba, the narrator’s surviving friend, a humble simpleton, immediately presumes that it must be a Spanish forgotten colony or a rubber-collector’s outpost, recalling the myth of ‘El Dorado’. The two companions are then approached by a European man, judging by his features, with terribly German-accented Portuguese known only by the vocative ‘Doctor’. The explorer fortunately speaks German; while evading some questions, the cold blue-eyed host (whose physical appearance resembles Moreau’s) provides the travellers with a home and a French-speaking Indian servant, Malila, candid and loyal as Moreau’s M’ling. Also, like Moreau, the Doctor explains his ‘island’:

‘Well, it is as I say, we are among the authentic Amazons, the celebrated tribe of the warrior-women who, nearly four centuries ago, were discovered for the first and only time, by Orellana and his fellows [and since then have escaped to the Amazonia since the Spanish invasion]...⁶ And full of

⁵ This trait is particularly noticeable on the Portuguese version of the book; its translation – on the other hand – has opted to substitute the words with English common equivalents or brief explanations between brackets. The original book also includes a vocabulary section at the end of it: explaining the origins of the terms and its usages. This has been deleted from the English version.

⁶ Francisco de Orellana (1511-1546), Spanish explorer who was able to navigate the entire length of the Amazon River.

enthusiasm he went on to explain to me that our Amazons also consisted of a gynecocracy, in which men appeared but temporarily, once a year, for the perpetuation of the species. These men, their vassals, belonged to a tribe that protected them from every foreign incursion and visited their dominions only on the occasion of the spousal festivities. Of the children born of these unions our Amazons kept only the girls, while the boys were either killed at birth or delivered to their fathers.’⁷

The city is named ‘Kingdom of the Green Stones’ by the European; the Brazilians and the classical legend –speak Quichuá and do not, unlike classical Amazons, practise amputation of the left breast. He further explains that the young females are always kept virginal for the sake of a competition to determine the new queen of the realm. The muyrakytan amulets are fertility tokens relating to the ritual of the tribe that takes place after the nomination. The narrator comments:

‘I had by now become convinced that the German was a student of ethnology, and this explained his long sojourn with these Amazons. Judge then of my surprise when, congratulating him on the success of his studies, I heard from him that such was not the case, and that his discovery of this people was the work of pure chance. I smiled incredulously but Senhor [‘Mister’ in portuguese] Hartmann, for that was his name, insisted hotly that he had spoken the truth. He had never devoted his time to ethnology and indeed the interests that had brought him to the Amazonia were far different... When I asked him what it was then that had brought him to these distant parts, his manners changed and in a tone of severity he warned me not to touch on his private matters, as he absolutely refused to satisfy my curiosity. And he added that, if I managed to discover his business, then there would be no question of our departure, we should be forced to stay there as his prisoners, till such time as he and his wife were ready to depart also.’ (110-1)⁸

Hartmann’s wife, Rosina, a melancholic French lady, is also present in the jungle against her will. She develops a close bond with the protagonist and serves as a cicerone during his stay. They visit places such as the ‘poison factory’ of the Amazons, which makes pharmacology of many kinds such as cocaine-based stimulants and a drug called ayquec, compared by the narrator to the famous

⁷ Gastão Cruis, *The Mysterious Amazonia (A Brazilian Novel)*, trans. J. T. W. Sadler (Rio de Janeiro: Livraria-Editora Zelio Valverde, 1944), 89-91.

⁸ Gastão used to say that if he could go back in time and choose his profession he would surely trade medicine for ethnography.

curare.⁹ He is proven wrong when, through the use of ayquec, he experiences a fantastical spiritual dream-journey and visits the ancient Inca realm Atahualpa, the last emperor of this people.

At his first opportunity, the protagonist takes advantage of being alone to explore Hartmann's mysterious activities. In an area avoided by Rosina, which is surrounded by a high thick hedge, he gets close to a small cage, where:

I could easily examine its inhabitant.

Was it a monkey, or a sloth? I concentrated my attention on the strange creature that crawled on the ground with slow hesitating movements. No! It was a child! There could be no mistaking its human form. But, then, was it a monstrosity? I stood perplexed, making a thousand conjectures, my eyes fixed on that spectacle, that horrifying yet fascinating sight, awakening at the same time sentiments of pity, repugnance and disgust. (155-6)

The Moreau-esque theme is already evident but it is explicitly revealed as an intertextual reference on a second visit to the 'laboratory', when the unwanted visitor is caught by his cold-blooded host, who justifies his hubristic violation of natural and Darwinian laws:

"I saw then on the porch of the hut, seated on a log of wood, an Indian woman occupied in watching a tiny creature of strange appearance and ways. In size, it might have been a child of a few months, but it was full of life and at times, standing upright on its legs, attempted a few tottering steps. The protruding jaw, the narrow receding forehead and outstanding ears gave its physiognomy a bestial semblance, which is not uncommon with certain microcephalous idiots. And its body was out of the ordinary, being entirely covered with hair...

While I was still gazing open-eyed at this weird and unrecognisable being, there came to the porch from the interior of the house another fantastic creature. Although its shape and ways reminded me of a child of tender years, its stature was that of a full-grown man... All at once I discovered that another child had joined the group, this last, of minute proportions, certainly measuring no more than ten inches... I could not help thinking of *Gulliver's Travels*, finding myself in the Kingdoms of Lilliput and Brobdingnag at one and same time [...]

I made some careless movement or changed my position to one in which I became visible [the narrator was hiding amongst trees and bushes

⁹ Curare was an anaesthetic drug notoriously studied in nineteenth-century surgical procedures. Its properties are known for a paralysing effect but not annulling the sensation of pain. Made from a poison typically produced by South-American Indians for their arrow tips, it was banned from usage on the Cruelty To Animals Act from 1876.

while Hartmann was getting out of his laboratory], but the fact is that Hartmann turning round suddenly and unexpectedly, looked me full in the face. [...]

“You are behaving like a real gentleman,” he said very red and with a sarcastic smile which masked his anger. [...] “So if you remember what I said, you will not be surprised if I keep you here as my prisoner till such time as we may all return together.” [...]

“No, I’m not surprised nor alarmed, we shall see. Now I understand your reserve. You are afraid I shall denounce your crimes.”

“Crimes?”

“Yes, crimes,” I repeated resolutely. “I have seen the little child you treat like an animal and that lives in a cage.”

I saw the German did not relish what I said, and now he changed his manner towards me, asking more courteously: -

“Ah, then you’ve seen everything, have you?”

“No, but sufficient to feel disgusted and to consider you a second Dr. Moreau and worse.”

I saw he did not understand the reference.

“Yes,” I went on. “Have you never heard of Wells’s *The Island of Dr. Moreau*? Dr. Moreau took it into his head to transform animals into men and women, while you are trying to do the opposite.”

“Oh! but that man must have been mad.”

“Mad or not, in any case he was less harmful than you.” (165-71)

The reaction to these accusations makes Hartmann elucidate further on what is happening in his facility. The chapter ‘Professor Hartmann’ tells that he is also a doctor and pupil of Professor Steinach the famous Austrian physiologist who ‘has for so long devoted his time to the study of certain curious subjects which are of the greatest interest to society, such as the problem of growth of living beings, the question of determining sex, the possibility of prolonging life by the renewal of the worn-out organs’ (180). His master’s attempts on physiology were limited to animal subjects and Hartmann believed that human experimentation was necessary to move the discovery forwards. Travel literature had made him speculate that prisoners of war taken by South-American cannibal tribes were the perfect victims for science: they were already doomed to death and failed surgical procedures would be irrelevant to their destiny. By chance, the Amazons had appeared and supplied him with their own human rejects: children with physical defects and twins (abjected because of the belief of Indian tribes that only one baby could be born from sexual intercourse, meaning that a multiple birth must be the result of the mother having had several lovers).

Disappointed that his only subjects were youths, Hartmann ‘talked with the utmost calmness, referring to the children with the same callousness as if he were speaking of the guinea-pigs or frogs the physiologists use in their laboratories’

(184). Examination of aphasia (study of disturbances in the field of language competence) became the transplantation of organs of one animal to another, aiming at the modification of 'chemism' and the possibility of cross-breeding between species.

After eight years of research and the help of a young German assistant named Hans (his Montgomery) Hartmann becomes able to interbreed an Indian woman and a coatá monkey (seen in the cage) along with chimeric creatures that have birds and lizards, coatis and sloths, ant-eaters and capuchin monkeys as parents.¹⁰

“And the others I saw yesterday, the young giant and the tiny dwarf?”

“Oh, those,” the German hastened to explain, “those are experiments I am making to test the action of organic acids on growth. I may possibly obtain here some interesting light on the problem of longevity.” And, changing the subject, now in the best of good humours, Senhor Hartmann asked me with a smile, “do you still compare me with that Doctor you mentioned yesterday, Dr...?”

“Dr. Moreau?”

“Yes, that’s the name.”

I began to excuse myself. That was a thoughtless observation and quite unjustifiable. I had caught sight of a horrid picture which would have shocked anyone who did not know the aim in view. Now taking into consideration the important interests of science... I considered it a good plan to shew myself in perfect harmony with his point of view and henceforward, during our return in animated conversation, I had nothing but praise for his work.’ (194-5)

It is unclear to what extent the narrator is sincerely impressed by such scientific work or just wants to earn his freedom more easily. Rosina then confesses that her husband has already performed cruel surgeries on a former lost foreign prisoner: a Syrian found by the tribe and trepanned in order to find if it was possible to make a subject forget every language but their vernacular. She also refers to a series of Hartmann’s racist comments on the superiority of the offspring of monkeys and Indians was to the ‘savage children’ of the tribe. The couple kiss and declares their love for each other; fearing for their lives, they decide to escape, taking Pacatuba with them.

The story ends when, following the Festival of Green Stones to select the new queen and male partners, the trio try to run away but are corralled by the Amazon warriors. Rosina is hurt with an arrow and falls into a river full of piranhas. The final scene sees the protagonist kissing her almost lifeless body; the reader can assume they do not succeed in fleeing.

¹⁰ *Ateles paniscus*, also known as ‘red-faced spider monkey’ or ‘guiana spider monkey’.

In both *The Mysterious Amazonia* and, for instance, Wells's short story 'The Empire Of The Ants' (1905), Amazonia is an invincible, oppressive and tropical refuge of dangerous animals including insects and giant ants and charming half-bloods. Gastão's portrayal of the native Amazonian Indian culture is similar to Henry Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) or *She* (1887), and to Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* (1912), especially in the descriptions of the rainforest's topography and geology and habitat. (The short stories also prove to be influenced not only by English authors but also by the darker styles of Maupassant and Poe.)

The influences of the 'Lost World' genre are not exclusively literary, however. The Instituto Histórico Geográfico Brasileiro (Brazilian Historic and Geographic Institute or IHGB) focused from 1838 on investigating and producing a national identity through a 'pure Brazilian' historiography. The myth of an Amazonian El Dorado or lost tribes was absorbed by the Brazilian imaginary as the country tried to vanquish its inferiority complex. Allied to the project of a Brazilian national archaeology, the Institute tried to determine the very meaning of 'the Nation' and helped to design a myriad of national symbols, while trying to quench the thirst for grandiose origins comparable to Latin-American neighbours (Aztecs, Mayans) and overseas relatives (Romans, Greeks). A vast array of treatises and studies about the Amazonian environment preceded the creation of Gastão Cruls's romance, enabling the fictional emulation of ethnic ceremonies and customs, and writing in original dialects such as quichuá throughout the narrative. Gastão only visited Amazonia years after his book was published, but his visit confirmed his impression of the exoticism of vast amazonian flora and fauna, and of Amazonia as a resource for narratives of fantastic utopian isolation.

It is possible that Gastão and other writers of 'Lost World' fiction were aware of the intriguing case of manuscript 512, published by the IHGB an year after its foundation. A compilation of handwritten papers from the mid-18th century that described a fantastical expedition to the Amazonia territory, the manuscript was discovered by one of its members and promptly taken as a fair evidence of the country's past history. The narrator of the adventure claimed to have seen Greco-Roman ruins and Phoenician/Ptolemaic inscriptions amongst a lost bare place on the forest. Such a noble finding would be more acceptable to a country trying to echo cultural roots more civilised than Indian ceramic vases, rudimentary huts and cave paintings.¹¹ It is also curiously reminiscent of the

¹¹ A very interesting study on the emergence of this mentality is the article by Carlos Haag, 'The Dream of an Amazonian Eldorado: Brazilian Archeology and the Eternal Quest for Hidden Civilizations in the Amazon Forest', available at: <http://revistapesquisa.fapesp.br/en/2009/06/01/the-dream-of-an-amazonian-eldorado/>, accessed on 14th September 2014. The authority and veracity of the manuscript still remain debated now.

Portuguese explorer in *King Solomon's Mines* and his descriptive note about a lost and possibly rich land.

Brazilian science fiction scholars such as Roberto de Sousa Causo argue that Gastão Cruls is a pioneering figure in the absorption of national themes in a work of science fiction.¹² For Causo, Gastão utilises the Lost Race subgenre to illustrate Brazilian potential, rather than criticise imperialism, as in British writers such as Wells.¹³ Since Brazilian colonisation, miscegenation was seen as a particular cause of economic and cultural retrogression. Causo's research points out that the eugenic subject is not exclusive to the plot of *The Mysterious Amazonia*: cross-breeding between Europeans and slaves or natives problematized the notion of a 'true' Brazilian identity in Social Darwinist and eugenic terms. Cruls made use of Moreau's archetype, but while Wells's doctor works on the plasticity of animal flesh, Cruls's equivalent reframes human beings as scientific guinea pigs, as if in a new Darwinism that proves that, under the will of science, species can freely flow back and forth between evolutionary stages. Moreau clearly wishes to maintain his creations as closely as possible to the top (human) evolutionary level but his German colleague is much more interested in fertility through chimerical transmutations, leaving it ambiguous whether he is or is not a critic of miscegenation.

The famous Brazilian author and critic Monteiro Lobato published, a year after Gastão's, a now relatively obscure science fiction book called *O Presidente Negro ou O Choque das Raças* (*The Black President or The Clash of Races*). According to André Carneiro, the preface of Lobato's publication hints that 'like H. G. Wells, [he] might not have imagined things but just "predicted" things.'¹⁴ In *The Black President*, a scientist invents a telescopic device to observe the future. In the year 2228 the United States elects an Afro-American president, which provokes a furious reaction from the Caucasian electorate. The racist plot praises (fictional) futuristic North America's segregation while criticising the Brazilian 'fusion of races'. It says that this *mixture* destroyed all the 'admirable physical qualities' of the Negroes and caused in the white race 'an inevitable worsening of character'; race hatred is seen as a consequence of admirable 'pride' and an efficient 'prophylaxis'. In one of the most shocking passages of the novel, the white electorate attempts to create a hair straightener product for their 'enemies' that secretly sterilises them. Lobato's book was sent to American editors and, to the perplexity of the author, it was, obviously, rejected.

¹² Roberto de Sousa Causo, *Ficção Científica, Fantasia e Horror no Brasil: 1875 a 1950* (*Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror in Brazil: 1875 to 1950*) (Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 2003). I profusely thank Roberto for his insightful reading and contributions for this article.

¹³ The Brazilian upper classes wanted to be compared to Europeans: it would thus be illogical to attack imperial influences since they were seen as markers of prestige.

¹⁴ Carneiro, 138.

There are also examples of much lighter appropriations of similar Wellsian themes by the Brazilian author Erico Verissimo. *In Viagem à aurora do mundo* (*Travel to the Dawn of the World*, 1939), the narrator also has a Time Machine capable of transporting its user only to see the past or the future. Nonetheless, the scientific method is not truly explored or deeply explained in either novel. Whereas Brazilian settings inspire European writers, when technology appears in Brazilian science fiction, it is inspired by foreign works of literature, thereby indirectly importing foreign scientific dilemmas.

Thus not only did Brazil's exoticism reach Wells's and the British imagination, but his own innovative fictional work was also formative in the discussion of scientific themes in Brazilian literature. Since Gastão refused to adhere to the Brazilian Academy of Letters or modernist literary niches, his influence was exerted only through his personal relationships with fellow writers, historians and physicians.¹⁵ Although a remarkable source of early science fiction on his country, many of his works are still obscure even to Brazilian readers and academics, and so the Wellsian influence on Brazilian science fiction is predominantly directly through Wells rather than via Gastão.

On the other hand, Wells, since his early work, remains a canonical figure in European science fictional literature side by side with Conan Doyle, Verne and Flammarion. Curiously, the majority of his books were first translated and published for Lusophone readers in Brazil rather than Portugal, hence his appropriation – explicit or not – by Brazilian national literature. Wells's imitators inherited his style and approach to science, his sense of wonder and his Darwinism, sometimes richly mixed with local eugenic or hygienist discourses. Although they may appear now as social dystopias to the modern reader, these works carry a peculiar historical meaning, mentality and culture, imbued with European influence.

¹⁵ That are several statements from his friends and relatives after his death saying that he was 'on the opposite side of everything pageantry and solemn'.