

## The Poetry of the Discovery of America: Spaces of Tradition and Renewal

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**Abstract:** The heirs of Columbus (1991), by Vizenor, and *A caravela dos insensatos* (2006), by Novaes, are the focus of the present study. By retelling the past, the Canadian narrative highlights aspects such as miscegenation, hybridization and the fusion of American cultures. These images are opposed to those of Columbus presented in the Brazilian literature, as one can see in *A caravela dos insensatos* (2006), by Novaes. In the Canadian universe, the past is recollected on the basis of the oral culture of the natives, who today, take part in the American capitalist society. The fusion of aspects turned to the hybridity, miscegenation and symbiosis of the native and European cultures is presented on innovative perspectives by Vizenor, while the fiction of Novaes follows the traditional historical novel, evoking exalting images of Columbus.

**Key words:** Contemporary American Historical Novel; Poetry of the Discovery; Hybridity; Miscegenation; Amerindian Culture

Among the most important historical events in the course of Western civilizations is the discovery of America, recorded on the 12th of October, 1492, by the Spanish expedition commanded by Christopher Columbus. He searched for an alternative route, through the west, to the exotic lands of Cipango and Cathay. Tzvetan Todorov is one of the many critics who claim that “it is the conquest of America that announces and establishes our present identity. [...] No [dates] are better indicated to mark the beginning of the modern age than the year of 1492, the year in which Columbus crossed the Atlantic Ocean.” (1983: 6 – our translation). Ilan Stavans (2001: 6) thinks similarly, by reporting that when Columbus reached Guanahaní (Watlings Island) for the first time, and then Cuba, Haiti, Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, a new age began. Since that first meeting, the course of America was marked by processes of racial miscegenation and cultural hybridization. Such aspects were always intriguing and drove many American citizens to question their own identity from the cultural bases that opposed each other in that first meeting.

Throughout that process of fusion, symbiosis and also imposition of habits and behaviors, which happened in the American Continent, the number of atrocities committed was very large and the limits were overcome. During the following centuries, new nations arose from the encounter between what would be later called Old World and New World – however some scholars rather use the expression “different worlds” when referring to Europe and America in the context of their first relations. These

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early times after the first encounter were marked by acts of conquest and colonization, which came from the Europeans who arrived here, and by fights, first as a resistance, by the autochthonous people, and then for independence, by the crossbloods – term redefined by Gerald Vizenor in his work for mixed-race people who originated in America.

Even today, these nations are still marked by the cultural essences of the people who founded them. The numerous contributions of each people in this process makes Vargas Llosa affirm that “the wealth of Latin America consists in it being many things at the same time, what makes it a microcosm where almost all races and cultures in the world cohabit” (2006: 8 – our translation). These different cultures started to mix with each other throughout the centuries, imbricating in a symbiosis process, producing new cultural strands, what led to the formation of hybrid societies whose hybrid marks reach contemporary times. As reported by Carlos Fuentes (1992: 11), the crisis that impoverished us also “put the richness of culture in our hands, and forced us to realize that there is not a single Latin American, from Bravo River to Cape Horn, who is not a rightful heir of every single aspect of our cultural tradition.” (our translation). Such process was always conflicting and, for that, the emblematic figure of Christopher Columbus, considered the European who discovered America, still is one of the sources in which the American nations review and question their own roots, in an intense search for self-knowledge created by the critical readings of the past by fiction.

The figure and the deeds of Christopher Columbus, for being linked to the origin of the identity construction of the American nations, were always inspiring for fictional works in the American universe. Thus, the first creations were directed to the exaltation of his actions. Thus, while in the XVI and XVII centuries the saga of Columbus was the topic of European poets and playwrights, in the XVIII century, the North Americans made of the mariner the protagonist of their verses. Among them is Philip Morin Freneau, who believed, according to the reports of Stavans (2001: 59), that Columbus was the favorite historical figure of the North American poets.

Freneau celebrated Columbus in his verses as the “founding father of the Republic” (Stavans, 2001: 59). In the following centuries, with the celebration of the mariner’s actions increasing in importance among Americans and Europeans – and also due to the emergence of the historical novel –, the interest of novelists in the achievements of Columbus grows. They cast on the adventure of reviving, under the new perspectives that the historical novel instills to the Romanesque novels, the great saga of a hero, perfect figure for the fictional creation within the aesthetic standards which were current at the time. Wrapped in an atmosphere of mystery and secrets, the life of Columbus allows the novelist a series of liberties in his configuration of hero/model without incurring in historical contradictions. In the North American poetry of that period, the image of Columbus is cultivated, among others, by Walt Whitman, with the same enthusiasm of the previous century, aligning itself to the historical novel in its uplifting and apologetic discourse.

James Fenimore Cooper was the first great novelist to focus on poeticizing the adventure of Columbus. That happens with his work *Mercedes of Castile, or the voyage to Cathay*, published in 1840. This novel inaugurates a series of exalting and apologetic Romanesque productions in relation to the actions of Columbus, which later happened to be followed in Spain.

The apologetic current of the actions of Columbus in Literature arises, therefore, in the historical novel of the United States, influenced by the lyrical works of Freneau (1772), Barlow (1807) and Whitman (1855), who, since the XVIII century, celebrated the thematic of the discovery in their verses dedicated to the Admiral. Part of these authors’ production was inspired, also, by the enthusiastic biography of Columbus written by Washington Irving in 1827. United, they explore the thematic and the hero in order to consolidate esteem feelings for the mariner who opened the doors to the formation of new nations in the American continent. Such process starts with the immigration of Europeans to America, initiated in the first decades after the Atlantic crossing, performed by Columbus in 1492 and not recorded at that time in Western History. That process also initiates the intense environment of miscegenation and hybridization that will originate the majority of the American nations and their cultural bases.

This laudatory North American production will have a big swing only by the late 80’s of the XX century. That is due to the fact that the poetry of the discovery, in this literary universe, becomes to be

influenced by the quality and receptivity of the Hispanic-American production of the thematic. Historical novels about the adventure of Columbus are produced in the scope of the new Latin American narrative often from the late 70's of the XX century.

These productions follow the critical writing standards of the new Latin American historical novel, whose principles were established by Fernando Aínsa (1988-1991) and Seymour Menton (1993), in which the parody and the carnivalization are essential elements.

These narrative strategies, along with high doses of intertextuality, metafiction and all the narrative strategies studied by Bakhtin, produce critical re-readings of the deeds of Columbus under the view of those who, in this continent, have suffered the consequences of seeing their territory invaded by beings whose real configuration was unachievable to them.

The critical readings of the Hispanic-American writers found a good reception in minority groups in North America, which, based on the Hispanic-American experiences, began – in the decades that followed the publication of the works *The harp and the shadow* (*El arpa y la sombra*) (1979) and *The sea of lentils* (*El mar de las lentejas*) (1979) by the Cubans writers Alejo Carpentier and Antonio Benítez Rojo, *The dogs of Paradise* (*Los perros del Paraíso*) (1983) by the Argentinean Abel Posse and Christopher Unborn (*Cristóbal Nonato*) (1987), by the Mexican Carlos Fuentes – to rewrite, by means of the fiction, the history of the formation of their nations from critical fictional readings of the actions of Columbus and of those who followed him.

Novels such as *The memoirs of Christopher Columbus* (1987), by Stephen Marlowe; *The discoveries of Mrs. Christopher Columbus: his wife's version* (1994), by Paula DiPerna; *The Aztec chronicles: the true history of Christopher Columbus as narrated by Quilaztli of Texcoco* (1995), by Joseph P. Sánchez, among others, were then originated.

Such process of critical re-readings of the discovery, however, did not happen in the Brazilian Romanesque production, which is turned to the thematic, tied to an exalting vision of the actions of Columbus until contemporary times in works such as *Cristóvão Colombo (s/d)*, by Otto Schneider; *Cristoferus* (1992), by Henrique Fleury and *A caravela dos insensatos: uma viagem pela renascença* (2006), by Paulo Novaes.

Among the innovative works in the laudatory system, our attention is drawn, out of the Hispanic-American and United States spaces, to the novels *The heirs of Columbus* (1991), by Gerald Vizenor; *The accidental Indies* (2000), by Robert Finley and *The daughter of Christopher Columbus* (2000), by Réjean Ducharme, in the Canadian literary universe.

Among these works, the novel by Gerald Vizenor stands out, specially, for its confluence of history, fiction and culture that is affected throughout the hybrid narrative, which redraws the encounter between both continents. The cultural universe of the American autochthons is focused in the work of Gerald Vizenor in an innovative way to the eyes of the Brazilian readers. The Canadian novelist ascends from French immigrants from Quebec and from Chippewa natives. In his work, *The heirs of Columbus* (1991), he gives voice to the crossblood descendants of Columbus, conceived, as reported by the narrator, from the relation of the mariner with Samana, a native deity with whom Columbus, according to the fictional discourse, had a relationship in his first trip to America.

The descendants of this relationship are tricksters that carry in their blood the genes of old histories and a “blue radiation” which allows them to do great wonders. These hybrid figures become the great crossblood nation, which results from the encounter of representatives from the Old and from the New World: they are the “heirs” of Columbus. According to the reports of Cunha (2001: 9), the tricksters are abnormal and ambiguous figures who integrate the Amerindian folklore universe. They are capable of doing tricks and of assuming both a human and an animal form; they can also be creative or destructive, heroes or anti-heroes. However, they can be victims of their own tricks. These mythic figures of the Amerindian world have the special characteristic of existing out of the binary and hierarchical dichotomy of heroes and anti-heroes, and out of the imperialist language of good/bad, sacred/profane; thus, they can be inserted in the contemporary context of the deconstructionist notions.

In Vizenor's fiction, the trickster characters, or heirs of Columbus, gather annually to celebrate the encounter of the worlds and tell the stories they carry in their blood. In that sense, they keep the oral

traditions of their mother's tribe and activate the genes which they inherited from the Great Explorer, and which assure them the blue radiation that emanates from them and allows them to do great achievements. Their most supreme value is the memory, which rescues their past stories and makes them survive, for at each meeting "[...] there were more stories to remember in the blood" (Vizenor, 1991: 27), as reported in the beginning of the novel.

While the fiction of Vizenor valorized the presence of American crossblood people as protagonists of its re-reading of the past, the novel *A caravela do insensatos* (2006), by the Brazilian writer Paulo Novaes (2006), exclusively turns itself to the European universe. In it, a trip through the European Renaissance is proposed, starting with the pilgrimage of a group of people led by Columbus that leaves in search of the author of a mysterious book in which the lands discovered by the Admiral are mentioned to be, actually, part of a new continent.

The proposition, however, is to transport the reader – Brazilian, in the first instance – to the European world, in which the images of the newly discovered America still created frenzy among the citizens. On the back cover of Novaes' novel, it is registered: "Discuss politics with Maquiavel. Opine about Mona Lisa's smile. Walk through the Sistine Chapel among Michelangelo's scaffoldings. Discover a new world. Many adventures and just one name: Columbus" (our translation). An advertisement with a very well defined target audience: travelers – factual or imaginary, which may know a distant and "exotic" world, according to the marketing appeal, extremely attractive, fascinating and breathtaking.

In this sense, that also leads to the editorial success in Brazil – and in many other parts of the world – of the narratives mixed of history and fiction which are turned, in contemporary times, to an "exotic" past and site, it is important to highlight the role of the "evasion". Accordingly, Esteves (1998) points to the current matter of the "temporal tourism", that is, the reader's wish of knowing different places and quotidian habits by means of an "inoffensive and already consummate adventure" (Esteves, 1998: 138 – our translation). By reading it, such travelers avoid the risks and attritions of a true adventure, being able to return to the phatic world just by closing the pages of the book.

Thus, the work of Paulo Novaes, *A caravela dos insensatos* (2006), is a very daring literary project, because the novelist intends not only to literarily reconfigure Columbus, but also to embrace all the Renaissance spirit of the early XVI century. Such intent occurs by means of the fictionalization of several of the most prominent figures in the European world at the time. Among these figures there are representatives of the most different art spheres, such as Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Sandro Boticelli, Maquiavel, besides eminent representatives of the public sphere, as the Medici family, the descendants of Catholic Kings – Catherine of Aragon, Isabella of Aragon and Mary of Aragon – Pope Julius II, among several other illustrious names registered in the compendia of history which, at the time, could have had contact with Columbus for being his contemporary.

In the work of Novaes, these eminent characters of historical extraction are the protagonists, and the diegesis focus on their actions. The narrative voice of the novel is fixed on Monk Gaspar Gorriccio – character of historical extraction who was the confessor of Columbus and cooperated in the production of the work *The book of prophecies (O livro das profecias)* (1502), by Columbus and his son Fernando. In its images of Columbus, this view does not spare efforts in creating edifying and laudable perspectives of the mariner.

The construction of the diegesis connects all these illustrious characters of the European Renaissance in the very character of Christopher Columbus, the sailor, who, together with other characters of historical extraction, peregrinates around Europe and, immersed in a romantic fashion, meets the intellectual elite of that time. Novaes' work is divided in four parts, which are subdivided in many chapters. Each part corresponds to a particular geographic position, e.g.: Spain, Italy, Sacrum Empire (Switzerland, Germany, France and Spain) and, again, Spain. This order is also the route along which the reader follows the peregrinations, or investigations, of Columbus and his assistants in an attempt to solve a mystery, the generating element of the diegesis itself: coming across the author of the book where the discovery of a New Continent that would be called America is clearly mentioned.

Not only does Noaves' fiction aim to give readers a contemporaneous way of evasion by means of 'time travels', but it also casts an idealistic vision both upon Renaissance Europe and the historical characters that it recreates in the narrative. Vizenor, though, seems to be aware that the immense cultural

shocks produced all over the centuries in American lands show many consequences in the contemporary world, when the ethnical minorities are discriminated and prevented, because of a historical path, from access to education and to benefits and rights guaranteed by it. This way, it is noticeable, in Vizenor's work, that the oral tradition remains, even before a whole world of "culture and technology" developed by the "white man". That occurs when the narrator shows a character called Stone Columbus, portrayed as the announcer of a radio talk show, spreading the stories of his ancestors, heirs of the great explorer, Christopher Columbus. A similar search for origins is also present in the novel of Gerald Vizenor, which is composed of two distinct actions, each of them adding up to a part of the narrative. The first of them focuses on the actions of the "heirs of Columbus" when retrieving their identity.

In that sense, they go after their past by appealing to the memory in order to "retell the story of the admiral and resuscitate his past", in the words of Cunha (2001: 30 – our translation). Besides trying to preserve the collective memory by means of the orality, the heirs of Columbus also seek the sources of their identity. In search for their origins and ancestor traditions, they search for indigenous historical sources, such as tribal medicines, masks, feathers, celebrations and the body remains of their ancestors – among them, those of Christopher Columbus, of course, which are currently owed by The Brotherhood of American Explorers, and those of Pocahontas as well – buried in an English chapel.

The tricksters use their culture, by means of shamanist magic, to retrieve the above-mentioned relics. In their reserve, neat the tavern where they meet year after year to tell the stories mingled in their blood, the heirs have a graveyard called "The House of Life", where they bury "the lost and lonesome bones that were liberated by the heirs from museums" (Vizenor, 1991: 05).

This first action of the book exposes the attempt of the natives to keep the tradition of their people untouched around a strange society, just as what happens to Latin American peoples and to North American ones, whose native-born populations were drastically reduced, and whose lands were taken from their hands, reflected in their current attempt to keep their original culture active, by living in reserves, with the help of NGOs and of the government. (Oliveira Junior; Fleck, 2009)

The natives, descendants of Columbus, thus, rebuild, in a first time excerpt of the novel, the whole track of the heirs of Columbus all over the centuries and up to the contemporary world. In the present, the tricksters take on their human shapes, and are normal integrants of the capitalist American society. In *The heirs of Columbus*, Vizenor shows a mix of reality and fiction, telling the story of native Americans that belong to the Anishinaabe tribe, in which the hypothesis that Christopher Columbus was a descendant of the Maya, who inhabited certain parts of Latin America between the centuries of IV and IX BC., is a real belief, as well as the supposed fact that "The Maya brought civilization to the savages of the Old World and the rest is natural" (Vizenor, 1991: 9). Stories like these are usually referred to in the annual meetings of the tricksters. Thus, this version wins a discursive organization in the texture of the novel, as, for example, they say that the Mayas had crossed the Atlantic long before the Spaniards. "The Mayan Shamans and hand talkers landed unused in the Old World and declared their heritable radiance in the shadows and spiritual causes of Jesus Christ, Christopher Columbus, and Sephardic Jews" (Vizenor, 1991: 28).

When contrasting the historical registers about Columbus and the beliefs around him found in the culture of the tricksters, the official written version and the oral and cultural one build the novel dialogism and enable new versions of the past, including the one that says that "Jesus Christ and Columbus are Maya", by Felipa (Vizenor, 1991: 26). Once again, there stands out another characteristic of the critical eye cast upon the past in Vizenor's work: the polyphony. The vision and the voice of the discourse do not focus in a single point of view in this novel, contrary to what happens in Novaes' work. When using Gorriccio as the enunciative vision and voice of the discourse, Novaes' novel may offer a quite interesting vision of Columbus, apart from subjectifying it through the considerations of a less important character, to the historical material that maintains the hybridity of the novel. Thus, the story starts with Gorriccio making his way to Columbus' house, in Valladolid, where Columbus hits him with the news about the death of Queen Isabel: "We were the same age – born in the same year, you know, brother? We shared the same faith, the same dreams, the same beliefs, the same values. What more can

one crave for? Do you understand the meaning of twin soul? Do you?" (Novaes, 2006: 14 – our translation).

In this first dialogue found in the novel, the inspiring images of the characters of historical extraction are already shaped, reset by the fictional discourse, especially those of Queen Isabel – which will echo on remarked aspects of her daughters, recreated through the fiction of Novaes' narrative – and such images travel all over the narrative. Columbus, "the Queen's twin soul", therefore passes by the same process of exaltation, when the spiritual similarities that had always bound the sovereign to the mariner become evident in the voice that announces the discourse.

The inspiring discourse about the life and deeds of Columbus, uttered in the voice of the narrator of Paulo Novaes' novel (2006), seems to be a reflection of that romantic idealizer, also found in Washington Irving's novel (1992: 13): "[...] the bitter and various lessons of his youth blessed him with practical knowledge, [...] with tameless resolution, [...] that so well distinguished him later" (our translations), which is paraphrased by Gorriccio in *A caravela dos insensatos* (2006), causing the more experienced reader in this subject to feel that both books, Cooper's and Novaes', use the inspiring biography of Irving as intertext.

Before changing matters to the planned route, though, all of them attend to Queen Isabel's funeral, in Granada. Columbus takes the opportunity to question his son, Fernando, about the death of the Queen, and then he learns that before her death she had told him all the adventures of her fourth trip to the Indies. In the voice of Fernando, who repeats the last words he had heard from the Queen, new praising images around the admiral come to life: "[...] she whispered to me: be proud of your father. He is a man of character, and he always honored our kingdom and the holy Lord, bless him. I have always known what he would be capable of, and I'm sure my country will long owe him lots" (Novaes, 2006: 33 – our translation). Such words touch the main character and cooperate with the laudatory purpose found in the discourse of *A caravela dos insensatos* (2006).

As Novaes' novel tends to establish inspiring images of the Catholic Kings and their ancestry, as well as of Columbus and all the historical figures incorporated to the narrative tissue of the novel, the reconstruction by Vizenor values the old tribal beliefs cultivated by the tricksters, who seek to repatriate objects they consider sacred. Therefore, when a character called Doric Michéd, a member of The Brotherhood of American Explorers, announces he has hold of sacred native items, the lawyer of the tribe, Felipa Flowers, a trickster that lives with her daughter Miigis and her husband, the trickster Stone Columbus, in a trailer, tries to repatriate them. In that intent, she counts with the help of a shaman, Transom. Doric intended to auction off the remains of Christopher Columbus, starting with an initial bid of one million dollars. Felipa and Transom make up a plan to recover the relics and, with the help of the shamanistic magic that enables them to transform into animals, they succeed. Doric goes to court, looking to retrieve the pouches stolen by the shaman, but the court decides to favor the natives. However, when Felipa tries to repatriate the remains of Pocahontas, which are placed in England, she ends up being murdered. That happening provokes a change of strategy in the actions of the heirs of Columbus, who realize that "[...] recovering their origins was not a successful strategy. [...] instead of recovering their past, the heirs invent their origins by creating the crossblood nation on a hybrid tribal identity" (Cunha, 1991: 31).

That way, in the second half of the book, holding on to the oral traditions of the American native culture of Samana – mother of the heirs – and still giving the righteous value to the historical sources, importantly considered in the universe of Columbus – father of the tricksters – the crossbloods decide to open themselves to the contemporary reality, constituting a community that is aware of their past and able to fight against the resistance actions of the present. That happens with basis on the fact that there is no pure and unique identity and that any given individual who shares the values of the community owns a hybrid identity. Such fact makes of the subject an integrator of the great tribe. The hybridity found in Vizenor's text stands out for the confluence of different languages and versions of the past and for the use of the "trickster", which, in the book, represents "not only a character [...] it also establishes a peculiar form of discourse, which values humor and imagination, language play and ambiguity" (Cunha, 2001: 34-35).

In *The heirs of Columbus* (1991), Vizenor creates a derogatory narrative of the catholic European discourse when he reinvents the Bible tradition of creation of men, changing the normal fathers of humanity Adam and Eve into the characters of an American tribal divinity, the oldest of all female tricksters – Samana –, and Christopher Columbus, the discoverer, in order to approach the subject of searching for an identity carried by the American half-blood nations in the scope of the poetry of the discovery. The fictional discourse, besides establishing intertextuality with that of the Bible, distorts conceptions and reveals other possibilities that value the miscegenation, for example.

Such strategies enable the creation of images around the admiral that match with the crossblood, who, propelled by the strength of his genes, makes the way back to the lands of his ancestors. Such images, arm in arm with a especially destructive discourse, uttered by the descendents of Columbus – Vizenor's tricksters (2001) – become, then, quite trustworthy, as they do not oppose themselves to registered truths, but, instead, they get leveled to another version of the facts, which fits to the contradictions and ambiguities registered by the admiral.

The courses of the narrative are therefore altered when Felipa Flowers is murdered. This happening causes the other heirs to found a crossblood community that develops cure therapies, as the heirs own a gene code – the “blue radiation”, which Columbus once owned, and which enables them to perform therapeutic actions and miraculous cures.

Following an analysis by Cunha (2001: 44-52), the criticism to the capitalist and racist American society grows stronger in this excerpt of the book, by means of an improved use of the language, in which irony, parody, humor and intertextuality are frequently used, apart from metaphors which refer to the artificialism of the consumer society and establish the relation between the burning desire and the seek of gold that motivated Columbus with the attitudes of the current American society and its greed for money.

The book is narrated from the perspective of the natives, who search for an alternative for the version brought by the official historiography, which, up to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, only managed to provide the maintenance of the *status-quo* imposed by the winner, the one who groped a certain economical and political power. Such discourse receives approval from fiction itself in the narrative of Novaes (2006).

The prime intent of Novaes in rebuilding Renaissance is usually subject to the mystifying discourse of Columbus, always discursively set under the highest religious values, blessed by heavenly visions which served as guide and illumination for the fulfillment of his discovery entrepreneur. In Novaes' book (2006), not only does Columbus become an ancestor of Isaiah, but also a source of revelation of the intentions of saving the world coming from the Virgin Mary, who appears to him in occasions of astounding affliction and doubt. The sacred aura extends from the setting of Queen Isabel to Columbus, who calls himself a “twin soul of hers”. In the fictional discourse, this mystified image of Columbus receives the approval of nobody less than Pope Julio II himself, to whom Columbus pays a visit when he passes by Italy. In this occasion, the narrative shows that the Pope, a profound admirer of Columbus, decides to celebrate a mass in his homage. One can see the hallowed images of Columbus in the words the Pope utter in the novel, exalted by many of his great admirers. It is worth reproducing an excerpt of such an inspiring and mystifying discourse found in the book by Novaes:

‘Dear believers of mine, today I would like to speak to you about faith, the heavenly strength that pushes normal people into taking extraordinary attitudes. It is one of the Christian virtues, and those who cultivate it have guaranteed the way of communion with the Lord. Today, here with us, lies the living witness of the strength of faith, his Excellency, the Admiral Christopher Columbus, discoverer of the New World, and promoter of the gospel in those lands. [...]. What propelled him to such adventure? The desire to serve God, to catechize the Indians and expand the Christian frontiers did. Devoted to the Virgin Mary, he dedicated the cheers of his discoveries to her, and resorted to her in the crises of his journey in order to obtain the hope that would allow him to face the terrible challenges in his way. [...]. Dear Admiral, we here, today, owes you everything you have done towards our beliefs, our faith, and our salvation’. (Novaes, 2007: 131 – our translation).

At each new encounter of Columbus along his journey through Europe, these exalting and inspiring images are repeated and widen, without ever questioning the impacts of his actions on the pre-Colombian American universe. The linear structure of the novel and the absolutely chronological narrative, composed of very few flashes of memory, also show their character, focused on the preservation of the traditional parameters of the historical novel, which, as registered by Fernández Prieto (2003), are still held in the current world, with just some structural changes that tell the classic models from one another.

The narrative of Novaes goes along the entire route previously planned by the characters in Europe and, at the end of it, they return to Valladolid, without the answer they were looking for. The death of Columbus in 1506 is always narrated through Goriccio's mouth and, as the present of the narrative advances a few years after this event, everything the mysterious book had foreseen comes true: the lands discovered by Columbus were really a new continent and it would be named America.

A reading of both books presented here can reveal that in the contemporary American literary universe, the character of Columbus – and all the actions that resulted from his feats – goes on under a dichotomy sight. On the one hand, there are critical readings about this past elaborated by the Hispanic-American narratives, by a few American writers and, on another hand, also by works like those of Paulo Novaes (2006), in the Brazilian field, that follow the exalting tendencies of this subject, which were cultivated by romantic American writers in the past and, in parts, in the current Spanish literary universe.

One can realize what Zilá Bernd (1998: 18) defends as hybridization in the fiction of Vizenor, that is, the “deterritorialization procedures of symbolic processes that generate hybrid cultures, processes of conversion and recycling of contributions of modernity that are adapted to the environment” (our translation). It is not what happens in Novaes' narrative, where the recovery of the past uniquely serves to apply old values to it, already determined by the hegemonic historical discourse which determined the way our past would be fulfilled by a discourse imbued with veracity. Novaes' work lacks this “process of re-symbolizing, in which the memory of the objects remains, and in which the tension among distinct elements generates new cultural objects that correspond to attempts of translation or subversive participation of the culture with origin in another culture [...]” (Bernd, 1998: 18 – our translation).

Inter-American readings can therefore contribute to make concepts like racial miscegenation and cultural hybridization reach wider dimensions also in the scope of Compared Literature, which can really become, as imagined by Zilá Bernd (1998: 18), “a process of creation” of our cultures. This is a learning that can lead America as a whole to recognize that “a great richness is placed in this mixture. Being a Continent that lacks an identity because it owns them all”, as exposed by Vargas Llosa (2006: 9), when mentioning that every nation has already contributed somehow for the cultural shaping of Latin America.

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