RESENHA REVIEW

Robert Patrick Newcomb. *Nossa and Nuestra America: Inter-American Dialogues*. Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2012. 265 p.

Robert Patrick Newcomb's *Nossa and Nuestra América* offers a detailed and carefully constructed intellectual history of Pan Americanist discourse that centers on the work of four well-known scholars and *politico-cultural* activists: Uruguayan José Enrique Rodó (1871-1917); Mexican Alfonso Reyes (1889-1959); and Brazilians Joaquim Nabuco (1849-1910) and Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (1902-1982). Newcomb's engagement with these writers – all canonical figures in the context of their respective national literatures – coalesces around a central question that he poses both to frame his study and to delimit the otherwise massive bibliography on the history of "Latin America" as an idea: How does Brazil fit into the broader region imagined as *magna patria* (or *patria grande*) in the Boliviarian tradition and imaginary?

Newcomb sets out to answer this question by examining some of the lesser-known components of these intellectuals' work in diachronic dialogue with many other Pan Americanist critics – from José Martí to Walter Mignolo – and by characterizing Brazil's Latin Americanness as "problematic" due to factors ranging from obvious linguistic difference to complex negotiations of colonial legacies. He goes a step further in claiming Brazil to be a "necessarily" problematic piece of the Latin American puzzle for reasons that boil down to power: the country is too massive, both geographically and economically, to be excluded (21-3). This power differential is one of the main reasons, Newcomb suggests, that Brazilian and "Spanish American" intellectuals have tended to approach the "problem" differently – the latter seeking to project onto Brazil some sense of continental, "Latin" oneness at all costs; the former insisting, instead, on Brazilian specificity and exceptionalism. In short, "Latin America" needs Brazil (as opposed to Haiti or Paraguay, which could also be

"problematic" for the project of uniting Latin-ness across the Americas), while Brazil, effectively a continent unto itself, has long managed perfectly well on its own. Newcomb raises MERCOSUL as just one example of how the uneven distribution of power and influence across the region must continue to color any serious consideration of inter-American relations. Notwithstanding the intertwined economies of the last several decades and the cheery rhetoric of collaborative regionalism that tends to accompany such ventures, Brazil's dominance still is unmatched (and unchecked): the country runs a massive trade surplus through the collaborative venture while all other members continue to wade through deep deficits.

Following the introductory chapter, Newcomb begins his series of four case studies with the thought of José Enrique Rodó – not because Rodó's work predates that of all other scholars under study (Nabuco wrote earlier), but because his version of *americanismo*, together with what Newcomb considers its inconsistencies and shortcomings, establish the parameters within which the book's remaining arguments will be deployed. Newcomb maintains that Rodó's Hispanocentric view of the Americas and enthusiastic but relatively uninformed embrace of Brazil as an idea (never so much as a place) set the stage for key Latin Americanist dialogues and debates over the course of the twentieth century. Rodó's scant first-hand knowledge of Brazil made it easier, Newcomb suggests, to elide linguistic, cultural, and historical difference and to imagine Uruguay's massive neighbor as close kin in "race," "spirit," and expression. In an unpublished 1910 speech, Newcomb notes, Rodó went as far as to claim that Spanish and Portuguese were a single language with "different hues" (81). Appealing in several of his essays to "Iberianism" (rather than Hispanism, the more common and preferred term for many of his contemporaries), Rodó could downplay Brazil's distinctiveness more effectively and imagine, along with Francisco Bilbao, Rubén Darío, José Martí, and other likeminded thinkers, an ideally cohesive Latin America that existed in radical contrast with the "utilitarian" Sparta of the North: *el águila del norte, la otra América*, Calibán. As epitomized by Rodó's most widely cited essay – *Ariel* – the imperative of North-South opposition made the task of traversing Tordesillas not only urgent, but perhaps, in some cases, even possible.

Newcomb's second case study brings us to the Brazilian side of Tordesilhas and back one generation. By the time Rodó published *Ariel*, in 1900, Joaquim Nabuco had already been thinking and writing about Brazil's place in the Americas for decades. Although best known for his abolitionist ideas and his contradictory and sometimes controversial declarations on "race" and non-white peoples at home and abroad, Nabuco was intensely concerned, as Newcomb demonstrates, with the possible structures that democratic governance might adopt on Brazilian soil. A lawyer by training, Nabuco was particularly influenced during his studies by the writings of John Stuart Mill and Walter Bagehot, through whose ideas he would later consider the relationship between legislative and executive power and, more broadly, the distinct functions of and interplay between "efficient" and "dignified" roles of government. Nabuco, who like Bagehot, deemed the uneducated masses (or *povo*, in more optimistic moments) unprepared for the "efficient" role of government and thus generally incapable of effective self-rule, emphasized instead the continued importance of government's "dignified" role – that is, of the ceremonial functions that would lie within the (inherently limited) realm of their understanding. Skeptical of Brazil's republican movement and haunted by the specter of *caudillismo* he saw manifested in newly independent nations across the region, Nabuco became a careful student of English parliamentary government (especially as reflected in Bagehot's 1867 volume, *The English Constitution*) and continued to advocate, even after the fall of empire, for a Brazilian constitutional monarchy as a path toward a more enlightened republicanism to be achieved in the (distant) future.

Newcomb concludes the chapter with Nabuco's writings on *Balmaceda* – Julio Bañados Espinosa's study of the 1891 Chilean revolution. Although Nabuco's approach to post-revolution Chile might appear at first blush to represent a shift in his thinking about national democracy and Brazil's future role in the region (namely, an overture to the country's South American neighbors and their particular versions of republicanism), Newcomb maintains that the monarchist's stance reveals quite the opposite. Indeed, Nabuco's partial embrace of Chile's post-revolution "parliamentary republic" was only possible because Chile was markedly *un-South American*, and thus largely *unrepresentative* of what he saw as the nominally democratic and mostly dysfunctional governments of the region. Chile might have been, in other words, the least-worst option and next-best thing to Brazil itself.

The third case in Newcomb's study examines the humanist discourse of Mexican Alfonso Reyes, whose voluminous writings spanned from Greco--Roman antiquity to the Mexican politics of his day, engaging with innumerous other themes – gastronomy, travel, and poetry, for example – along the way. In keeping with his analysis of Rodó, Newcomb studies Reyes to examine his uses of Brazil in the formulation of a continental vision of American political and ideological thought. As, too, in the case of Rodó's work, Newcomb finds Reyes' appropriation of Brazilianness problematic, not least because his "Hispanocentrism" leads him to overlook the country's distinctiveness with regard to language, history, and cultural practices, and to project onto it a distorted if desirable oneness with Spanish America. Key among these projections, Newcomb suggests, was the sense that Brazilians themselves would choose to identify with their Spanish-speaking neighbors if given an opportunity to do so. Part of Newcomb's argument throughout the book is, on the contrary, that for the most part, they have and do not.

While Reyes thus repeats some of Rodó's sins by squeezing Brazil into a Pan American project with which many Brazilians would never seek to identify, the Mexican did nonetheless engage more deeply with Brazilian culture and history than his Uruguayan predecessor. Having served as Brazil's Mexican ambassador in Rio de Janeiro for six years immediately following the 1930 revolution that brought Getúlio Vargas to power, Reyes revealed deeply mixed sentiments regarding his temporary home. He vacillated, on the one hand, between intense engagement with and respect for Brazilian (mostly high) culture and its practitioners, and on the other hand, intense frustration over what he perceived to be a Brazilian inclination toward separatism and even isolationism vis-à-vis other Latin American countries. Thus he would envision Brazil (and Latin America) as an *Última Tule* in his 1942 volume by the same name (176-7).

Like Rodó, Reyes bolstered his argument for continental unity by downplaying differences between the Spanish and Portuguese languages, declaring in a 1942 essay that the latter formed a "spider web" entirely "permeable" to speakers of the former (174-5). Although Newcomb points out with some irony that, despite this assertion, Reyes's own use of Portuguese was quite limited even during the years he resided in Rio de Janeiro, he disagrees with the critique offered up by Jorge Schwartz (and others), equating Reyes's scant use of Brazil's national language with a broader lack of attentiveness

to Brazilian history and culture, or to the Portuguese language itself. And yet, Newcomb concludes, Reyes's documented interest in these questions and evident recognition of Brazilian distinctiveness vis-à-vis "Spanish America" did not prevent him from espousing a generally Hispanocentric continental thought into which Brazil would be included too readily and unproblematically.

In his fourth case study and final chapter, Newcomb returns to the Brazilian side of Tordesilhas to examine Sérgio Buarque de Holanda's early writings and his 1936 classic, *Raízes de Brasil* – widely considered (alongside Freyre's contemporaneous *Casa Grande e Senzala*) among the most influential reflections on Brazilianness to appear in the twentieth century. Newcomb's point in rereading Buarque's 1920 essay, "Ariel," and above all, *Raízes*, is to demonstrate what he calls their "obscured roots" – that is, an almost entirely unacknowledged debt to the thought of José Enrique Rodó. Newcomb claims the fact of the alleged obfuscation as (further) evidence of Brazilian intellectuals' pervasive practice of distancing themselves – philosophically, culturally, and politically – from their Spanish American counterparts rather than mapping out, or in some cases, even recognizing the common ground on which they stand. Newcomb asserts toward the end of the chapter (and thus toward the end of book), when considering Silviano Santiago's 2006 study of Buarque's *Raízes* alongside Octavio Paz's *El laberinto de la soledad*, that Santiago also disappoints for not examining with greater care or interest the Brazilian historian's intellectual indebtedness to Rodó. This shortcoming reveals for Newcomb no malice on the part of the authors (he cites specific instances when Buarque failed to acknowledge Rodó, for instance, yet never calls him a plagiarist). Rather, it indicates a sort of willful blindness to important interests and concerns that span the Tordesilhas/Tordesillas divide and ought to be recognized and examined as such. To do otherwise, Newcomb indicates, is to participate in, or at best, prove complicit with an unfortunate reproduction of exclusions like those he has documented with such care.

Working against such "disconsonance" (a term he borrows from David William Foster), Newcomb contends that there is much to be gained for individual and collective research projects, as well as for institutional intellectual initiatives, by engaging with the Luso-Hispanic paradigm he establishes and employs in his book (and in his work more generally). And while it seems essential to acknowledge (as Newcomb, I suspect, would agree) that other comparativist paradigms (African-diasporic, inter-indigenous, trans-Atlantic,

migration studies, etc.) might be similarly fruitful for students and scholars of the region, *Nossa and Nuestra América* offers a rich and persuasive example of how the Luso-Hispanic framework can help to shed new light not only on Brazil's historical role in Latin America as a place and an idea, but also, indeed, on Brazil's increasingly powerful and prominent role in the world.

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