

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

KRISTA BRUNE

In this 2012 book, Robert Patrick Newcomb, currently an assistant professor of Luso-Brazilian literature at UC Davis, establishes an inter-American dialogue between Brazil and Spanish American literatures by focusing on the essay tradition of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Rather than provide a panorama of the essayistic production throughout Latin America in these years, Newcomb concentrates on four central figures: Uruguayan critic José Enrique Rodó, Brazilian writer and diplomat Joaquim Nabuco, Mexican humanist Alfonso Reyes, and Brazilian historian Sérgio Buarque de Holanda. This comparative approach proves fruitful as it inserts Brazil into the discussion of pan-Americanism, illuminating both the similarities and the distinctions between cultural, historic, and linguistic traditions. Newcomb pays particular attention to Spanish American attempts to subsume Brazil and the Portuguese language under the matrix of Spanish when including Brazil as a part of Latin America. He also suggests a desire of Brazilians to distinguish themselves from Spanish American intellectual traditions.

The book opens with a first chapter that poses the question of this inter-American study. How can Brazil be understood in relation to pan-American constructs and, more broadly, what is the role of Brazil within Latin America? Newcomb begins by exploring the etymology of Latin America as a term coined by the French intellectual Michel Chevalier (1806-1879). He notes the ethnic nationalism that inflected Chevalier's conception of Latin America. Newcomb identifies Simon Bolívar's *América meridional* and José Martí's *Nuestra América* as potential alternatives, although they are also tied to individual political projects. He thus rightly claims that "Latin America" is a historical, ideological, and geographical invention with a particular intellectual genealogy (14-15). He states his goal for the project as describing "the *confluences* and *disjunctions* between certain essayists' understanding of Latin America as a concept, and of Brazil's specific role in alternately reinforcing and challenging this concept" (15). Newcomb identifies Brazil as "*necessarily problematic*." Brazil raises questions about the imprecise term of "Latin America" due to its distinct linguistic, historic,

political, and cultural trajectory. Given its size and regional importance, Brazil cannot be ignored and is therefore also *necessary* to conceptions of Latin America as a geographic entity. Yet, when Spanish American intellectuals conceive of pan-Americanism or Latin America, they at times project Spanish American identity onto Brazil, claiming that in actuality Portuguese is a component of Spanish language. After outlining these tendencies, Newcomb justifies his title for the work as *nossa* and *nuestra* to illustrate the comparative aspect and the necessity to include Brazil and Portuguese in the pan-American vision of “Our” America proposed by Spanish American intellectuals.

Following this introductory chapter, Newcomb proceeds to outline the influence of José Enrique Rodó. According to Rodó’s notion of “magna patria,” Brazil forms a part of *Hispanoamerica* and Portuguese and Spanish are two matrixes of the same language. The chapter highlights the problematic aspect of Rodó’s argument, which elides distinctions between language, culture, and history. Rodó bases his claim on a mis-reading of the Portuguese writer Almeida Garrett’s vision of *iberismo*. Garrett was skeptical of equating cultural *iberismo* with a political alliance. The distinction between these two thinkers is most evident in terms of language as Rodó views Portuguese as part of Spanish while Garrett argues for the importance of maintaining a linguistic distinction. Selecting of Garrett, rather than a more sympathetic Iberian voice, suggests Rodó’s unfamiliarity with Luso-Brazilian letters. Rodó’s *Ariel* and other writings nonetheless proved fundamental to the conception of a Latin American tradition.

The subsequent chapter concentrates on the work of Joaquim Nabuco as a writer and diplomat. Nabuco emerged as an essential figure in the critique of slavery, writing an important treatise on *O abolicionismo*. While he argued for the abolition of slavery, Nabuco was also a monarchist and a defender of Dom Pedro II. He feared the “South Americanization” of Brazil. In the early stage of his career, his travels to Europe and other Spanish American countries proved fundamental for his conception of the ideal form of government. He viewed Spanish American governments as weak imitations of the already inferior model of federal democratic governance in the United States. Nabuco instead argued for the English model of parliamentary monarchy. Newcomb traces the influences of English political thinker Walter Bagehot on Nabuco’s support for a constitutional monarchy akin to the British monarchy. While Nabuco argued for abolition, the dissolution of imperial

Brazil surprised Nabuco and forced his political views to change. Initially, he remains critical of the potential negative impacts of Spanish American models yet arriving at a more nuanced opinion as Newcomb highlights in his insightful reading of *Balmaceda* as a parallel to the Tomás Antônio Gonzaga's satirical *Cartas chilenas*. In both pieces, the situation in Chile serves as a foil to comment on the events in Brazil. Newcomb outlines the development of Nabuco's though following the founding of the Republic as the former monarchist becomes a proponent on pan-American relations between the US and Brazil and occupies the role of first Brazilian ambassador to the US.

Chapter four returns to the realm of Spanish American essayists with the Mexican diplomat, writer, and humanist Alfonso Reyes. Newcomb establishes the intellectual connection between Rodó and Reyes by situating Reyes within the generation of *arielistas* in Mexico known as the *ateínistas*. Whereas the work of Reyes may be less known than that of his contemporary José Vasconcelos, it proves more important when considering the relationship between Spanish America and Brazil. Revealing influences of Rodó, Reyes envisions the possibility of founding a new Athens in a city in the Americas. His argument has parallels to the work of Rodó and Vasconcelos arguing for the classical origins of the Americas. Yet, he exhibits a greater awareness of the Luso-Brazilian traditions, due in part to his role as the Mexican ambassador to Brazil from 1930 to 1936. During that period, he established friendships with well-known Brazilian writers like Manuel Bandeira. The final section of this chapter concentrates in particular on the Mexican intellectual's thoughts on language, utopia, and the position of Brazil in the Americas. Tracing these influences, Newcomb notes Reyes's receptivity to the works of Nabuco, Buarque de Holanda, and Gilberto Freyre, especially their conception of Brazil as politically and racially conciliatory. Yet, in spite of this increased familiarity with Brazilian intellectual thought, Reyes still claims that Portuguese should be understood as related, yet not equivalent to, Spanish. Newcomb highlights the metaphors and descriptions used by Reyes to categorize the relationship between Portuguese and Spanish. For Spanish speakers, Portuguese represents a "permeable spider web" with parallel vocabulary and other linguistic similarities. Newcomb rightly views this perspective on the linguistic relationship as indicative of the lingering hispanocentrism evident in the work of Rodó, Martí, and other calls for pan-American unity.

In the final chapter, Newcomb turns his attention to the preeminent historian Sérgio Buarque de Holanda as he teases out the potential *arielista* influences in his work. The analysis uncovers lesser-known texts from Buarque de Holanda's early career as a modernist literary critic to reveal a presence of Rodó's influence, although never made explicit, in his writing. Newcomb claims that this omission indicates a desire among Brazilian intellectuals to differentiate Brazil from Spanish America. The chapter continues to explore this tendency towards distinction in the work of Buarque de Holanda especially as evidenced in *Raízes do Brasil*. While scholars often highlight Weber's influence on Buarque de Holanda, Newcomb approaches the essay from a slightly different comparative angle by highlighting its origin in an earlier, unfinished project *Teoria da América*. He points to the distinction between *iberismo* and *americanismo* as two potential paths for development in the 20th century. These concepts emphasize a distinction between the old and new world and imply the broader pan-American or "novomundista" perspective of Buarque de Holanda. Yet, neither the historian nor subsequent literary scholars such as Silviano Santiago expressly recognized the influence of Rodó. Newcomb ends the chapter and the book by suggesting that current scholars like Santiago and Richard Morse reproduce this failure to acknowledge the *arielista* tendencies in Brazilian thought inadvertently as a way of differentiating Brazil from the rest of the Americas.

Newcomb's careful comparative work expands on the scholarship initiated by Jorge Schwarz, Raúl Antelo, and other scholars calling for a tearing down of the line of Tordesilhas. Concentrating on key figures allows Newcomb to enter into more details of the individuals' work while also providing four distinct entrances into the same problematic of understanding the national essay within the context of a pan-American impulse. He presents a reading of these national questions in dialogue with questions that extend beyond the specificities of a given country and its linguistic, historical, and cultural trajectory. This study provides an essential contribution to the growing field of inter-American studies while also suggesting that a great deal of work remains to be done.