

**DRUHÝ BŘEH ZÁPADU. Výbor iberooamerických esejí.\* [The Second Coast of the West: Anthology of Ibero-American essays.] Introduction and editing by Anna Housková.**

Prague: Mladá fronta, 2004,  
ISBN: 80-204-1139-9, 372 pages.

A team of scientists-teachers and PhD students (eleven altogether including the editor of the volume) of the Department of Romance Studies, Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, led by renowned Czech Hispanist, Professor Anna Housková, recently published a vast collection of translations of important essays presenting various sides of history, culture and everydayness of the Hispano-American and marginally also of the Luso-American world to Czech readers. Essays from eleven countries of Latin America are presented in the collection. There are 30 translations, mostly from Argentina and Mexico – five each, followed by Cuba and Peru with four essays; Brazil is represented three times, Venezuela, Uruguay and Columbia twice each and the Dominican Republic, Chile and Paraguay once.

In her introduction (pp. 11-26), Hispanist Anna Housková reflects on Ibero-American culture, which is of course not completely unknown to the Czech public. Let us mention some of the works published recently showing the identity of Latin America and its

distinctiveness from Anglophone and Francophone Americas in the north: C. Fuentes, *Pohřbené zrcadlo*. [The Buried Mirror] Praha: Mladá fronta, 2003 (review also being part of this issue), E. Lukavská, *“Zázračné reálno” a magický realismus*. [“Magic Reality” and Magic Realism] Brno: Host, 2003, A. Housková, *Imaginace Hispánské Ameriky. Hispanoamerická kulturní identita v esejích a v románech*. [Imagination of Hispanic America. Hispano-American Cultural Identity in Essays and Novels] Praha: Torst, 1998, or A. Müllerová, *Hledání kulturní identity Španělské Ameriky*. [A Search for Cultural Identity of Spanish America] Thesis, Praha: Filozofická fakulta UK, 1998. Europeans always denoted Latin America and its inhabitants, both autochthonous Indian tribes and since the early Colonial Period Mestizos, Creoles, Mulattos, Zambos, Quadroons and members of other mixed groups<sup>1</sup>, as “the others” and their problems as the “problems of the others” (cf. T. Todorov, 1996). However Latin American thinkers often educated in European and North American universities think differently: “We are the outpost of the West,” *un extremo de Occidente*, as one of them, Mexican Octavio Paz, emphasizes. On the other hand, world-known North American political scientist Samuel Huntington in his controversial book *The Clash of Civilization* published 1996, regards Latin America (Ibero-America) as one of eight independent world civi-

\* The project was subsidized by the Grant Agency of Charles University in a grant called *Iberoamerika jako soužití kultur* [Ibero-America as a Coexistence of Cultures].

<sup>1</sup> Since the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the colonial authorities in Mexico have distinguished sixteen socially clearly differentiated groups (castes).

lizations. From the civilization point of view, at least according to some authors, Latin America represents the most western promontory of Europe. Its situation resembles that of the countries of the Iberian Peninsula where three different cultural worlds co-existed for hundreds of years: Christian, Arabic, or better to say Moorish (Berber-Arabic) and Jewish. In Latin American countries, these three dominant ethno-cultural substrates were joined by the original one – native, Indian; this group was of course not homogeneous. On the contrary, e.g., there were without any doubt bigger differences between Classical Mayans and nomadic North-Mexican tribes than between Iberian Christians and Moors. And due to a highly developed slavery system, the three substrates were soon supplemented by an African one. Already at the end of the Colonial Period, the topic of unity and variability became the main object of self-reflection of Latin American culture and it still continues to be. Within particular Latin American countries, the opposition of civilization and barbarism is most often studied. The topic was most significantly formulated in Argentinian “material” by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento in his famous book *Facundo*, which will be discussed later on.

An endeavor to delimit themselves from the powerful northern neighbor is another “eternal” topic for Latin American philosophers and scholars. Some of them, such as the abovementioned Octavio Paz, see in both the civilizations “two various, but probably irreconcilable, versions of western civilization.” Others, like Uruguayan essayist and philosopher José Enrique Rodó, succumbed to the

*Nordo-mania* fashion, whose advocates praise the United States as their ideal.

The review cannot cover all 30 translations; therefore we limit ourselves to the essays that contribute to the studies of cultural identity of Latin America and their topic is more or less related to social/cultural anthropology. The very first essay of the anthology can surprise many readers because it is the famous *Letter from Jamaica* by nobody other than El Libertador (the Liberator) **Simón Bolívar (1783–1830)**. The letter, addressed to British citizen Henry Cullen living in Jamaica, is an outline of Bolívar’s vision of the future America after gaining independence for Latin American countries. Although Bolívar wrote it during battles against colonial oppression, he compares the state of America at that time with the situation when the Roman Empire broke down and each part created a political system suiting its interests leading to the old nations being restored after some time. Bolívar criticizes the disunity of Latin America stemming from indefinite identity: “... we keep only ruins of what had existed, and we are not Indians and not Europeans, but something between legitimate keepers of the country and Spanish conquistadors...” (pp. 30-31). All of Bolívar’s endeavor is aimed at gradual unification of the subcontinent. The center of the subcontinent could have been, according to his ideas, in Mexico or in the Isthmus of Panama<sup>2</sup>. In his *Carta*, Bolívar shows that

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<sup>2</sup> Bolívar was aware of the surviving paternalism of the Latin American countries. Thus he saw in powerful Mexico a paternalistic center capable of caring for their weaker neighbors. Later he promoted the idea of creation of

he was not only a man of the “sword,” but also a man of the “pen<sup>3</sup>,” though his pan-American visions were fulfilled only partly and only temporarily (see his anticipation of a wider Central American union).

Such a representative handbook of Ibero-American essays cannot do without a presentation of one of the pioneer works of not only the essay genre, but of Latin American literature (novel) in general – Sarmiento’s *Facundo*<sup>4</sup>. **D. F. Sarmiento (1811–1888)** captured in this essay, as well as in others, some of the cultural features of cultural identity developed mostly or solely in Latin America. For example, only on the immense Argentinian pampas could the specific nature of their inhabitants have developed. The essay is characteristic by its stoic resignation towards violent death understood as an “accident that is an integral part of life.” In this very space a distinctive type of cultural hero – the “white savage,” the *gaucho* – came to

existence. Sarmiento describes Argentina as a country which by the character of its nature strongly determines the customs of its inhabitants. The pampas (excluding Patagonia in the south of Argentina) were practically not populated when the first Europeans came, as if even nomadic Indian tribes did not want to proceed in their depths. The gaucho in Sarmiento’s various versions of “gaucho – tracker,” “gaucho – guide,” or “gaucho – singer” replaced the “traditional” representative of savagery and barbarism (Indian, Zambo, Cimarrón, etc.) in Argentina as well as in South America more generally. The gaucho became an opposition to the bearers of civilizational cultural values – urban inhabitants personified in Sarmiento’s Argentina almost exclusively by the inhabitants of Buenos Aires<sup>5</sup>. This “environmental heritage” has survived in Argentina until today to some degree. The pampas as well as all the Argentine countryside are still divided into hundreds of private “feudal” lands, a fertile land where another Latin American social (arche)type comes from – the *caudillo*, an unlimited, generally

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a metropolis in Panama where he expected the formation of a world trade crossroad. In 1826 (June 22 – July 15), congress was summoned to Panama for the purpose of creating a constitution of the Pan-American confederation where Bolivar vainly tried to enforce the idea of the formation of “the greatest nation in the world.”

<sup>3</sup> The publishing of his political speeches and letters numbering 11 volumes in total simultaneously anticipates the Hispano-American essayist genre.

<sup>4</sup> The whole title of the essay from 1845 is: *Civilización y barbarie: vida de Juan Facundo Quiroga. Aspecto físico, costumbres y hábitos de la República Argentina (Civilization and barbarism: the life of Juan Facundo Quiroga. Physical aspects, traditions and lifestyle of the Argentine Republic).*

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<sup>5</sup> At the time when Sarmiento was writing his book, most of the other Argentine cities also lived with a few exceptions from pasturage. Nevertheless, livestock was then bred for the most part in Buenos Aires proper. Recently the Argentine authorities attempted to somehow cultivate the areas southward of Buenos Aires. They came up with a project of shifting part of the state administration to the smaller city of Viedma, which should become the basis for the future settlement of the pampas. The new settlers should mainly be European immigrants who were attracted to purchasing the lands for very low prices. As far as I know this attempt failed or was postponed.

uneducated leader, mostly a representative of the “barbarian” world that often allows him to rise, even as high as to the function of presidency<sup>6</sup>.

**Ezequiel Martínez Estrada (1895–1964)** returned in his works almost one hundred years after Sarmiento to the opposition of city vs. countryside. In the collection, he is represented by the first chapter of the fourth part (pp. 130-133) of his *Radiografía de la pampa* (1933) devoted to Buenos Aires. Inhabitants of the Argentine capital (*porteños*) are described as those who rejected the inland as they were not brave enough to enter it after they had crossed the ocean. On the contrary, they gradually built a “dream paradise of laziness” beyond the borders of which lies a foreign country, a gaucho’s pampas, so vividly described by Sarmiento. Can there be a better place on Earth where the *art of idleness (arte del ocio)* proliferates, as J. E. Rodó once put it, than the area of La Plata?

“Our America,” “Nuestra América,” an essay from 1891, is one of the best of the Hispano-American essays (pp. 55-63). Its author is Cuban politician, writer, and reporter **José Martí (1853–1895)**. Although Martí spent part of his life in the USA where he met with American principles of society and culture, he felt a temperamental need to disqualify himself from North America in his essays. In North America he saw a much bigger danger for Cuba and Latin

America than in Spanish dominance, against which he fought actively. Firstly, he saw the danger in ignorance and intentional incomprehension: “...*Disdain of the huge neighbor, who does not know our America, is its biggest danger*” (p. 62). Martí turns away from the idea of positivist progress. He does not find any ideals in contemporary Europe and in the USA worth following. He finds them in the past, thus becoming one of the first thinkers lauding the colonial past of Spanish America and Indian roots. According to him, this is the only way to reach the “unity of continental spirit” spanning from Rio Bravo to the Strait of Magellan.

As just a feeble pick at the thoughts of more biologically oriented colleagues, I add that Martí did not accept the term *race*. He suggested that those who operate with it often unintentionally stir up polarity and hate among groups of different cultures and languages.

The next essay of the collection inveighs against blind *Nordo-mania* (pp. 65-77). It is the fifth chapter of the book of Ariel (1900) written by Uruguayan thinker **José Enrique Rodó (1871–1917)**. He along with José Martí and Nicaraguan Rubén Darí are considered the founding trio of Hispano-American modernism. Rodó also delimits himself against the United States, but contrary to Martí he does not leave aside Indian tradition and the present<sup>7</sup>. He is aware of the

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<sup>6</sup> Sarmiento himself lived under one of the worst Latin American dictatorships of President Juan Manuel de Rosas. The cruel dictatorial regime was in Argentina in the second half of the 1970s when the military junta governed there.

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<sup>7</sup> No Indian people lived any longer in the territory of the Oriental Republic of Uruguay in the time of Rodó. The former Uruguay was always only sporadically settled by native people. The *Charrúa* were one exception, but in fact they were exterminated during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

uncontrollable penetration of the *American way of life*, the desire for material success and abundance in America. Nevertheless, Rodó's essay is not an autotelic critique of the USA because, as he says: "... even though I do not like them, I admire them..." (p. 67). He admires firstly the enormous will to *want*, the ability of great determination to work and create, the courage to risk. Could this be the source of the more and more apparent ambivalence of Latino-Americans towards North America? Rodó is also aware of certain mental differences within the United States. He notices that the center of power is shifting from the eastern "Atlantic" states to the "Pacific" West. The following words, that after more than one hundred years still seem to be prophetic, target today's Californians and Texans, the main bearers of so-called *pocha culture*<sup>8</sup>: "...Utilitarianism disengaged from its ideal content, cosmopolitan vagueness and the superficiality of bastardly democracy will probably triumph..." (p. 74). However, when we reflect on the identity of the bearers of this "defective" or "bastardly" culture, a problem emerges. Who is the most responsible for the spread of such a *hybrid culture*<sup>9</sup>, e.g., in Los Angeles, where the majority is nowadays of Hispanic origin? An answer to that question cannot be found in Rodó's *Ariel*.

<sup>8</sup> *Pocha culture* – a Spanish name for the superficial, utilitarian-oriented North American culture. This expression is probably derived from the *Yaqui* word *pochi* = "stupid"; however, its etymology may be more complicated.

<sup>9</sup> The term *hybrid culture* is promoted by the Argentine-Mexican social anthropologist Néstor García Canclini.

Peruvian writer and politician **Manuel González Prada (1848–1918)** prefigured in his essay *Our Indians* from 1904 (pp. 79-90) the beginnings of *indigenismo*, a movement striving for a respectable life of marginalized Indians. While Martí in "Our America" discerned more ethno-cultural substrates, González Prada strives to edify the original inhabitants of the continent. He is aware that half-breed *encastados*<sup>10</sup>, who outnumbered the previous majority, are the worst evil for Peruvian Indians. González Prada even more strongly than Martí refuses to work with the term *race*, which is for him, like for Novicow, "a subjective category of our mind without external reality" (p. 79). The Indian question lies in the socio-economic problem and "revolution": the only solution is to get rid of poverty and low-class position. "*Indians will be saved only by their own efforts, not by humanization of their oppressors*" (p. 90).

Writer and ethnologist **José María Arguedas (1911–1969)** put even stronger accent on the Indian element in Peruvian culture. In his essay *Cosmic loneliness in Kechua Poetry* (pp. 207-216), he particularly points out the growing contrast between the mountains and the shore caused by hundreds of years of isolation of Kechua villages inaccessible until the middle of the last century. Shortly after that, the Industrial Revolution started to penetrate the Peruvian Altiplano and the "cosmic loneliness" of

<sup>10</sup> The term *encastado* includes persons who are a mixture of white and Indian parents (*cholos* and *mestizos*), those who are a mixture of black and white parents (*mulatos*), and those who are a mixture of black and Indian parents (*zambos*).

its inhabitants started to fade out rapidly. Hundreds of thousands of Indians shifted immediately to the shore and settled in Lima, where they built hundreds of illegal peripheral quarters, so-called *pueblos juvenes*<sup>11</sup>, some of which have nowadays up to one million inhabitants. Peruvian Lima probably became the most rapidly growing city in the world.

An essay important for anthropology is the essay *The Process of Transculturation in Cuba* (pp. 115-120) by Cuban ethnologist, sociologist, historian, linguist, etc., **Fernando Ortiz (1881–1969)**. In it he presented the term *transculturation* that should have replaced the older term *aculturation*, first defined by North American cultural anthropologists R. Redfield, R. Linton and M. J. Herskovits in 1935<sup>12</sup>. In spite of more and more frequent use of the term aculturation, the term promoted by Ortiz – *transculturation* – sanctified by Bronislaw Malinowski seems to be more accurate. It does not have to be applied only to Cuba where according to Ortiz continental Indians, Jews, Portuguese, Anglo-Saxons, yellow Asians from Macao and other newcomers pass through double fateful events of destruction and renewal. At first, all of them go through the process of *deculturation* or *exculturation* followed by *aculturation* or *inculturation* and overarched by the synthesis of phenomena in *transculturation*. It is an incessant migration dynamic, social and cultural surf.

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<sup>11</sup> Literally *young villages* or *young cities*. Some of them arose overnight in pre-chosen sandy places.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. R. Redfield, R. Linton, M. J. Herskovits, A. Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation. In *Man*, 35, 1935, pp. 145-148.

Works of the Brazilian sociologist and anthropologist **Gilberto Freyre (1900-1987)** represent a deep anthropological insight into an archaic community of Brazilian sugar-cane plantation owners. This is in the first place exemplified in his extensive fresco *Casa-Grande e Senzala (Manorial House and Senzala)* from 1933. The essay *Borderlands and Plantations* (pp. 148-163), translated from a book called *Interpretation of Brazil* (in Spanish 1945), is an analysis of two different groups that took part in inhabiting Brazil – the so-called *vertical* (plantation owners) and *horizontal* founders. The former are early settled families, for whom firm stone and brick houses or *casas grandes*, large houses scattered all along the Atlantic coast, became a basic socio-economic cells. The latter are men with nomadic inclinations (“men of the borderland”) who dispersed to the north, south and west of the country and earned their living as traders with Indian and black slaves. Their mutual “symbiosis” led by pragmatism rather than by mutual affection between otherwise completely different groups lasted practically unchanged until 1888 when slavery was abolished in Brazil. However, the symbiosis is with some modifications visible even nowadays.

Venezuelan writer, university professor and politician **Arturo Uslar Pietri (1906–2001)** draws attention to the difficulties of looking for identity on the language level in his essay *No name World* (pp. 189-194). In the very beginning of his rather short contribution, he says: “*A name is a constituent of identity...*” (p. 189). He then illustrates the problems with identity by referring to the name for the “other

America.” While North Americans never had to hesitate over their name, no *pan-autoethnonym* exists to the south of Rio Grande. There are thus always hesitations if it is Spanish America, Hispanic America, Ibero-America, Latin America, Indo-America. Carlos Fuentes, a current Mexican writer, even tried to squeeze all the most important traditions in the name: “Indo-Afro-Ibero-America” to express as precisely as possible the polyculture nature of this cultural super-area. Pietri considers this hesitation over the name to be an important part of thinking about identity but even he cannot find any satisfactory “solution.”

When writing about categorizing of Latin America in his essay *Latin America: Long way to itself* (pp. 223-234), the great Mexican philosopher **Leopoldo Zea (1912–2004)** does not speak of assimilation, but of *juxtaposition* of various cultural forms caused by Iberian colonization. Various cultures forming Latin American identity have been placed next to each other, while one has always been leveled above the others. Zea believes that nowadays we can witness another attempt at a new juxtaposition imitating cultures of Western Europe – Anglo-Saxon and French. Like Mexican scholar Antonio Caso before him, Zea also warned against idle imitation, against the Latin American variant of *bovarism*, and exhorted his fellow countrymen to “think a bit.”

Another great Mexican poet and essayist **Octavio Paz (1914–1998)**, one of five Hispano-American laureates of the Nobel Prize in Literature, deals with the topic of double Mexico – *developed* and *developing* in his essay *The Critique of a Pyramid* (pp. 235-255). This is accord-

ing to him an essential problem, “*whose resolving is the key point of our national existence*” (p.235). By the *Developed Mexico* he means the part of the society that enforces its model of society on the other part – *Developing Mexico*. The former Mexico however does not realize that such a model is only a copy of a North American archetype leading to the attributes of the abovementioned “pocha culture” like wheat meals and leather boots replacing maize pancakes and *huarache*<sup>13</sup> that are much more comfortable in the given climatic conditions. When anthropologists study the developing Mexico, they use the term “culture of poverty” (O. Lewis). Paz argues against the term and stresses primarily the “otherness” of this predominantly poor and miserable Mexico. He identifies the main cause of a huge, lasting abyss in economic and social spheres of today’s Mexico<sup>14</sup> in both intentional and unintentional overlooking of otherness. At the same time, Paz criticizes the fact that Mexicans chose the Aztec as their archetype of the pre-Colonial Period. However Paz considers Aztec rather the predecessor of the Spanish conquistador and today’s politicians. In other words, a direct path leads from the Aztec *tlatoani* to the viceroy of New Spain and then to the president. All

<sup>13</sup> *Huarache* – Indian sandals formerly produced from cattle skin leather, today mostly produced industrially, e.g., from bald tires. Corn pancakes, *tortillas*, are still one of the main components of the Mexican diet despite a strong penetration of western cultural attributes.

<sup>14</sup> The Zapatista Movement mainly widespread in the South Mexican federal state of Chiapas is one of the results of these lacks of comprehension.

three are representatives of centralist and authoritative tradition, whose material and spiritual expression in the Central American is the pyramid.

The work and life of Paraguayan writer **Augusto Roa Bastos (1917–2005)** was influenced by the fact that his mother tongue was Guaraní. A bi-culture environment where he grew up and the troubles connected with the “trans-culturability” such as translating Guaraní expressions into Spanish are reflected in his socio-linguistic essay *Oral culture* (pp. 261-274). Paraguay, where both languages are equal, can thus be talked about as the only fully bilingual or better to say “di-lingual” country in the world.

Brazilian cultural anthropologist **Darcy Ribeiro (1922–1997)** was interested in Brazilian Indians, among whom he did a great deal of fieldwork. In the reviewed collection, his work is represented by the essay *The Afro-Brazil* (pp. 276-280). It is a minor ethnographic probe into the life of black people in Brazilian Society introduced there in accordance with its ecology – by monoculture and the slavery system.

The last author to be mentioned is Mexican novelist and essayist **Carlos Fuentes (born in 1928)**. Czech readers mainly know his novel “*Nejprůzračnější kraj*” [The Clearest Country], where he describes particular social classes of the capital city, and some other books translated into Czech. In the essay *Hispanic world of North America* (pp. 288-298), chosen for the volume from his book *The Buried Mirror*, he thinks about how Latin America would probably develop further on despite millions of its inhabitants escaping over the northern border,

which is for him a hardly healable wound. Fuentes is optimistic and he believes that Latin American culture is strong enough and that the “*enchilada* can stay next to hamburgers.” He speaks about the more positive side of acculturation or transculturation: “...*cultures prosper only in contact with other cultures; in isolation they become lazy*” (p. 294). Only this way, apparently, can the bleeding wound be healed. Thus, Fuentes is more conciliatory than many of his colleagues. He basically believes in the equal co-existence of both “other Americas.”

**In conclusion:** The anthology includes comprehensive notes, a selective general bibliography, and bibliography of the authors together with their short biographies. It is without hesitation a very useful handbook for all who are interested in a thorough study of “Hispano-American” and “Luso-American” cultural identity. It is a relatively representative volume covering most of the important countries or wider areas of Latin America – Mexico, the Caribbean area and above all South America. In the anthology I miss only representatives of Central American countries that also gave the world many excellent writers and thinkers (M. A. Asturias, A. Monterroso, R. Darío, R. H. Valle, etc.). However, they were rather novelists, poets, or philosophers and did not concentrate that much on writing essays. Nevertheless, I think that at least **Luis Cardoza y Aragón (1904–1992)**, a Guatemalan poet and reporter, and his essays *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano* (1955) are so important that they could have been included in the otherwise very well done anthology.

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**Peter Salner: MINULÝ ROK V JERUZALEME. [Last Year in Jerusalem.]**

Bratislava: Marenčin PT, 2010, 256 pp.

The new book by the Bratislava ethnologist Peter Salner, published in a beautiful format by Marenčin PT publishers in a Bratislava-Pressburg edition, follows up on Salner's previous title *Budúci rok v Bratislave alebo stretnutie (Next Year in Bratislava or a Meeting)* (Albert Marenčin PT 2007),<sup>1</sup> paraphrasing the blessing connected with the Jewish seder, which is, in its importance, comparable to Christmas Eve in the Christian tradition. Last year's title is dedicated to the already-300-member group aged between 55 and 70 years old, socially and religiously heterogeneous, centralized around the Internet forum *Meeting* (founded in 2004; in 2009 renamed *Light*) and one moderator, who also includes in the Web pages (in Slovak) information about happenings in Israel, interesting events, books, television and radio broadcasts, Slovak anti-Semitism. This forum connects Slovak Jews who emigrated after August 1968, mainly to North America, Israel and Germany, Switzerland and Austria, and the Slovak version of the *Czech Children of Maislovka*. Its original core (Bratislava Jews meeting in a Kitchen) gradually spread, however, to more Slovak and Czech Jews – descendants of victims of the Shoah with experience of the August occupation in 1968.

<sup>1</sup> A review of the book appeared in *Urban People*, 12, 2010, 2, pp. 445–446.