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REWRITING FORGOTTEN HISTORIES: *THE HEIRS OF COLUMBUS* AND
“A COYOTE COLUMBUS STORY”

por

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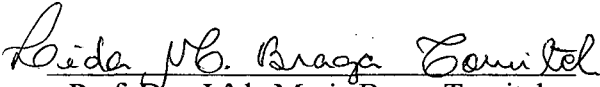
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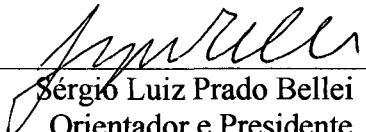
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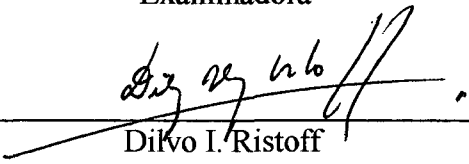
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For my Mother, my Father and my sister Ane.
For Mano, who patiently waited for me 900 km away...

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ABSTRACT

REWRITING FORGOTTEN HISTORIES: *THE HEIRS OF COLUMBUS* AND “A
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In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said points out that imperialism is still present in postcolonial times. Further, he shows that although literature and language have been part of the imperialist project to produce cultural domination, they can also be used to resist colonial discourse. The present thesis examines Native literary possibilities of resistance to the myth of Christopher Columbus and the official history about the colonization of America. My hypothesis is that Gerald Vizenor's novel *The Heirs of Columbus* (1991) and Thomas King's short story “A Coyote Columbus Story” (1993) resist the discourse of American colonization by rewriting Columbus's arrival in America through a Native point of view and by recovering the tribal figure of the trickster. I base my analysis of the two fictions mostly on Derrida's theory of deconstruction and on postcolonial literary theories. Also, I examine documents and historical and critical revisions of the official history about Columbus and the colonization of America to illustrate some of the forces that resist imperial discourses. My analysis of the literary examples of Native resistance exposes the two strategies proposed by the authors. I show how *The Heirs of Columbus* resists the discourse of colonization by celebrating the deconstructionist trickster's play and hybridity. “A Coyote Columbus Story”, however, questions the trickster as resistance, since he

perpetuates colonialism in the narrative, and points to the necessity of writing a Native history which opposes the official history of American colonization. Finally, I conclude that, although Vizenor's novel and King's short story propose different strategies of resistance due to their diverse perceptions of the postmodern world, the two narratives emphasize the necessity to be aware of how Natives and minorities in general can perpetuate imperialism in capitalist North America.

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RESUMO

Em *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said aponta que o imperialismo ainda está presente na era pós-colonial. O autor também afirma que, embora a literatura e a língua tenham sido parte do projeto imperialista que visa à dominação cultural, elas também podem ser utilizadas para resistir o discurso colonial. A presente dissertação examina as possibilidades literárias de resistência dos povos Ameríndios ao mito de Cristóvão Colombo e à história oficial da colonização da América. Minha hipótese é que o romance *The Heirs of Columbus* (1991) de Gerald Vizenor e o conto “A Coyote Columbus Story” (1993) de Thomas King resistem o discurso da colonização americana através da rescrita da chegada de Colombo na América sob o ponto de vista do ameríndio e através da recuperação da figura tribal do *trickster*. Minha análise das ficções baseia-se, principalmente, na teoria de desconstrução de Derrida e nas teorias literárias pós-coloniais. Também examino documentos e revisões históricas e críticas da história oficial sobre Colombo e a colonização da América a fim de ilustrar algumas forças de resistência aos discursos imperialistas. Ao analisar os exemplos literários de resistência ameríndia, exponho as duas estratégias propostas pelos autores. Explico como *The Heirs of Columbus* resiste o discurso da colonização através da celebração do jogo desconstrucionista do *trickster* e do hibridismo. “A Coyote Columbus Story”, no entanto, questiona o *trickster* como resistência, já que ele perpetua o colonialismo na narrativa, e aponta para a necessidade de escrever-se um história ameríndia de oposição à história oficial da colonização americana. Finalmente, concluo que, embora o romance de Vizenor e o conto de King proponham estratégias de resistência baseadas em diferentes percepções do mundo pós-moderno, as duas narrativas enfatizam a necessidade de conscientização a respeito das formas pelas quais os ameríndios e as minorias em geral podem perpetuar o imperialismo na América do Norte capitalista.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

stories are at the heart of what explorers and novelists say about strange regions of the world; they also become the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history

Edward Said

The political independence of the last colonies in the so called “postcolonial era” does not mean that the politics of colonialism has disappeared in the relationship among and inside countries: imperialism is still a very powerful force in the economic, political and military relations in which the less economically developed countries are subjected to the more economically developed (qtd. in Said 341). Moreover, even inside an independent country, this status of superiority, so characteristic of colonial times, is still operative in powerful political representatives of the countries, or in powerful economic and social classes. This part of society acts as descendants of the colonizers and repeats their behavior in relation to minority groups.

In his 1994 book, *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said defines imperialism as “the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory” (8). In this context, literature as “the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging” is also used to produce cultural domination (xiii). Not only the literature in English, but also the English language itself confirm cultural imperialism. According to Said, the unbroken tradition of novel-writing in England is very much related to the consolidation of the country as an imperial nation (xxv). Further, the development of American literature, as well as the spreading of English as a “universal language” reflect the consolidation of the United States as the capitalist empire.

Today, language and literature still work as instruments of domination and oppression, and yet, these same cultural practices offer possibilities of resisting colonial

discourse. Contemporary linguistic and literary theories have questioned the truths and stereotypes produced by culture in order to create an imperial superiority, and have demonstrated that the colonized subject and the minority groups can find ways of resisting and opposing colonial domination from inside this same discourse. Poststructuralist theories, deconstruction and feminism, for example, represent important marks in the studies of language, discourse and meaning, and literature, because they promote a resistance to colonialism as they unbalance and deconstruct the binary systems of linguistic hierarchical oppositions.

Jacques Derrida's relational definition of the sign is important to define the project of deconstruction. Although Ferdinand de Saussure had already recognized language as a system of differences, Derrida breaks up with the logocentric notion of positive entities which assume hierarchical positions in the language system. In Saussure's binaries *langue/ parole*, signifier/signified, the second term is subordinated to the first. Derrida starts by inverting binary oppositions: one element is *not* superior to the other, since what counts is the relationship of difference between the elements, and one is just a particular function of the other.

This argument is developed in terms of the ideas of *presence* and *absence*. For presence to function it must have the qualities that belong to its opposite, absence, because in an opposition the interdependence of the elements is a necessary condition. Thus, it is not absence that will be defined in terms of presence, as its negation, but presence will be the effect of a generalized absence, or what Derrida calls *différance*.

Différance is the term that defines the interdependent relation between two elements in the linguistic system. It cannot, therefore, be conceived in terms of the opposition between presence and absence, superiority and inferiority. Playing with the active and passive forms of the word (in English the noun *difference*, its gerund *differing*, and with the similar word *deferring*), this term indicates a systematic play of differences, of traces of differences. It also relates to the spacing by means of which elements relate to one another, the necessary intervals for the operation of the terms.

The play of differences means that each element is constituted with reference to the trace in it of the other elements of the sequence or system. In discursive terms, as Jonathan Culler explains, this linkage or weaving is the text, which only exists by the transformation of another text, because there are just “differences and traces of traces” (99). For Derrida, the text is in itself an intertext, and the play of meaning will always provide further connections and contexts in discourse.

In literary criticism, deconstruction has promoted a new kind of reading in which the relationship and interdependence of the sign is represented by the interdependence of the literary texts, that is, by intertextuality. As Vincent B. Leitch puts it, the importance of this definition of intertextuality is that in pointing to the dependence on and infiltration by prior codes, concepts, conventions, unconscious practices, and texts, it facilitates extremes of dissemination – of the dispersions of meaning and truth, therefore subverting the idea of the text linked to a fixed context (161).

Dissemination requires not only contextualization, but decontextualization and the movement to a new recontextualization. Therefore, this position is very important to question a logocentric definition of history, in which the narrative of a determinate context produces only one meaning, or what is called “historical truth.” While in this logocentric notion history is opposed to literature or fiction, if we conceive history in terms of a poststructuralist definition, it would be a text in the sense defined by Derrida, therefore an *intertext*, as unstable and fictional as a work of literature.

Deconstruction and intertextuality open space to a reevaluation of literary forms of discourse which privilege a double code, such as parody and irony. In parody, a historical or official text can be reinscribed in order to add something or to demonstrate another version of itself. Thus it is again not an inversion, or opposition, but a “re-appropriation,” a revision which values the relational aspect of the two texts, the parodical and what is parodied. Similarly, irony is a double-edged discourse in which something can be negated while it is affirmed. According to Linda Hutcheon, irony is an adequate strategy for the discourse of minority or marginalized groups because it is the trope that incarnates doubleness:

it does so in ways that are particularly useful to the ‘other.’ irony allows ‘the other’ to address the dominant culture from within that culture’s own set of values and modes of understanding, without being co-opted by it and without sacrificing the right to dissent, contradict, and resist. (49)

In other words, while addressing the dominant discourse from within, irony inverts the original meaning of that discourse. For Hutcheon, irony is an important element in what she calls postmodern parody. Postmodern parody establishes both a relation of continuity between the present and the past by means of intertextuality and a break with the discourse of the past by the use of irony. For this reason, postmodern parody allows the artist to speak *to* a hegemonic discourse *from* inside, but without being co-opted by it, since parody subverts the official narrative.

As a critical undoing of the hierarchical oppositions on which theories depend, deconstruction “demonstrates the difficulties of any theory that would define meaning in a univocal way: as what an author intends, what conventions determine, what a reader experiences” (131). Thinking of literature and culture in terms of imperialist oppression, we realize that the concept of intertextuality as defined by Derrida breaks down the colonial concept of a great literature (such as the European and American), therefore it questions the idea of the *canon* and celebrates the constant dialogue between texts and cultures. Furthermore, in deconstructing the *canon*, it is possible to identify the rhetorical operations that produce the ground for such hierarchical oppositions.

The questioning of imperial literary definitions is very relevant for the postcolonial revision of the hierarchical arguments produced in colonial times. Since colonial domination was imposed by the affirmation of binary oppositions of colonial superiority versus Native inferiority – such as civilized/barbarous, literate/illiterate – an approach that promotes a *reversal* of the classical oppositions *and* a general *displacement* of the system is appropriate to resist imperialist discourse. What is important to highlight in this statement is that deconstruction does not promote just an inversion of positions, otherwise the system would still be reaffirmed. On the contrary, through a double gesture, a double science, a double writing, it will provide the means

of “*intervening* in the field of oppositions it criticizes and which is also a field of non-discursive forces” (qtd. in Culler 85).

Culler affirms that in deconstruction an opposition is not destroyed or abandoned, but reinscribed, thus revised and explained by the undoing of the devices which produced it. In showing the interdependence of the two elements, of signifier and signified, we can relate this idea to the concept of *hybridity* developed by the postcolonial scholar Homi K. Bhabha. Derrida’s ideas are very important to the development of the concept of hybridity in Bhabha’s “Signs Taken for Wonders.”¹ Bhabha approaches the authority of the colonizer over the colonized in terms of the relationship between the two of them, as if they were the elements of Derrida’s relational sign. Here, though, the hybrid object retains the actual semblance of its authoritative part – the colonizer, but revalues its presence by resisting it as the signifier which *re-presents* itself. In hybridity processes, instead of a symbol in which the colonizer could represent the colonized’s reality, there is the contact between the colonizer and the colonized, which promotes a certain reduction of the difference between them.

In this context, the oppositions determined by the colonizer, who defines himself as a set of unified and pure superior concepts in contrast to the defiled colonized, can not be representative of the situation of the colonial encounter. Instead of opposed elements, in encounters mediated by hybridity, colonizer and colonized *contaminate* each other: the perception of the colonized is already present in the discourse of the colonizer. Bhabha’s example of the Bible being imposed as the English book to the Natives outside Delhi, and their questioning of this imposition, demonstrates that, in the contact between colonizer and colonized, there will always be an interference of the colonized’s reality in the colonizer’s imposition, so that colonialist values can be reinscribed and adopted.

Both in the deconstructionist discourse and in hybrid processes there is an emphasis on the ambivalence of meaning and authority, demonstrating the interdependent relation of the two elements of the oppositions imposed by colonial and

imperial discourses. In this sense, colonial oppression and resistance are not opposites, because for oppression to exist resistance must come along together, and it comes from inside the discourse of colonial supremacy.

Although contemporary theorists, specially in postcolonial studies, recognize the importance of deconstructionist arguments in order to resist imperial discourses, some scholars start from these ideas but move a step beyond by questioning the problems involved in such statements. More concerned with the ideology of meaning, not with its ambivalence, such authors question whether the two interdependent elements in the play of difference are really equal forces in this discourse. The power of hybridity can, in fact, be illusory, because it does not do away with the superiority of imperial forces in relation to minorities: although there is apparently a dialogue between these two opposites, there is, in fact, no change in the reality of political and economic relations that actually take place in society. Imperialism still rules the game.

Peter Hulme, among others, is concerned with a politics of discourse. He acknowledges that deconstruction involves politics, since, as Culler shows, the questioning of the conditions and assumptions of discourse, of the institutional structures governing our practices, can be seen as a politicizing of what might otherwise be called a neutral framework (156). However, for Hulme, the poststructuralist argument that all texts are in a certain sense fictional, since no access to reality in words is superior to another, is just a starting point, not the last word. Ideological analysis remains necessary. In fact, it constitutes an essential tool for Marxism because it enables us to say not just that a particular statement is false, but also that its falsity has a wider significance in the justification of existing power-relations.

In the introduction to *Colonial Encounters*, Hulme proposes a “radical new history” which is capable of presenting a new, or neglected version of the past. In this model, there are two interdependent but separable moments. First, there is a critique of existing versions, to which the ideas proposed by deconstruction and Bhabha’s concept of hybridity can contribute. Secondly, though, there would be the presentation of alternative and contradictory evidence, so that an alternative unofficial history of

colonialism and imperialism would be constructed. Hulme practices this kind of history when he analyzes Columbus's *Journal*.

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said shares with Hulme the idea that postcolonial resistance is grounded on the dialogue between poststructuralist ideas and the Marxist emphasis on the ideological aspects involved in the power-relations which create imperial oppositions of superiority versus inferiority. Said defines resistance as "an alternative way of conceiving human history" (260). In terms of colonialism, it would mean "*writing back* to the metropolitan cultures, disrupting the European narratives of the Orient and Africa, replacing them with either a more playful or a more powerful new narrative style" (260).

In their revision of colonial history, both Said and Hulme consider capitalism as the major force which maintains imperialist oppression in postcolonial societies. In *Colonial Encounters*, Peter Hulme shows that the end of imperial colonization did not completely break the continuity in the power-relations established during the colonial period: colonialism continued to exist in the form of neo-colonialism, which is reinforced by the politics of globalization. The spreading of multinational corporations and capital brings the necessity of *colonizing* new consumers for this market, and capitalism involves a system of slavery, even if the slaves themselves are not aware of it. In addition, many social groups choose to agree with this colonialist behavior in order to promote the capitalist market.

The construction of the myths of the great discoverers is another important part of the imperialist project. These discoverers are presented as "creators" of a reality that did not exist before their interference. Furthermore, they define themselves as the ones who saved the Natives from their barbarous reality and brought them to civilization. One good example of that is the figure of Christopher Columbus as evinced in his four voyages to the American Continent.

While in official history Columbus is "the great discoverer" who "found" America, revisions of these documents point to the interests underneath his voyages and show that the voyages to the New World were basically a capitalist enterprise. These

historical and critical accounts explore forms of resistance to the colonial discourse of Columbus's superiority and to the colonizer's history of America, denouncing the capitalist interests of his voyages and revealing the oppression of the Natives. However, since the authors who defend the Natives are not always descendants of Natives, one question still remains: can we hear the Natives's voice in a discourse of postcolonial resistance?

It is known that many Natives were exterminated in North, Central and South America, and the ones who survived were forced to adapt to the colonizer's way of life. In this process, the colonizer tried to destroy their culture and traditions, and forced them to acquire and communicate only in the master's language. Thus, the Natives not only lost their land, but were also forced to forget their own identity.

Specially in North America, the life of the Natives in the colonial period was divided between the religious schools and the reservations. The older Natives were kept in the reservations, which was the only territory left to the first inhabitants of the American Continent. The children, on the other hand, were separated from Native origins, and taken to schools in order to learn the colonizer's way of life. Even after the independence of the colonies, the structure of the reservations survived. Today, the system of reservations is one of the few, if not the only, way left of preserving Native cultures. The result of Natives's education during the colonial period is particularly visible in postcolonial societies, since many descendants can no longer communicate in their ancestors's language. What they can do is to try to recover their origins in order to define their hybrid identity.

Due to their mixed condition, in terms of race and culture, Native descendants in the United States and Canada try to resist the typical colonial discourse of capitalist societies by adapting the white culture to their needs and by recovering Native origins and tradition. These two endeavors are extremely important as alternative forms of recovering lost traditions after the disappearance of Native races.

Today, the majority of Natives is formed by mixedbloods, individuals integrated into white society, but conscious of their Native origins. These Natives are not the

“dangerous savages” of Columbus’s discourse, nor the “victims” of colonization, but professionals, including some university professors and writers, who are ready to fight for minorities’s rights. In this context, a literary postcolonial resistance to the pervading imperialist discourse in American and Canadian society, in which descendants of the white colonizers still consider themselves superior to minorities, can only emerge from a consciousness of the Natives’s actual situation in the contemporary world. If Natives have a divided image of themselves, the only way out is to work on the fragments of their history, trying to build up a bridge between the past and the present. In other words, the Native’s discourse of resistance needs to balance the Native and white influence in his attempt to invent his own contemporary Native identity.

Mixedblood authors such as the American Gerald Vizenor and the Canadian Thomas King work in this direction. In this thesis on Gerald Vizenor’s novel *The Heirs of Columbus* (1991) and Thomas King’s short story “A Coyote Columbus Story” (1993), I will focus on the two strategies of Native resistance proposed by the authors in their rewritings of the myth of Columbus. In their literary works, the dialogue between the colonizer’s literary tradition and Native cultures and oral literatures is the strategy by means of which they resist the discourse of colonial oppression in North America. In *The Heirs of Columbus* and “A Coyote Columbus Story,” the two writers promote the dialogue between the official history of Columbus’s arrival in America and the Natives’s perception of the colonial encounter. Moreover, there is the dialogue between deconstructive and postcolonial writing strategies, as evinced in the tribal culture of the trickster, the amoral and ambiguous figure who plays tricks and can be both human and animal, creator and destroyer, hero and antihero, but can also end up as a victim of his own tricks.

What is most important in the use of this tribal figure is the fact that the trickster’s behavior is not part of the hierarchical binary opposition between hero and antihero: tribal culture allows the trickster to exist outside this dichotomy, therefore outside the imperial language of good/evil, sacred/defiled. For this reason, many critics have recognized that the idea of the trickster is related to contemporary notions of

deconstruction and play. In “Subverting the Dominant Paradigm,” Kerstin Schmidt affirms that the trickster imagines ‘meaning’ and is thus liberated from a determinate meaning; the trickster is the embodiment of the poststructuralist notion of ‘play’ (70).

Gerald Vizenor recovers the figure of the trickster to deconstruct the opposition colonizer versus colonized and to deal with the identity of the mixedblood descendants of the colonial encounter. The story of the earthdiver trickster *Naanabozho* illustrates the impossibility of defining the Natives in terms of the colonialist idea of a “pure” race, and shows the Natives’s need of a new consciousness of their existence in contemporary North America.

Naanabozho, or Wenebojo, are transcriptions of the tribal trickster of the woodland *Anishinaabe*, or the people named the Chippewa. He is a compassionate trickster and a tribal creation myth. The tale says that Wenebojo was standing on the top of the tree, and the water was up to his mouth. He defecated and the shit floated up to the top of the water and around his mouth. Being in such a difficult situation, Wenebojo asked the beaver, the muskrat and the otter for help. He asked them to dive and bring some grains of sand, because he wanted to make an earth for them to live on. The end of the tale says that the otter was successful and brought five grains, which Wenebojo threw around, creating a little island. Each time Wenebojo got more earth on the island, he threw it all around and the island got bigger; this process never ended: Wenebojo kept on throwing earth around.

Vizenor is a Métis Minnesota, a mixedblood descent from Quebec (French descent) and the Native Chippewa. In his introduction to *Earthdivers: Tribal Narratives on Mixed Descent* (1981), he affirms that the Métis were the first earthdivers, and that “Métis tricksters and earthdivers are the metaphors between new sources of opposition and colonial ideas about savagism and civilization” (xi). In his words, the trickster earthdiver represents the contemporary mixedblood Native attempting to resist colonialism and racism: he is “the imaginative and compassionate trickster on street corners in the cities” (xvii).

The earthdiver is an important metaphor to define the Native writers's strategy of resistance: they dive into contemporary society, which is still full of contradictions and prejudice, to create a new "island," or a new consciousness for the ambiguous mixedblood existence. As Wenebojo, the Native writers must keep on throwing earth around, because creating possibilities of survival in imperialist North America is a continuous process.

Vizenor's professional life and literary works show his trajectory as an earthdiver writer. He was born on October 22, 1934, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. In 1950 he joined the Minnesota National Guard, and from 1952 to 1955 he served with the U.S. Army in Japan. There he had contact with haiku and Japanese culture, which contributed a lot to his literary works. Vizenor attended New York University from 1955 to 1956 and acquired his bachelor of arts degree from the University of Minnesota in 1960, where he did graduate work from 1962 through 1965. He later studied at Harvard. Since then, he has been a social worker, civil rights activist, journalist, and community advocate for Native people living in urban cities. He organized the Indian Studies program at Bemidji State University and has taught literature and tribal history at Lake Forest College, the University of Minnesota and Macalester College.

Today Vizenor is a professor of American Studies and Native American literature at the University of California, Berkeley, and is considered one of the leading voices on Native American literature. As a novelist, poet, and essayist, he is the author of more than twenty books, including the American Book Award 1988 winner *Griever: An American Monkey King in China*, and the Josephine Miles Award 1990 winner *Interior Landscapes: Autobiographical Myths and Metaphors*. He also received research grants for writing from University of Minnesota Graduate School, and the Fiction Collective Prize in 1986.

Vizenor is part of the contemporary Native literature group defined by Arnold Krupat as "postnativist - postnationalist or posttribalist" (43). Krupat, in *The Turn to the Native*, compares Appiah's description of the two stages of postcolonial African novel to Native American literature. Although affirming that there is in fact no "post-" to the

colonial status of Native American, Krupat recognizes some similarities between Appiah's classification and the development of Native literature in the United States.

The so-called Native American Renaissance represents a self-consciously new stage of Native American fiction, and it began with N. Scott Momaday's 1969 Pulitzer Prize for his novel *House Made of Dawn*. Krupat considers both Momaday's works and Leslie Silko's *Ceremony* (1977) part of a Native literature which expresses a nostalgia for Native roots and "an ideological image of Indianness for Native Americans and for the rest of the world" (42). These novels present themselves in an essentially realist mode of representation. For Krupat, Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* (1991) and Vizenor's works exemplify a second stage in Native American literature. This literature is much more critical than the one from the first celebratory stage. The authors question the idea of Indianness and the search for Native roots of the first stage, which they consider associated with Western ideas of nationalism and authenticity.

Vizenor's literature is part of this postrealist or postmodernist stage, since his works present the Native already integrated in Western society and criticize colonialist practices which still dominate politics, economy and social relations. Although his fiction portrays capitalist Euramerican "dominance," Vizenor's characters challenge the Western "culture of death"² by Native American "survivance" and "continuance" over the colonialist process, as they subvert and deconstruct Western imperialist culture through parody, irony and humor³. *The Heirs of Columbus* exemplifies the earthdiver Native's attempt to survive and resist the Western history of colonization. Published in 1991, the novel presents trickster descendants of Columbus who rewrite the story of the admiral and the colonial encounter. According to this trickster version of official history, Columbus himself is a mixedblood, and this fact promotes the celebration of hybridity and the deconstruction of the concepts of race and nation in the novel.

The concern about the Natives's mixedblood condition in contemporary society and the revision of official history are also present in Native Canadian literature, as evinced in Thomas King's fiction. King was born in 1943 to a Cherokee father and a mother of Greek and German descent. He grew up in Northern California, received his

Ph.D. in English literature at the University of Utah, and worked for a number of years at the University of Minnesota as Chair of their American Indian Studies program. He is, however, a Canadian citizen and has spent much of his adult life in Canada. For ten years he was a professor of Native Studies at the University of Lethbridge and he is currently a professor at the University of Guelph where he teaches Native literature and Creative Writing.

King's creative and critical writing has been widely published; articles, stories, and poems of his have appeared in many journals, including *World Literature Written in English*, the *Hungry Mind Review*, and the *Journal of American Folklore*. He also edited a book entitled *The Native in Literature* (1987) and a special issue of *Canadian Fiction Magazine* (1988) devoted to short fiction by Canadian Native writers.

While Vizenor is a very well-known Native writer, there is not much criticism published about King's works, specially about his short stories. The short story I will analyze in this thesis, "A Coyote Columbus Story," exemplifies the lack of criticism about the author, since there is nothing published about the text. In this sense, this thesis contributes as research material for people interested in that narrative.

King started to publish his fiction only in 1990, when he published his first novel *Medicine River*, which was later turned into a television movie. Also published in 1990 was *All My Relations*, an anthology of contemporary Canadian Native literature that was edited by King and which also included an introduction by him and his story "The One About Coyote Going West." In 1992, King's first book for children, *A Coyote Columbus Story*, was published, and it was nominated for a Governor General's Award later that year. In 1993, King received his second nomination for a Governor General's Award for his novel *Green Grass, Running Water*, and published *One Good Story, That One*, a collection of ten short stories, including "A Coyote Columbus Story." Recently, King has created and written a popular serial for CBC Radio entitled "The Dead Dog Cafe Comedy Hour," and he published his latest novel *Truth and Bright Water* in 1999.

The trickster figure is also recovered in King's fiction. In his short stories, the female trickster Coyote is the means by which he recovers Native oral storytelling

tradition, and the tales are usually a meeting between Coyote and a Native narrator who tells a story to his visitor. Nevertheless, King's Coyote is different from Vizenor's compassionate trickster, and when she visits the narrator she usually causes trouble. In "A Coyote Columbus Story," Coyote visits the narrator and tells him that she is going to a party for the celebration of Columbus. In order to decolonize Coyote, the narrator creates an alternative history of Columbus's arrival in America in which Coyote creates Columbus. The narrator's version not only shows how colonization was negative for the Natives, but also how imperialism is still operative in contemporary society.

In this thesis, I will concentrate on the analysis of Vizenor's novel *The Heirs of Columbus* and King's short-story "A Coyote Columbus Story" in order to confirm the possibilities of the trickster as a force of Native resistance. While both texts make use of parody, irony and humor to deconstruct, recover and revise the historical discourse of Columbus's arrival in America, they acknowledge the trickster's force of resistance differently. In *The Heirs of Columbus*, despite the consciousness of the instability of the victory over American society, the tricksters are able to end up the story defeating, at least temporarily, the evil force of the cannibal windigoo and creating a society in which healing is possible. In "A Coyote Columbus Story," on the other hand, King warns the reader about the danger of the trickster's play with the colonizer, since it can end up confirming colonization.

In this first chapter, I tried to show how contemporary theories can help to understand alternative forms of resistance to imperial discourse. My focus was on Derrida's theory of deconstruction and postcolonial theories of resistance, specially Bhabha's concept of hybridity and Hulme's and Said's notions of alternative histories. Also, I contextualized contemporary Native literature and the works of the American Gerald Vizenor and the Canadian Thomas King.

The next three chapters focus on historical, critical and literary strategies to resist the discourse of Columbus and the colonization of the American Continent by means of the empowerment of the Natives's voice. In chapter 2, I explore documents of

Columbus's arrival in the American Continent and revisions we find in criticism and history which illustrate some of the forces that resist imperial discourses.

The movement from a resistance based on the demonstration of the ambivalence of meaning in the system of imperial oppositions to the construction of alternative histories will be shown in the analysis of literary examples in chapters 3 and 4. In chapter 3, Gerald Vizenor's *The Heirs of Columbus* celebrates the power of the deconstructionist force of the trickster. In chapter 4, however, Thomas King's "A Coyote Columbus Story" questions the trickster Coyote as a force of resistance and emphasizes the necessity of creating a Native history which opposes the colonizer's official narrative. Also in this chapter, the discussion of William Kent Monkman's pictures to King's children's book, *A Coyote Columbus Story*, points to yet another contribution to the writing of an alternative history of colonization. The three pictures to be analyzed are added as an Appendix to the thesis.

In chapter 5, I conclude by comparing the two strategies of postcolonial resistance proposed by Vizenor and King, and suggest that the authors's approaches to the trickster figure show two different perceptions about the postmodern world.

NOTES

- ¹ Homi K. Bhabha's article "Signs Taken for Wonders" was published in *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994.
- ² The expression "culture of death" appears both in Silko's and Vizenor's works. For Vizenor, it represents practices which are indifferent to the original right to life. Capitalism exemplifies the culture of death in *The Heirs of Columbus*.
- ³ Vizenor developed the concepts of "dominance," "continuance" and "survivance." The suffix "-ance" emphasizes the idea of continuity and movement. According to Krupat, healing is the necessary condition for "survivance," concept which appears fictionally in *The Heirs of Columbus*.

CHAPTER II

COLUMBUS AND THE HISTORY OF AMERICA: VISIONS AND REVISIONS OF THE MAN AND THE VOYAGES

One important mark in the history of colonialism is the figure of Christopher Columbus as presented in his four voyages to the American Continent. This significance is confirmed, of course, by the great amount of writings produced, either in the form of history or literature, about this protagonist of Spanish expansionism. Kirkpatrick Sale, in a review of Gerald Vizenor's *The Heirs of Columbus*, the novel to be analyzed in the next chapter, discusses the power of the myth of this "great discoverer." He suggests that Jesus Christ is probably the only historical figure who exceeds Columbus in the number of written accounts.

The impulse that pushed postcolonial authors to write about Columbus was not only to recover the history of America, but, interestingly, to decipher or to explain the "true" character of the discoverer. Moreover, it is recognized that, in order to do so, the authors not only recovered documents of the time, but worked on them in order to destroy the myth of Columbus as a brave and noble hero, or as the "Admiral of the Ocean Sea."

The historical material about Columbus and his arrival in America can be divided into two groups: the first concerning the official history of the admiral, and the second the rewriting of the official discourse of his voyages. Official history, as it was presented in the introduction, has always privileged the voice of the empire. In this case, it is the voice of the colonizers of Spain and their representatives in the colonies that is always heard. Although some official documents start by denouncing the atrocities of Columbus's enterprise, such as the one written by Dr. Chanca, who had been sent as a doctor on the second expedition, the prevalent version is the one that honors Columbus and Spain for "discovering" a new continent and for spreading Christianity among the pagans and savages. In addition, the idea of bringing progress and civilization to a

primitive land places the colonizers in the position of heroes who are saving the “New World.”

As the discourse which considers Columbus a hero and a great discoverer spreads across the American Continent, both Spain as the colonizer and America as the colonized continent celebrate the greatness of Columbus. However, inside the historical discourse, we find voices that dissent from this perspective. Of course, in the 500th anniversary of this continent, in 1992, much was published that questioned the myth of Columbus, reaffirming the concept of official history as just one more fictional version of reality.

In this account of Columbus and his voyages, my purpose is to detect to what extent these texts produce alternative historical discourses which question the official versions and influence literary works which revise the history of America from the Natives’s point of view. Using as my theoretical basis the works of Hulme and Said, my strategy here is to listen to the silences of these texts in order to perceive their contribution in writing new histories. However, it is important to highlight that the term *new* is used here as Hulme defines it: in the “New World,” “newness” exists because it was not seen, told about or recovered before.

A great amount of documents, articles, history and literary books have been published about Columbus and the voyages to the American Continent: book reviews and articles, Columbus’s report about the voyages which were part of his log-book, and his letters to the sovereigns of Spain. I will concentrate my analysis on documents of the time of Columbus’s voyages and on more recent books about the admiral which make possible the questioning of official history. In this chapter, I will basically consider J. M. Cohen’s *Christopher Columbus: The Four Voyages*, Hans Koning’s *Columbus: His Enterprise*¹, the fragments of Columbus’s log-book or his *Journal*, and Peter Hulme’s *Colonial Encounters*. I will also occasionally comment on the 1992 film *1492: The Conquest of Paradise*, directed by Ridley Scott.

Columbus: The Man

Christopher Columbus was born near Genoa, on the Italian coast, the son of the weaver Domenico Colombo and his wife Susanna Fontanarossa. Although the year of his birth is not certain, 1451 is the most probable date of birth. Columbus was first married with the Portuguese Dona Felipa, who died in 1485, and with whom he had a son, Diego Columbus. In Spain, in an illegitimate relationship, he had his second son Hernando.

Several versions of who Christopher Columbus was and his role in the colonization of America exist today. Also, divergent opinions about his origins, appearance and personality pervade history and literature, and comic appropriations of the myth will be analyzed in the next two chapters. In terms of his appearance, most of what has been written is pure fiction. According to Hans Koning, since the discoverer of a great continent *should* be a great man, many of our history books describe him as a typical anglo-saxon hero: blue-eyed, high stature and red-blond hair. In the *General and Natural History of the Indies*, by Captain Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo, from which some fragments are translated by J. M. Cohen in *Christopher Columbus: The Four Voyages*, Columbus is described as a Native from Cugureo, near Genoa. He is presented as

a man of decent life and parentage, handsome and well-built, and of more than average height and strength. His eyes were lively and his features well proportioned. His hair was chestnut brown and his complexion rather ruddy and blotchy; he was well spoken, cautious and extremely intelligent. He had good Latin and great cosmographical knowledge; he was charming when he wished to be and very testy when annoyed. (28)

There are many different and contradictory versions of the admiral. For Koning, most of what has been written about Columbus is false, and if the armor in the museum of Santo Domingo is truly Columbus's, he was a short man, and not a man with "more than average height and strength."

In terms of his personality and skills, Cohen affirms that Columbus could be skillful as a pilot, but he was extremely inept in his handling of men. He was very pretentious and did not want to share power with a subordinate. He could hardly control

his crew and the settlers. Aboard, he quarreled with his captains and his crew was frequently on the point of mutiny: “He could not control his settlers in the island of Hispaniola, and was frequently at odds with Bishop Fonseca and the office at Seville which was responsible for his supplies and ships. He trusted no one except members of his own family” (15).

Much has been said about his origins. The most extravagant story is told by Cohen. The author explains that Columbus was accused of being a Majorcan Jew, not an Italian, and that, in this version, “the reason for his ambitions for noble rank was to exact private compensation for the humiliation of that people, who were, as he notes in his log-book, expelled from Spain on the day on which he made his terms with Ferdinand and Isabella for the first voyage” (20). In the next chapter, I will argue that this is one of the ideas explored by Vizenor in *The Heirs of Columbus*, with the purpose of questioning concepts of *race* and *nation*.

If the accounts about Columbus the man are polemic, the ones about the *admiral* and his four voyages to the new continent are even more so. Responsible for mistakes and misconduct, Columbus was far from being a hero for Spain, and much less for America.

The Admiral Columbus and the Colonization of America: The Four Voyages

Whereas the official celebrations of Columbus Day and his quincentenary in America tried to highlight the heroic figure of the “Great Discoverer,” much was written in order to demystify Columbus’s achievements. Columbus’s mistake in believing he had reached the Indies and the confusion in calling the American Natives “Indians” were the source of tragic and comic narratives that opened the way for many jokes and parodies about the admiral. Since the comic and parodical literary accounts of Columbus will be explored in chapters 3 and 4, my focus here is on the reports that bring information about Columbus’s abusive attitudes not only before his crew, but also in relation to the Natives. I will also deal with the contribution of Columbus’s voyages

to the establishment of capitalism and the historical superiority of the colonizer over the “savage” Native.

Columbus’s project for crossing the ocean from Spain to China in order to open up a direct route to the west was persistently presented to Portugal, the twin kingdoms of Castile and Aragon, England and France. It was only after great efforts that Columbus gained the support and acceptance of Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand, the monarchs of Spain. He organized and executed four voyages to the American Continent, which he believed (and tried to make people believe) were the Indies. Nevertheless, Columbus’s situation and prestige in each of these four enterprises were not the same. While he arrived in Spain with great honors after his first voyage, in spite of the difficulties and the loss of the “Santa Maria,” the return from the second was accompanied by the revelation of his weaknesses in commanding the lands as the “Vice Roy.” In his first voyage, in 1492, Columbus had organized the first settlement in Fort La Navidad. However, on his return to the lands in his second voyage, none of his men were alive, and the settlement had been destroyed by the Natives because of quarrels provoked by the Spanish involvement with Native women.

The massacre of Fort Navidad and the syphilis epidemic in his crew made the third voyage much more difficult. In the American Continent, the civil war between the settlers and the Natives was a fact. When these news arrived in Spain, Columbus lost his title of General Governor of the Indies and was sent to prison, where he stayed for six weeks. After all these misfortunes and failures, Columbus, in his fourth voyage, was a 51 year-old obscure and tired man, a loser who gathered just four ships to his last voyage. On his return, he was considered just one more mariner.

Cohen and Koning make clear that Columbus discovered nothing new when he defended his idea that the world was a sphere and that, therefore, it would be possible to reach the orient by sailing west. However, the authors demonstrate that Columbus’s great mistake was the calculation of the distance between Portugal and Chipangu (Japan), which he fixed as 2,760 miles, whereas the actual distance is 12,000. As

Koning affirms, if Columbus had not arrived in America, all the crew would be dead before reaching Japan (32).

Many versions of the “discovery” of America, including the one presented in the film *1492: The Conquest of Paradise*, depict Columbus as the one who tried to avoid violence with the Natives. Columbus himself had emphasized this version of the story in his log-book. Although the film also denounces Columbus’s loss of control of the settlers and the crew, the strongest idea conveyed is that Columbus was a very brave and persistent man who “discovered” the route to the American Continent, but ended up in poverty and solitude, tormented by seeing Amerigo Vespucci being recognized for what would be *his* achievement: the discovery of America.

Nevertheless, some books present Columbus as a thirsty and mercenary man in search of gold and he, indeed, saw the Natives as the ones who *had* to find gold for him. The capitalist intentions of Columbus’s voyages are exposed by Cohen, Koning and Hulme. As well as, they are explored in the literary works which will be analyzed in the next chapters.

Cohen’s *Christopher Columbus: The Four Voyages* is an important and useful compilation of accounts about Columbus and the voyages to America. The author translated documents which give a chronological narrative of the events of the four voyages. Among these documents, we find parts of the *General and Natural History of the Indies* by Captain Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo, the digest of Columbus’s log-book on his first voyage, made by Bartolomé de Las Casas, the *Life of the Admiral*, written by Columbus’s son Hernando, Columbus’s letters on his voyages to the sovereigns of Spain, the letter of Dr. Chanca to the city of Seville, and also Diego Mendez’s “Account of Certain Incidents on Christopher Columbus’s Last Voyage.”

Although these documents present different opinions about Columbus and the failures of his voyages, it is in the introduction written by Cohen that we find the voice that demystifies the heroic figure of the “Admiral of the Ocean Sea.” In the beginning of his text, he exposes the purposes of the trading venture which Columbus made attractive to the Catholic sovereigns of Spain: bringing the gold, jewels and spices of the Orient to

the ports of Castile through a direct trade route to the west, while converting the inhabitants of China and Japan to Christianity (11). In a time when the Jews were being expelled from Spain, the emphasis on spreading Christianity was a very strong argument, although it is clear that the competition between Spain and Portugal in finding new trading routes and gold was the strongest motivation for Columbus's voyages.

In relation to Columbus's attitudes towards his crew and the Natives during the voyages, Cohen boldly presents the admiral as a man commanded by the illusion that he had made a voyage to Asia, since he needed to provide rapid explorations and profits to the sovereigns of Spain. For this reason, even having the account of a Native who said that what he had found was in fact a great island, he forced his officers and crew to swear under heavy penalties that it was the mainland of Asia (16). As Cohen shows, since the islands he arrived at were not rich, Columbus advocated the export of the Natives as labourers, or *slaves*, to Spain. Furthermore, his settlers already treated the Natives in the islands as slaves, forcing them to dig for non-existent gold (17).

If on their first arrival the Spaniards were received with honors by the Arawak people, since the Natives believed they had come down from the sky, as time went by they became as frightened of them as they were of the Caribs (cannibals). Not only the treatment of the Natives as slaves, but also the sexual abuse of Native women, led to the Natives's reaction. The massacre of the first settlers at La Navidad is a good example, since it was promoted because of quarrels about women.

Columbus's loss of control in the colonies increased with his own illness, which prostrated him and caused temporary blindness, and with his obsession with trusting only his brothers. In addition, he was not interested in administrating the colonies, but in continuing his explorations, which could only result in confusion and disorder in the settlements. Criminals pardoned on the condition they should join Columbus's expedition were the next settlers and they continued to cause troubles in the colonies.

Many historical documents related to Columbus were written by people who accompanied or had contact with him, such as his son Hernando, Oviedo, Bartolomé de

Las Casas and Diego Mendez. Columbus's own voice and words can be read in his letters on his four voyages, and through the fragments of his log-book, and his decline is evident in the excessive arguments to convince the sovereigns in the last letters. While in the first two he writes to convince the Spanish Queen and King of the richness of the Indies and of his organization of the settlements, from the second voyage on he can no longer hide his failures. Not only his illness, but also his despair, lead him to affirm that he had found the "earthly paradise" in the New World.

The fragments of Columbus's log-book, or his *Journal*, were organized by Bartolomé de Las Casas. Hulme points to the historical complexities involving the text when he says that it is "a transcription of an abstract of a copy of a lost original" (17). Interestingly enough, we can detect in the narrative the shifting from the "I" of Columbus to the "I" of Las Casas. The *Journal* is one of the few documents in which we have contact with the voice of Columbus in the discourse of America, or the voice of the one sent by the crown to America. Through Columbus's words, we perceive the voyage *he and Las Casas* want to show us, and certainly the kind of man *he* wants us to believe he was.

In the admiral's words, we perceive his persistent paranoia in leading his crew to believe his illusion. In the colonies, Columbus only saw what he wanted to see. Konning points out that, while presenting his voyage as the opportunity to spread Christianity, Columbus also reaffirmed his condition as "explorer." His own words to define his expedition were "La Empresa de las Indias:" the enterprise of the Indies. What this expression reveals is that the real intention was searching for profit. It was the beginning of capitalist expansion.

In *Colonial Encounters*, Peter Hulme not only exposes Columbus's compromise with the expansion of capitalism, but also analyzes the hidden contradictions in the admiral's *Journal*. For Hulme, the changes in direction and the wrong calculations are related to a discourse hidden in the first assumption of finding Oriental gold: the one about finding *savage* gold (21). The author points to an unconscious force that drove Columbus to this voyage: the Spanish desire for conquering new territories and a new

market. The New World, then, becomes a fantasy of the Old World. Only this explanation would support the fact that Columbus traveled with only a ship full of cheap baubles and not sufficient arms to force an entry into Eastern trade, since his baubles could not impress Chinese entrepreneurs.

The colonizer's eyes and ears could only see and hear the word *gold*. When Columbus describes his contacts with the Natives, there is always the recognition of the Natives's explanations about where he could find gold, although he could not understand a word of what they said. Moreover, his interest after landing was only finding something he could sell in Spain. The Monarchs of Spain's real objective in supporting Columbus's voyages is then made manifest: the necessity of expanding Spanish territories and, most important, capital. Competing with Portugal, Spain needed to expand its trade, and the best way would be finding new territories, new products, and constructing new markets for consumption. The religious element worked as a kind of disguise that occluded the question of power.

Capitalism is the reason why Columbus came to America, and the relationship with the Natives is no more than the relationship of a superior boss to his subordinates. The Spaniards needed to control, punish and exterminate whoever promoted any kind of resistance. Koning's *Columbus: His Enterprise* exposes Columbus and his settlers's slaughter and extermination of the Natives in the American Continent. In his first reports about the Natives, Columbus described them as a "peaceful and innocent people," who did not know even how to use a lance and were willing to give everything they were asked to give. However, when the Natives realized Columbus and his people were not gods at all and started to fight back, Columbus's account changed drastically in order to justify his need to control them, which involved slavery, violence, and, as he named it, a "war." This is the shift that Hulme also perceives: from the conscious idea of an *Oriental gold* (associated with Cathay, Grand Khan, intelligent soldiers, large buildings, merchant ships), to the unconscious *savage gold*, meaning by that gold obtained from savagery, monstrosity, and anthropophagy (20).

Columbus's discourse shifts from "peaceful people" to "savages," and then to the world of the Caribs, the "Native cannibals," so monstrous and terrifying because, according to the admiral, "they eat human flesh." Columbus's words start to define the monstrosity of this new people, which is his European projection and vision of this natural new world. Columbus needs to define the Natives as less than humans in order to justify the conquering of this new territory according to European fantasies, specially when resistance is offered, as in the case of the Caribs.

The Natives were victimized in all sorts of ways: in seeing their hands cut off if they could not find gold, in seeing their women being abused and raped, treated as sexual slaves, and finally in seeing their friends and relatives being hanged if they did not do what they were ordered to do. Nevertheless, according to Koning, the Natives's resistance was insignificant when compared to the superior power of the Spaniards, and since there were more and more voyages, the colonies were developed and the settlers were able to exterminate the Natives (72).

Both Cohen and Koning mention Bartolomé de Las Casas's defense of Native rights and the tales of oppression he gathered from all parts of the sovereigns's new dominions. Since the Natives were forced to convert to Christianity, the sovereigns of Spain had to stop Columbus and his settlers from enslaving them, because only criminals and prisoners could be made slaves. However, the settlers provoked rebellions and placed the Caribs ("cannibals") outside natural law in order to promote a valid argument to enslave more Natives.

The Natives's resistance gave Columbus the opportunity to set the boundaries between primitive savage and civilized. He could only see the Natives as inferior servile people, and could not realize the limitations of his own civilization. The hard treatment of the Caribs, for example, results from the fact that they resisted the Spanish settlers and their capitalist interests. While the two concepts of peaceful and savage Natives are contradictory in Columbus's texts, one element is common to both: *gold*. Oriental or savage, economic interest was the most important reason for the voyage, and colonial

discourse needed to transform the reality of the new land in order to conform to the Spanish interest in profit.

Columbus and his settlers's violent and abusive attitudes could only produce more violence. The Natives's rebellions, however, could not prevent the development of the Spanish "enterprise" in the American Continent. It is known that the Spanish promoted a slaughter of the Natives in America, and that the expansion of Spanish capitalism and Catholicism was produced at the cost of a river of blood. Nevertheless, the Native survivors of colonization still try to question the superiority of imperial discourse.

Although in the Caribbean and in the Antilles hardly any Native survived, which is confirmed by the population formed of Black slaves's descendants, in many other parts of America the remaining Native descendants try to develop cultural and political forms of resistance. In the next chapters, I will explore the possibilities of a Native revision of colonial discourse in the American Continent and the proposal of an alternative history by means of literature.

NOTES

¹ All quotations of Hans Koning's *Columbus: His Enterprise*, first published in 1976, are taken from the Brazilian translation *Colombo: O Mito Desvendado*, trans. Maria Carmelita Pádua Dias, Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editor, 1992, and translated back into English by the author.

CHAPTER III

INVENTING THE TRICKSTER NATION: *THE HEIRS OF COLUMBUS*

In Native literature, Gerald Vizenor is one of the authors concerned with the consequences of the colonial encounter for the Natives in contemporary North America. In the introduction to *Earthdivers*, he affirms that the mixedblood is an heir and survivor from the union between the daughters of the woodland shamans and white fur traders. In his ambiguous condition, he needs “to dive into unknown urban places now, into the racial darkness in the cities, to create a new consciousness of coexistence” (ix). Vizenor’s celebration of the mixedblood as an earthdiver trickster in postcolonial America evinces a political position to resist the idea of a pure race, since the trickster figure resists any univocal definition.

In *The Heirs of Columbus* (1991), Vizenor contests the idea of the authentic, victimized Native, the romantic ideal of the Native who lives away from civilization and is a victim of Columbus’s enterprise in the American Continent. Instead, he portrays Natives in contemporary American society and deconstructs official history through the celebration of the trickster figure and his humorous language game. Moreover, the author celebrates the hybrid condition of the mixedblood, or crossblood, the descendant of both Western and tribal races, which results in a criticism of colonialist ideas and practices which still affirm a history of racism.

The Heirs of Columbus defends hybridity as a strategy of postcolonial resistance and reaffirms the trickster play with colonialism as a means of Native survival in contemporary society. Published in the year before Columbus’s quincentenary in America, the novel criticizes in advance the celebrations of Columbus’s anniversary. Furthermore, it shows that there is no reason for celebration of a capitalist civilization which sees the culture of Native Americans as exotic objects of museums.

In this novel, Vizenor rewrites the history of Columbus only to affirm that even the “discoverer” of the American Continent was a crossblood: a descendant of Mayan

and Jewish peoples. The main characters of the novel are tricksters and shaman figures who live in the reservation and declare themselves the heirs of Columbus. The heirs are both humans and animals: Memphis is a black panther, Caliban is a white mongrel, and Samana is a shaman bear. Other trickster characters establish the contact between the Western and tribal worlds. Almost Browne, a name that reaffirms his mixedblood and ambiguous condition, dazzles the reservation and the trickster nation with technological laser shows. The lawyer and international fashion model Felipa Flowers is the trickster poacher who recovers Columbus's remains.

Kirkpatrick Sale affirms that Columbus is not a character in the novel, but rather "an idea, manipulated by the author on the one hand and a modern Indian character named Stone Columbus on the other" (488). Stone Columbus is the heir who dresses himself as Christopher Columbus. Genetic analysis and the comparison of Stone's gene signature to Columbus's bones and dried blood on a lead ball found at the bottom of his casket proved Stone's descent. In the story, he is a leader, but instead of perpetuating Columbus's colonialist interests, he devotes himself to the recovery of the heirs's history and to the creation of the tribal healing society. Binn Columbus is Stone's mother, and his father, like Columbus's father, is a weaver. The difference is that, as a contemporary character, he also has a doctorate in Consciousness Studies from the University of California.

These mixedblood heirs are earthdivers: they dive into their past and into contemporary society in order to recover their origins and resist colonization. Past and present live together in the reservation: Stone Columbus directs the Santa Maria Casino, which as Columbus's ship, sinks in a storm. He is also interviewed by Admiral Luckie White on Carp Radio, where he plays with the official history of Columbus to recover the past of the heirs.

Each autumn, the heirs of Columbus gather at the "Stone Tavern," a sacred place laid on a mount at the rise of a natural meadow, near the headwaters of the Mississippi River, to retell the story of the admiral and resurrect their past. They believe that once the stones told trickster stories, and now they are the silent elements which not only

keep history, but also listen to the heirs's stories about Columbus and his trickster lineage.

The heirs decide to recover Columbus's remains in order to keep them in the "House of Life:" "the burial ground for the lost and lonesome bones that were liberated by the heirs from museums" (5). Felipa is designated for the mission, and, with the help of a shaman, she takes the remains from the Brotherhood of American Explorers. Although the heirs go to court for that, they end up convincing the judge and the audience of the hearing of their right to keep the remains, since they are the documented heirs of the admiral.

The story takes a turn when Felipa is assassinated as she attempts to recover Pocahonta's remains ¹. Felipa's murder leads to the foundation of the trickster society on the border between the United States and Canada. After her death, the heirs move to the nation of Point Assinika and transport the House of Life and the Stone Tavern to their new place. In the new nation, the heirs create the Felipa Flowers Casino and build the Statue of the Trickster of Liberty. Also, they start genetic therapy in order to invent a tribal identity and heal wounded people.

The trickster nation calls the government's attention, and some investigators are sent to control and report what happens at Point Assinika. In addition, the cannibal windigoo, who is always trying to destroy the heirs, comes back to terrify and devour them. In the end of the novel, the heirs confront the windigoo and win the moccasin game.

The novel is divided in two main sections: "Blue Moccasins" and "Point Assinika," respectively the names of a game and of the new nation. Each section concerns a strategy to resist colonization. In "Blue Moccasins," the heirs try to recover their origins and history by getting back Columbus's remains and retelling the story of the admiral. The murder of Felipa sets the beginning of the second section and shows that recovering their origins was not a successful strategy. In "Point Assinika," instead of *recovering* their past, the heirs *invent* their origins by creating the crossblood nation and a hybrid tribal identity. Moreover, the heirs deconstruct the colonial concepts of

“nation” and “identity.” Since the nation is settled *on* the border between Canada and the United States, there is no border in Point Assinika. Also, there is no pure identity, and anyone who shares tribal values can have a hybrid identity and become tribal.

The history of Columbus is retold in the first three chapters of “Blue Moccasins.” From the fourth chapter on, the focus of the novel is mainly on the history of the heirs. Consequently, the focus is not on the colonizer, but rather on the colonized. The story is devoted to the heirs rather than to Columbus. Yet, Columbus is important in the story as the ancestor whose story of colonization pushes the Natives’s fight for their rights and a better society.

The last chapter, before the epilogue, portrays the climax of the story: the heirs have to play the moccasin game with the cannibal windigoo. The heirs are victorious and the novel has a “happy end.” However, since the novel defends hybridity as a form of postcolonial resistance, this “happy end” does not mean that the heirs *destroyed* the windigoo, because one element of opposition needs the other if hybridity is to be maintained. Although the heirs win one game, there will never be a last game for the windigoo, who represents the colonialist force.

According to Bhabha, the structure and content of a hybrid text do not contrast or deny the colonizer’s Western tradition, but promote the interference and participation of the colonized’s culture in that discourse. This idea is validated in *The Heirs of Columbus*, since the colonizer’s official history is contaminated by popular forms of discourse and by the trickster version of Columbus’s arrival in the American Continent. The structure of the novel is also marked by hybridity: it presents a constant dialogue with theory and criticism, clearly exemplified by the epilogue. In this section, Vizenor names the bibliographic sources for the several quotations presented in the novel. According to the author, he bothers to show the books he consulted because he does not “see a great difference between history and fiction. A particular kind of fiction.” (Miller 92).

The novel also shows that Vizenor’s literature is not composed of different and isolated narratives: his works are often intertexts of his other novels or short stories. In

The Heirs of Columbus, there is reference to at least three other books: *Earthdivers* (1981), *The Trickster of Liberty* (1988) and the short story collection *Landfill Meditations* (1991). The myth of the earthdiver trickster *Naanabozho* and the heirs's dive into their origins are intertexts of *Earthdivers*. Also, the unfinished statue of the Trickster of Liberty in the novel by the same title is finally completed, and the laser trickster Almost Browne, who is the protagonist of the short story "Feral Lasers" in *Landfill Meditations*, is part of the heirs's healing society.

More than that, the author establishes an intertextuality with different writing genres, both traditional and popular: history, fiction and mass culture. The mixture of genres is important for the structure of the novel, which reaffirms writing as play and values both official and marginal discourses.

Gerald Vizenor proposes the creation of a trickster "post-indian" society in which "humor rules and tricksters heal" (126). The trickster heirs survive in capitalist America through the use of both Native culture and technological advances. They establish a crossblood healing society that can save the Natives, the children and the world from the Old World "culture of death." In "On Thin Ice You Might as Well Dance," McCaffery and Marshall point out that *The Heirs of Columbus* provides "a perfect example of how Vizenor has used his "'trickster' literary program to construct a means of escaping victimization" (288).

When interviewed by McCaffery and Marshall, Vizenor affirmed that he "wanted to make [his] revisionist story of the last five hundred years serve tribal interests and changes, rather than continuing to serve the white liberal interests of having Indians as victims" (297). In a mythic way, he wants to heal the mutants of Columbus's "Chemical Civilization" and tell for the first time a Native version of the story of who Columbus *becomes*. In his story, the tricksters rewrite Columbus's history and make him somebody "far more interesting than he was in his own life" (297). Moreover, Columbus serves the "revolution" by helping to create the tribal mixedblood society, since his heirs take advantage of their descent when they fight for their rights.

Vizenor does not criticize or affirm the figure of the “Admiral of the Ocean Sea.” Instead, he subverts the meaning of Columbus’s voyage to the American continent. Official history supports the idea that the European Columbus *discovered* America. Vizenor contradicts this version and affirms that Columbus came to America in search of his Mayan descent, to recover his Native origins. Christopher Columbus, who was cursed with a twisted penis that made intercourse painful, came to the American Continent in search of his Mayan origins and found Samana, the Native golden hand talker. Samana saved him from his curse, he fell in love with her, and they had a child also called Samana. This colonial “encounter” established the crossblood heritage of Columbus.

In *Trickster Makes this World*, Hyde affirms that boundary is where the trickster will be found (7). *The Heirs of Columbus* celebrates this condition. The trickster heirs are not only shape-shifters, but also boundary-crossers. They are on the border between the Western and tribal worlds, and avoid any univocal position or terminal creed. Because their trickster nation also needs an ambiguous settlement, it is settled at Point Assinika, on the border between the United States and Canada.

In *The Heirs of Columbus*, as well as in “A Coyote Columbus Story,” different tribes have diverse visions about the trickster. In *The Heirs of Columbus*, Vizenor makes reference to the *Anishinaabe* trickster *Naanabozho*, “who assists him in remembering ‘how to turn pain and horror into humor’” (McCaffery and Marshall 289). In the first chapter, the author retells the *Anishinaabe* – or Chippewa – tale in which *Naanabozho* finds himself in the middle of his own shit and has to invent a whole new world out of it to find some freedom. The heirs of Columbus’s New World is like that. In the middle of capitalist and racist attitudes, they create a “New America” to celebrate the hybrid and ambiguous identity of the mixedblood as the best postcolonial condition. This is confirmed in the novel by the statement that mongrels represent the best race, since “the best humans” are mongrels: Columbus, Jesus, Mayans, Jews and Moors.

The trickster is not only a character in Vizenor’s literature, it also establishes a peculiar form of discourse, which values humor and imagination, language play, and

ambiguity. Parody is also an important element for trickster narratives. As a double coded discourse, it establishes a textual dialogue in which Columbus's official history only has importance by the interrelation to its Native version. Therefore, it represents discourse "on the border."

The trickster rewriting of Columbus shows, in Vizenor's revisionist efforts, traces of postmodernism and deconstructionism. Both Arnold Krupat and Alan Velie point to the influence of Vizenor's reading of the French deconstructionists in his writing. In "Beyond the novel Chippewa-style: Gerald Vizenor's post-modern fiction," Velie affirms that Vizenor's literature acknowledges the partiality of truth, and presents writing as play with a peculiar Native sense of humor (137). Playful versions of history are pervasive in *The Heirs of Columbus*.

The title sets the hybrid logic of the novel, which focuses on the contact between Columbus and *his* America, and his heirs's trickster version of history. Based on the assumption that trickster narratives value heterogeneous and ambiguous discourses, this analysis demonstrates how hybridity, as defined in chapter one, is present in *The Heirs of Columbus*, both in the structure, evinced in a hybrid literary genre, and in the content of the novel, which focuses on the celebration of tricksters and mixedbloods. In this chapter, I analyze the effective strategies of postcolonial resistance made possible by hybridity in the two sections of the novel: "Blue Moccasins" and "Point Assinika." Finally, I discuss the possible dangers involved in the play with colonialism. The emphasis on play can be a dangerous strategy of Native resistance, and the heirs's victory only transitory.

Blue Moccasins

In "Blue Moccasins," the heirs of Columbus still live in the reservation, which is not a place isolated from capitalist interference. In the reservation, the heirs get together to retell their past. They attempt to recover their origins in three situations: first, Stone Columbus tells his story as Columbus's descendant in Carp Radio. From chapters one to

three, the heirs retell the history about Columbus. Finally, in chapter four, Felipa Flowers tries to recover the heirs's origins by getting back Columbus's remains.

In the first chapter, a radio talk show is run by Admiral Luckie White, who interviews Stone Columbus in the "Santa Maria Casino." Carp Radio, a pun with the Latin expression "Carp Diem:" seize the day, emphasizes the trickster's survival play as the strategy to resist colonization. It is part of the reservation, thus it is the mass media channel through which the heirs's voice is heard in the United States. Although part of Western culture, the radio is much more appropriate to a trickster discourse, since it tends to motivate imagination more than the visual media. Admire, the mongrel heir, subverts our perception of reality and defends the imaginative power of the radio: "Radio is real, television is not" (8). Stone Columbus also affirms that radio is real, and " 'the rest is bad television': [...] 'what we hear on radio is what we see, and the remains, mean crows and evangelists, are poses on television'" (124).

The structure of the radio talk show is used, for example, when Luckie White interviews Stone Columbus:

"Admiral Luckie White is on the air, your late night host and voice of the night on Carp Radio." The radio was heard in four directions from enormous loudspeakers on the masts of the casino and the caravels. "Columbus is back to answer your questions and mine tonight. Here we go once more with the truth in the dark, so, how do you expect our listeners to buy the stories that your brother is a stone, a common rock?"

"Stone is my name, not my brother, and we are not common," said Stone Columbus. (9)

As a media channel, radio depends on the capitalist contribution of commercials. Carp Radio is not different from that, but it makes use of capitalism to spread the news about the Native heirs and their tribal world, and to tell "the truth in the dark," which means a tribal version of what is considered true in Columbus's history: " 'The truth at last, but first a commercial announcement from those wise companies that buy our time and make truth possible in the dark', said Admiral White" (10). The idea of "truth" is deconstructed when Stone Columbus answers the questions. Besides the confusion and constant changes about the dates in Columbus's history, the trickster strategy is to

frustrate any intention of finding closure or definite answers, since the trickster heirs “imagine the starts but never the ends” (173).

The “historical truth” about Columbus is deconstructed in the first three chapters, in which the heirs recover the story of the admiral. Although the dialogue with mass culture, as exemplified by Columbus’s participation in the radio program, is important to the hybrid structure of the novel, it is the dialogue between history and fiction which is most significant. This dialogue not only rewrites the history of Columbus, but also celebrates hybridity both as structure (parody) and content (a mixedblood Columbus) in the novel.

Vizenor’s deconstructionist opinion that there is no great distinction between history and fiction governs his rewriting of the official history of Columbus. He not only quotes parts of translations of Columbus’s *Journal* to affirm his version, but also brings quotations from other historical books in order to legitimate his rewriting. In *Postindian Conversations*, Vizenor points out that Christopher Columbus was not “the only traveler who had the enthusiasm and maybe stupidity to set sail in search of another continent” (128). In his version, Natives found him centuries earlier, when they landed in Europe and the Mediterranean. In *The Heirs of Columbus*, then, Columbus is “a crossblood descendant of the ancient Natives, and he was teased by this inheritance to return to his ancestral homeland” (*Postindian Conversations* 129).

The retelling of history in the novel results in a hybrid text. The author does not contest official documents, but uses them as part of his fictional version. Documents and literature contaminate each other, and *The Heirs of Columbus* fills in the gaps of official history in a mythical and humorous way. In the novel, Vizenor makes use of the official narrative in order to prove his thesis that Columbus is a Mayan descendant and comes back to America in search of his Native origins. The first chapter starts with a mixture of Columbus’s descriptions in his *Journal*, which are quoted in the text, and the author’s Native version of the story:

Christopher Columbus saw a blue light in the west, but “it was such an uncertain thing,” he wrote in his journal to the crown, “that I did not feel it was adequate

proof of land.” That light was a torch raised by the silent hand talkers, a summons to the New World. Since then, the explorer has become a trickster healer in the stories told by his tribal heirs at the headwaters of the great river. (3)

The heirs of Columbus get together at the “Stone Tavern” to remember their “stories in the blood,” the stories about the colonial encounter of Columbus and the Natives. In “Storm Puppets,” the third chapter, the history of Columbus and his voyages to America is retold by the heirs. Binn Columbus has the power to hear objects, and she “hears” Columbus’s story in a letter found in the sea and in the partial remains of the mariner. This chapter is a parody of famous books about Columbus, such as *The Life of the Admiral Christopher Columbus*, and of the translations of the *Journal*. As a hybrid and double discourse, parody reaffirms an official text by writing it differently. Hence, Vizenor validates his version “scientifically” by quoting parts of these historical documents, while filling their gaps humorously.

Vizenor’s narrative repeats the official history of Columbus’s family, the son of Domenico Colombo e Susanna di Fontanarossa. Information about the admiral’s physical appearance, which was introduced in the previous chapter, is presented in the novel in a quotation from *The Life of the Admiral*. The author keeps the description made by Hernando Columbus, one of the admiral’s sons: “The Admiral was a well built man of more than medium stature, long visaged with cheeks somewhat high, but neither fat nor thin” (30). However, Vizenor subverts the historical narratives by adding a comic reference to a malformation in Columbus’s genitals:

Columbus was pained by persistent erections; his enormous clubbed penis curved to the right, a disease of fibrous contracture during erection. He was born with a burdensome penis that once was presented as comic in ancient dramas. The smaller penis was a prick of endearment in some coteries; his was a torturous penis, a curse that turned the mere thought of sexual pleasure to sudden pain. (31)

In this part of the narrative, Vizenor recovers the metaphor that associates the colonizer taking possession of the mother land to a man possessing a woman sexually. Columbus cannot possess the land, nor the Native women: “He could not masturbate or have intercourse without pain, and the hard curve of his penis made intromission even more arduous” (31). Furthermore, it is Samana, a Native woman, who heals his sexual problem. She is never named as a Native, but as a *hand talker* and a *healer*: “She was a

healer, and he was lost in her hands, but she was never tribal because she was not a slave in his name” (38).

Fiction and fact are mixed in this trickster narrative, and Vizenor quotes an unknown text, probably part of his own fiction. Columbus describes Samana as the Native hand talker who had “golden breasts and thighs, [...] the first woman who moved [him] from the curse of [his] secret pain.” According to the narrator, Columbus wrote a secret letter at sea on his return from the first voyage. The letter was sealed in a container to survive a storm, and announced his discoveries, insecurities, visions, wild pleasures with the hand talker and the liberation from his curse. Vizenor legitimates his subversion by quoting Samuel Eliot Morison’s *Admiral of the Ocean Sea*. In this book, Morison confirms that Columbus wrote a brief account of the voyage and discoveries, “wrapped the parchment in a waxed cloth, ordered it to be headed up in a great wooden barrel, and cast into the sea” (31). However, the narrator in *The Heirs of Columbus* adds one more fact, and affirms that “Columbus worried to his death that his letter would be found at sea, and that he would be tried to defend his sanity over the stories of the storm puppets and a hand talker with golden thighs” (44).

Vizenor quotes Columbus’s words to introduce Samana in the history of the admiral’s arrival in America. According to the narrator, Columbus never mentioned her in the letter to the monarchs, but he “unwittingly” counted her as one of the tribal people on the caravels. First, the quotation of official documents proves that the admiral wrote he would take six Natives with him when he departed. Nevertheless, on October 14, “he wrote in his journal, ‘Your Highnesses will see this for yourselves when I bring to you the *seven* that I have taken’” (37) (emphasis added).

Revisions of official history, as it was discussed in chapter two, have questioned the real intentions of Columbus’s voyages to the American Continent. Vizenor explores this discussion in the third chapter of the novel. He quotes Sale’s *The Conquest of Paradise* and replaces the ideas in the book with his own version of the story. In *The Conquest of Paradise*, Sale affirms that if Columbus really planned to go to Cathay and the realm of the Grand Kahn, he would not take with him little trinkets, beads and bells

to trade with. Vizenor concludes that, although other historical reasons have prevailed, as honor and wealth, the explanation is that the mariner “heard stories in his blood and would return to the New World” (35).

Deconstruction and hybridization are not only forms of criticism of official history. Sometimes they even neutralize any opinion in favor or against dominating discourses, since they reject discourses which privilege any single position. Vizenor deconstructs official history with humor and parody, as exemplified above, but, although parody and humor are political strategies in the novel, the author is more successful in denouncing the atrocities of Columbus’s colonization by introducing “bitter ironies” in his narrative.

Even though Vizenor does not demonstrate any explicit criticism of Columbus’s and his crew’s brutality in America, he signals to the painful process of colonization and portrays the “Chemical Society” which resulted from that. Since the relationship between colonizer and colonized is the one of master and slave, the only alternative to deconstruct this discourse in the novel is to establish Columbus’s relationship with Samana, a mythical figure.

The irony that Samana cannot be named “tribal” because she would then become a “slave” allows Vizenor to criticize Columbus’s tyranny. The author recovers Columbus’s words in his *Journal*, in which he affirms that “the tribal people on the island ‘ought to be good servants and of good skill, for I see that they repeat very quickly all that is said to them’” (38). In addition, Vizenor quotes historical accounts confirming that Columbus’s relationship to the Natives was only that of master and slaves, and states that “cruel and bitter ironies abound in the missions of wealth and Old World civilizations. Overnight his [Columbus’s] discoveries reduced tribal cultures to the status of slaves; at the same time the stories in his blood were liberated by a tribal hand talker” (41).

Nevertheless, Vizenor’s deconstructive task is to unbalance any binary oppositions between good and evil, master and slave. In his text, Columbus can not be associated only to an evil figure, since he is a mixedblood. Therefore, he inverts the

master/slave binary opposition to establish a *différance*, the interdependence between the two forces, by affirming that Columbus is *also* a slave:

Columbus could have been remembered as the unvarnished slave of the Old World; he avouched his mission to the monarchs, and at the same time he carried the signature of survivance, the unrevealed stories in his blood, and the curse of a clubbed penis. Samana liberated his soul, his stories, and his passion; even so, his search for wealth would never be realized. He died a renounced slave to the monarchs in Valladolid, Spain, on May 20, 1506, and was first buried in San Francisco de la Santa María de la Antigua. (38)

Vizenor's parody also denounces Columbus's capitalist intentions in America, his loss of control in the settlements, and his violence. At first, the tribal humorous story of the admiral whose "bones and memories ached for the hand talker" (41), who had saved him from his curse and vanished, deconstructs Columbus's thirst for gold with humor: "Nothing but gold would ease his worries and sense of spiritual separation" (41). However, this statement introduces another "bitter irony" in the story. Instead of promoting a good relationship between Columbus and the Natives, Samana increases the admiral's thirst for gold, and does not stop the colonizer's violence. Two pages later, we come to know that Columbus's ship *Santa Maria* "sank on a mission the tribes would never survive", since "the Old World lust for gold would silence tribal names and stories in a decade" (43).

The author also registers the massacre at *La Villa de la Navidad* and presents the violent Columbus who commands the crew, very different from that "in love with" Samana: "The sailors were ready, since I always advised my men to be on guard," he wrote in his journal. "They gave one Indian a great cut on the buttocks and wounded another in the breast with an arrow" (43).

Columbus represents a mark in the expansion of capitalism, and his heirs live in the society which resulted from his enterprise. In *The Heirs of Columbus*, Vizenor acknowledges America as both the Continent and the United States of America, since that country is the best example of Columbus's enterprise: a capitalist and chemical society. The trickster heirs live in the United States five hundred years after Columbus's

arrival, and they show how American society consolidates Columbus's thirst for "gold" in its greed for money.

The story of Felipa Flowers and Doric Michéd is a good example of this greed for money. In the fourth chapter, Felipa searches for Columbus's remains and the novel becomes a detective story. The heirs need to recover Columbus's remains from the Brotherhood of American Explorers in order to develop gene therapy and make the world "tribal." Felipa Flowers is the heir in charge of that, and she is successful. However, she is victim of a trap when she travels to London to recover Pocahonta's remains, and ends up assassinated. Chaine Louis Riel, the private investigator, and Captain Treves Brink help to solve this mystery. They discover that Doric Michéd, the crossblood who is a member of the Brotherhood of American Explorers, is the criminal.

Although a crossblood, Doric is part of the Brotherhood of American Explorers and shares the whites's interests in selling Native culture. He is an evil force in the story, associated with the colonizer and the tribal figure of the windigoo. When Felipa says that medicine pouches were *stolen* from the tribe, Doric prefers the language of colonization: "*Discover* is more accurate" (50).

Felipa Flowers recovers Columbus's remains through trickery. A shaman becomes invisible and helps her to take the remains, so that no evidence is left of the theft. However, the heirs of Columbus are called for a court hearing. The heirs subvert not only the crime – they say there is nothing to be stolen, since Columbus's remains belong to his descendants – but also the formal discourse of the hearing, which is parodied and ends up in a laser show.

Carp radio transmits the unusual judicial hearing, which "would depend more on imagination than on material representations" (65), and would favor tribal consciousness. The incredible hearing of "the crime that was stolen" to demonstrate to the court "the evidence nobody had" attracted great popular attention. In a mixture of a show and a federal hearing, "The judge reserved several rows at the front of the courtroom; the other seats were sold to the first hundred people in line" (65). The

presentation of Almost Browne's laser show and virtual realities as evidence impressed so much the judge that she considered them admissible at trials.

The association of Columbus with colonization and capitalism is reinforced by Felipa's murder. The tribal character is murdered because of Columbus's remains and Doric's capitalist interests. The president of the explorers's club had promised to sell Columbus's remains for reburial in a quincentenary mausoleum dedicated to the admiral in the Dominican Republic. The price of the remains was at least ten million dollars. Doric killed Felipa to steal Pocahontas's remains, which she had just recovered. He planned to exchange them for Columbus's remains, which the heirs kept in the reservation. He would have both personal gain and fame with that achievement.

The episode of Felipa's death has a great importance in the novel. First, it suggests that Columbus's quincentenary only reaffirms the capitalist intentions of colonization and the violent and discriminatory treatment of Natives. Moreover, it introduces the second part of the novel, "Point Assinika," and motivates Stone Columbus to move with the heirs to a "new nation," where they start the trickster crossblood society devoted to healing.

Point Assinika

The nation of Point Assinika, otherwise named Point Roberts, is situated in the Strait of Georgia between Semiahmoo, Washington State, and Vancouver Island, Canada. The nation "on the border" is declared sovereign by the heirs of Christopher Columbus exactly on the five hundredth anniversary of the admiral in America: "October 12, 1992." Vizenor recreates America in its quincentenary, but does not deny Columbus's official narrative. Stone Columbus repeats Columbus's discourse in his *Journal* when he arrives at Point Assinika. However, technological advances and the motivation to keep a hybrid text contaminate the novel's discourse, and Stone repeats Columbus's speech in a different situation. Instead of writing a log-book, he participates in a talk show:

‘No sooner had we concluded the formalities of taking possession of the point than people began to come to the beach, all as pale as their mothers bore them, and the women also, although we did not see more than one very young girl’ said Stone Columbus on Carp Radio. (119)

Victorious in the trickster hearing, but afflicted with Felipa’s death, the heirs move to the new nation and start genetic therapy. References to genetic engineering, robots, mutation and biological experiments introduce a new discourse in the second part of the novel. Science fiction, then, becomes the next popular genre in an intertext made up of a novel, a radio talk show, and a tribal hearing. The development of genetic experiments and mutation is something that scares Vizenor and promotes his sometimes dark vision of the world. Nevertheless, genetic experiments are practiced in the novel in order to end up racial discrimination and install the crossblood society.

Another element in the science fiction discourse is the metaphor “Chemical Civilization,” which Vizenor associates with our Western five-hundred-year history of chemical usage. This metaphor is particularly emphasized in the end of the novel, when the children that arrive at the nation of Point Assinika prove to be victims of chemical contamination. In fact, the trickster nation is a place of weird, sensitive and wounded people. When the children entered the casino in the nation, they “hobbled and limped, some without legs, other without arms, and many who were blind, but no one seemed to notice, because most of the gamblers in the casino were wounded, deformed, grotesque” (145). According to this description, the present world is a place of disabled and fragmented people, which is a very relevant metaphor to express the sense of loss that people have in postmodern society. The loss in human relations and values cannot be filled in by technological advances and materialism, so much so that, in the novel, people move to the tricksters’ nation to be healed.

Point Assinika is the ultimate defense of hybridity in the novel, and the trickster heirs emphasize they want to create a mixedblood America, very different from that of Columbus’s discourse. As in the previous examples, in this part of the novel the author also introduces Columbus’s words in order to legitimate the nation and to present his “bitter” ironies. Stone Columbus affirms they took possession of the point in the name

of their genes and of the wild tricksters of liberty, and ironically makes reference to American racism and the necessity of registering anything according to “White American” law, which is the “authentic” and “official” discourse in the United States. Since the American stereotype is the “blond,” and American society usually recognizes Natives’s history and culture only when it is part of anthropological research, Stone affirms that they made all the “necessary” declarations and had these testimonies recorded by a “blond anthropologist” (119).

Columbus’s heirs create a new America and recreate the United States for the Natives. In Point Assinika, the statue of the “Trickster of Liberty” is higher than the Statue of Liberty, and “the inscription on the statue promised to ‘heal the tired and huddled masses yearning to breathe free’” (122). The Trickster of Liberty finally promotes the freedom that the American statue promised to *everybody* coming from across the ocean, but never given to the Natives.

Point Assinika is “claimed by the heirs as a free state with no prisons, no passports, no public schools, no missionaries, no television, and no public taxation” (124). Vizenor’s novel also shows that it is the place where American capitalism and technology can contribute to heal people and turn them “tribal.” Genetic therapies, natural medicine, bingo cards, and entertainment are forms of healing, and are free to those who come to be healed and those who live on the point.

The objective of this utopian nation is to make the world tribal and create a universal crossblood identity. Anyone who wants to be tribal is accepted in Point Assinika. However, Stone explains that he resists any notion of blood quantum and racial identification. Hence, the tribal universal identity is much more related to tribal consciousness than to tribal blood, and it is given through genetic therapy to those dedicated to “heal rather than steal tribal cultures” (162).

Krupat recognizes that this idealist nation is a contradictory element in Vizenor’s celebration of ambivalence, since it has a univocal aim: “healing” the human race. Moreover, the last scene in the novel is a happy end, which promotes some closure in the narrative. Although the basis of the new society – humor in stories, genetic therapy

and gambling – confirms the celebration of trickster play, deconstruction and hybridity, which are the elements of postcolonial resistance in the novel, it is possible to detect the limitations of such strategies as forces of resistance, which could explain the necessity of giving some closure to the story.

Krupat's "*Ratio-* and *Natio-* in Vizenor's *Heirs of Columbus*" is a very detailed study of the hybrid nature of Vizenor's tribal identity and the genetic therapy developed in Point Assinika. First, he analyzes Columbus's descent and the affirmation that the admiral came to America because he heard "stories in the blood." According to Krupat, the expression "stories in the blood" occurs approximately fifty-three times in the novel, and it is relevant to the concept of tribal identity because it takes into account both national and rational elements of identification.

For Krupat, the fact that Columbus is a Mayan and Jewish descendant is very significant in the novel. More than a parody of the many versions for Columbus's origins, he explains that this descent is important because the Jews were expelled from Spain exactly in 1492, the year Columbus traveled for the first time to America. In 1492 Spain, the myth of "Pure Blood" (*sangre pura*) expressed the desire to keep a "pure race," and Spanish people did not want their blood mixed with Muslim or Jewish blood. Therefore, as both tribal and Jewish, Vizenor's Columbus is doubly marginal.

The myth of "Pure Blood" is a very traditional type of identification, associated to a racist concept of nation. However, the modern world introduces a *rational* idea of kinship: "my brothers and sisters are those who share my values and principles" (Krupat 58). According to Krupat, since Vizenor's position is to keep things open by refusing to resolve contradictions, the politics of his novel must remain ambivalent, as well as the definition of identity in Point Assinika. Therefore, he defines tribal identity both in national *and* rational terms.

The trickster heirs cannot deny that blood counts in American society, which still takes into account blood quantum and repeats a colonialist behavior. Therefore, blood counts in the new nation, but according to the heirs's "ratio:" it is mixed blood that counts. Moreover, blood counts only when people share tribal values and the desire to

heal the Chemical Society. The expression “hear stories in the blood” means that only those who value tribal ideas of healing with humor can have tribal blood.

The genetic signature in Point Assinika is not *pure*, it is hybrid. Since scientists have established the genetic signatures of most of the tribes in the country, anyone can have a genetic tribal identity by an injection of suitable genetic material and become a crossblood. “Germans, at last, could be genetic Sioux, and thousands of coastal blondes bored with being white could become shadow tribes of Hopi, or Chippewa, with gene therapies from Point Assinika” (162).

Ironically, Columbus’s blood counts in the novel for tribal interests, since the heirs want to recover everything owned by their ancestor. Stone writes a letter to the President to remind him that King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella signed seven documents and granted Columbus a tenth of the gold, and other precious metals, spices, pearls, gems, and other merchandise obtained in commerce and free of all taxes. The trickster strategy is to expose Columbus’s and American capitalist interests and ill-treatment of the Natives. Stone advises the president that, unless the government gives the legal heirs the unpaid tithe, they “shall annex, as satisfaction of the tithe, the United States of America” (160).

Krupat points that Vizenor’s trickster discourse and humor achieve an ambivalent political significance, complicitous and critical at once. Moreover, he associates the idea of an ambivalent political position to Hutcheon’s postmodern parody and Jameson’s concept of “fantastic historiography.” While Hutcheon affirms that there is political action in postmodern parody, Jameson states that postmodern fiction portrays symptoms of social and historical impotence, of the blocking of possibilities that leaves little option but the imaginary. Vizenor’s use of the mythical figure of the trickster represents this movement to the imaginary, since the author affirms that “You can’t have liberation if you’re confined to discourses based on the real” (McCaffery and Marshall 303).

The political defense of ambivalence and a hybrid identity is part of Vizenor’s trickster project. Western capitalist society cannot be destroyed, nor its impact on Native life can be neglected. Therefore, trickster resistance is appropriate because it is

developed on the border between Western reality and the tribal literary power of imagination. Tricksters demonstrate the instability of contemporary life, and celebrate play as both a theoretical basis and a strategy of survival. In *Point Assinika*, Vizenor's defense of play is represented by the importance given to games of chance.

Gambling is free for those who come to the nation to be healed and become "tribal," and it is bingo that pays for local services. Vizenor makes clear that the capitalist interests of bingo will only be used for helping the Natives and marginalized people. In the first chapter, when the heirs still lived in the reservation, the narrator presents Columbus's ships *Santa Maria*, *Niña* and *Pinta* as respectively the "Santa Maria Casino," a restaurant, and a tax free market. This ironic appropriation of the ships both reinforces Hulme's argument that Columbus's search for gold evinced the capitalist intentions of his enterprise and allows his heirs to use Columbus's legacy for tribal interests.

In an interview, Vizenor shows his interest in detecting the impact bingo is having on the tribal experience of life – both its positive and negative consequences. Moreover, he relates the process of trickster storytelling to chance, highlighting the importance of playing in his literature. Games of chance are essential in *Point Assinika*, since they "heal the wounded and lonesome" (124). Therefore, although the *Santa Maria Casino* sinks in a storm as Columbus's ship did, play cannot stop in the novel: the heirs of Columbus survive and create a new casino in *Point Assinika*, the "Felipa Flowers Casino."

In fact, *The Heirs of Columbus* is a game between the trickster heirs and the evil forces which perpetuate colonialism. In "On Thin Ice You Might as Well Dance", Vizenor affirms that tricksters "*liberate* themselves through the process of existential play and language" (303). In this novel, the tricksters's strategy in the game is to liberate themselves through the play with language and colonialism. In several parts of the novel, the heirs confront evil forces, which represent colonialism in their attempt to destroy Native culture. The first one is Doric Michéd, who is a member of the Brotherhood of American Explorers and keeps Columbus's remains. In the last chapter,

colonialism is represented by the cannibal windigoo, a Native evil figure with whom the heirs have to play the moccasin game. When they recover Columbus's remains from the Brotherhood of American Explorers and go to court to defend their rights, they win the game and defeat the American law system thanks to the trickster power of imagination and to the trickery of assuming the role of Columbus's descendants. Felipa's death is a kind of defeat, but the heirs are victorious in the end of the novel because they defeat the windigoo in the moccasin game.

The last scene in *The Heirs of Columbus* emphasizes the heirs's victory, which confirms that resisting colonization by retelling history through a trickster discourse can be a successful strategy. Almost Browne resurrects important figures in his laser show in the end of the novel, all of them considered tricksters and crossbloods: Jesus Christ, Christopher Columbus, Felipa Flowers and Pocahontas. Moreover, Almost resurrects leaders who are references in the history of Native resistance in the United States and Canada, as Louis Riel ². In fact, Vizenor introduces these Native figures of resistance early in the novel. One strategy is to present characters who are their descendants, such as the private investigator Chaine Louis Riel.

In spite of the fact that some resistance occurs as a result of the heirs's hybrid and trickster discourse, it is the end of the novel that exposes the limits of a Native resistance based on playing with the colonizer. Although the last sentence in the novel represents a happy end, since "The children danced on the marina, and their wounds were healed once more in a moccasin game with demons"(183), the windigoo reminds the heirs that "The game never ends"(183), which points to the instability of the heirs's victory when play is the strategy of resistance.

In the moccasin game, the windigoo has to find out which moccasin has the marked coin that bears the image of Christopher Columbus. If he wins, he takes the children who are at Point Assinika, and this means the heirs's defeat. Doric Michéd is mentioned several times in the novel as akin to the windigoo, which confirms the cannibal is the evil force of imperialism and capitalism in the novel. The irony is that it

is the character associated with the colonizer that is the “cannibal” in the novel, and not the Native, as Columbus describes in his *Journal*.

The tricksters’s strategy to defeat the windigoo is to place a dose of the war herb, which could destroy the world, in a pouch under the moccasin with the marked coin. The heirs win by convincing the windigoo to give up, since the war herb would end the tribe, the heirs, the children and the nation. In other words, it would end the world he is so eager to devour. The windigoo’s dependence on the heirs is confirmed by Stone’s question to the windigoo: ““Who would you be without the heirs and the children to menace?”” (182).

When Stone affirms that “even a demon needs humans” (182), he not only reaffirms the windigoo’s statement that the game never ends, but also demonstrates that, in the ambivalent logic of the game, the two participants depend on each other. In other words, in the imperialist game the colonizer only affirms his existence by the presence of the colonized he menaces. The colonizer needs the colonized to keep the exploratory capitalist game and “devour” him, as the windigoo wants to devour the heirs.

The colonized, on the other hand, also needs the colonizer to keep the game in *The Heirs of Columbus*, and victory is only temporary, because the windigoo can return any time for another moccasin game. The problem of the instability of play is that there will always be the possibility of losing, specially when playing with such powerful forces as imperialism and capitalism.

Critics such as Diana Brydon, Edward Said, and Peter Hulme are aware of the dangers of playing with history and colonialism. In “The White Inuit Speaks: Contamination as Literary Strategy,” Brydon explores the differences between postmodernism and postcolonialism, and suggests that postmodernist devices can serve postcolonial ends. She shows that postmodern fiction takes liberties when retelling the facts of history much more freely than does postcolonial fiction. For her, postcolonial resistance is possible when, while a text celebrates the contamination of colonizer and colonized discourses, it does not hesitate “to suggest that some interpretations carry greater validity than others: lies may be distinguished from truths; false values from

valid ones” (201). In other words, even recognizing that there is no single truth, the text *desires* to be true when retelling history.

The discussion about how postmodernism and deconstruction can contribute to postcolonial resistance is very appropriate to the analysis of *The Heirs of Columbus*. Vizenor uses postmodernist and deconstructionist devices in the novel, and hybridity as postcolonial resistance reaffirms those devices. However, he prefers to end the novel very optimistically, with an image of hope. Krupat affirms that “Vizenor’s postmodernism can serve as an antagonist to Western postmodernism rather than an ally” (68). According to him, Vizenor’s sensitivity to human suffering and the human desire to act, as confirmed in the Sartrean epigraph to *The Heirs of Columbus*, makes his postmodernism far less ambiguous than anything possible in the more usual postmodernisms of Europe and America.

Brydon’s text complements Krupat’s conclusion. Vizenor’s “less ambiguous” end to *The Heirs of Columbus* confirms Brydon’s idea that it is important to take a position in order to have postcolonial resistance. Moreover, the epigraph from Sartre’s “What is Literature?,” which states that “we want it [literature] to be at the same time an act; we want it to be explicitly conceived as a weapon in the struggle that men wage against evil,” indicates that Vizenor is aware of the necessity to be *against* colonialism when resisting it. However, the trickster play is predominant in the novel.

Finally, if a position *against* colonialism is necessary for postcolonial resistance, then the trickster ambiguous play can be a dangerous strategy. Nevertheless, the trickster play is successful in *The Heirs of Columbus*, and just in the end of the novel we can identify some closure and a position taken, when the heirs defeat the windigoo and install a healing *and* hybrid society. Vizenor’s strategy is, then, to conciliate the trickster play with postcolonial resistance.

Vizenor’s *The Heirs of Columbus* shows that tricksters can resist and transform society, although their victory is transitory because the play with colonialism and capitalism never ends. In the next chapter, Thomas King’s “A Coyote Columbus Story” brings an alternative view of the effectiveness of the trickster, now made unable to cope

with the forces of colonialism. The analysis of the short story shows how the trickster figure can be a dangerous form of resistance. Moreover, it suggests that the trickster's discourse only works when the Native narrator takes a position *against* colonialism and, as Brydon says, instead of playing with official narratives, makes both the reader and the trickster aware of the dangers involved in forgetting history.

NOTES

¹ Pocahontas was born in Virginia in 1595 and her tribal name was *Matoaka*. She was betrothed to John Rolfe, an English tobacco grower, and married on April 5, 1614. Peter Hulme has a very detailed study about Pocahontas and the English colonization of Virginia in *Colonial Encounters*.

² Louis Riel was a very important leader of the Métis who led resistance against Eastern exploitation of the Canadian prairies. He was executed “for treason” by the central government in 1885.

CHAPTER IV

PLAYING HAZARDOUS GAMES: "A COYOTE COLUMBUS STORY"

The border between the United States and Canada does not exist to Natives, so much so that, although considered an American writer, Vizenor himself is a Métis, a person of mixed Indian and French-Canadian ancestry. Both the American Gerald Vizenor and the Canadian Thomas King are mixedbloods, and tribal culture challenges the frontiers between the two countries. In the fiction of these two writers, the trickster represents this challenge of frontiers. He is useful to express the Natives's ambiguous mixedblood condition and to recover tribal origins in postcolonial North America.

The Canadian writer Thomas King is one of the authors whose fiction is pervaded by that mythic character. King uses the trickster in an attempt to recover Native oral tradition, as evinced in "A Coyote Columbus Story."¹ This narrative was published in the short story collection *One Good Story, That One* in 1993. Thomas King and William Kent Monkman had published a similar version of the story in the children's book by the same title in 1992.

In "A Coyote Columbus Story," King questions the trickster's effectiveness as a form of postcolonial resistance in contemporary Native literature, since Coyote's trickery by itself cannot stop the colonialist process. The female Coyote visits the narrator and tells him that she is going to a party to be given as a celebration of Christopher Columbus. According to her, "that is the one who found America. That is the one who found the Indians" (123). The Native narrator is aware of the dangerous consequences of Coyote's ideas, so he tells her another version of Columbus's arrival in America, very different from the one she found in the "big red" history book. In this version, it is Old Coyote who creates Columbus because she does not pay attention to her thoughts. Old Coyote was bored because she did not have anybody to play with. She created the Indians to play with her, but they gave up because she always made up the

rules and won. While Old Coyote was singing and dancing, and only thinking about playing ball, she created three ships, Columbus and his people.

The narrator's story takes a turn when Coyote's invention takes a life of its own: Columbus affirms that he does not want to play ball. He wants to find China and gold, or something he can sell in Spain. Since Columbus can not find gold or anything of great value, he decides to take some Indians to Spain. Old Coyote does not believe Columbus and think he is playing a trick. While she laughs, Columbus steals all the Indians and leaves. Old Coyote realizes that Columbus was serious and gets really sorry for thinking him up. However, her sadness does not last very long. Old Coyote is just interested in playing. She does not care about the Indians and does not realize Columbus's capitalist intentions. Therefore, she becomes very happy when some blue jays come to play with her.

When the narrator finishes his story, he tells Coyote that America and the Indians were never found because they were never lost; they always had a history of their own, thus Coyote should be careful not to mess up history again. When Coyote asks about who found America and the Indians, the narrator questions the concept of "discovery" by saying that Columbus did not find anything because there was nothing to be found. The Natives were always in their place, and official history denies the fact that there was no discovery, because there was no loss. However, Coyote repeats Old Coyote's selfish attitudes. She wants to go to the party, therefore she just listens to the part of the story which allows her to go on playing and celebrating. As Columbus became rich and Old Coyote had somebody to play with in the end of the story, she considers it a *happy ending*. The last scene in the short story shows Coyote going happily to the party for Christopher Columbus, while the narrator still warns her not to mess up history again, because "this world has enough problems already without a bunch of Coyote thoughts with tails and scraggy fur running around bumping into each other" (129).

As I suggested in the previous chapters, the trickster is a deconstructive figure in contemporary Native literature. His ambiguous nature and his play with colonial history also exemplify hybridity, since they imply the contact between the cultures of the

colonizer and the colonized, so that the two discourses contaminate each other. In “A Coyote Columbus Story,” Native Coyote tradition contaminates the official history of Columbus and America. However, the contact between the Native world and Columbus is negative for the Natives, who in the end of the story are Columbus’s slaves. Therefore, this Native version of Columbus’s history does not celebrate the trickster’s playfulness, but the fact that he is dangerous.

There are two discursive levels in the short story. First, there is the narrative in which the Native narrator receives Coyote and tells her a story. But there is also the story told by the narrator, in which Old Coyote, some Indians, Columbus and his people, and some blue jays are the characters. These two discourses are not detached from each other. The narrator participates in the story he is telling and powerfully expresses his point of view. Also, the reader perceives the similarity between the Coyote who listens to the story and the character Old Coyote in the narrator’s tale, since both celebrate Christopher Columbus’s enterprise in America.

Before analyzing the narrator’s decolonizing efforts in the tale, I will bring in some information about the mythology of the trickster Coyote. Also, I will show how King incorporates and innovates this traditional myth through Coyote’s and Old Coyote’s actions in the short story.

A Native Revision of Colonization: The Trickster Coyote in Thomas King's Fiction

The analysis of “A Coyote Columbus Story” requires an understanding of oral literature and of the Coyote figure in Native culture. While written literature privileges an individual reading experience, oral storytelling is dynamic, since it changes and incorporates the present and the individual as well as the collective historical experience into the tale. In Native oral storytelling, trickster stories teach how to keep the world in balance. In his introduction to the anthology *All My Relations*, King affirms that “the trickster is an important figure for Native writers for it allows us to create a particular kind of world in which the Judeo-Christian concern with good and evil and order and disorder is replaced with the more Native concern for balance and harmony” (xiii).

In *Earthdivers*, Vizenor affirms that the trickster of his fiction is the *compassionate* trickster Naanabozho, who is imaginative and tries to balance the world between terminal creeds and humor with unusual manners and ecstatic strategies (xii). King's Coyote, on the other hand, is the trickster whose actions disturb the harmony of the world.

The trickster Coyote is present in many Native cultures. As Barry Lopez points out, no other personality is as old, as well known, or as widely distributed among the tribes as Coyote: "He was the figure of paleolithic legend among primitive peoples the world over and, though he survives in Eurasian and African folktales, it is among native Americans, perhaps, that his character achieves its fullest dimension" (xv). Lopez insists that Coyote stories are not simply just a way to pass the time. They detail tribal origins, they emphasize a world view thought to be a correct one, and they dramatize the value of proper behavior. Listening to the stories would renew one's sense of tribal identity. For the youngsters, the stories were a reminder of the right way to do things, usually not Coyote's way.

King's Coyote stories depend on the reader's knowledge of this trickster tradition. Their titles confirm that they are just some of the stories of the ancient and well-known Coyote tradition: "*The One about Coyote Going West*," "*One Good Story, That One*," "*A Coyote Columbus Story*." In "*A Coyote Columbus Story*," the author writes to a Native audience, or at least an audience who should have some knowledge of Coyote stories. The narrator assumes that the reader knows this tradition and starts the narrative with a recurrent sentence in Coyote stories: "You know, Coyote came by my place the other day" (123).

Although King is a mixedblood who knows just some words in his Native language, he tries to preserve oral tradition in his fiction. The Native narrator's oral language when telling his *Coyote version* of Columbus's story and his interaction with Coyote preserve the Native sense of community. In the first dialogue between Coyote and the narrator, oral language and the ungrammatical "I says" emphasize the effort to

keep a Native oral syntax, and show that the narrator does not belong to the English literary tradition:

You know, Coyote came by my place the other day. She was going to a party. She had her party hat and she had her party whistle and she had her party rattle.
I'm going to a party, she says.
Yes, I says, I can see that. (123)

In King's attempt to recover Native tradition, he also innovates by subverting patriarchal concepts. In *Trickster Makes This World*, Lewis Hyde affirms that most trickster figures are males because the canonical tricksters operate in patriarchal mythologies. One of the only female tricksters is a female Coyote, who can be found among two matrilineal and matrilocal Pueblo Indian groups, the Hopi and the Tewa. However, this female Coyote operates alongside a more traditional male Coyote. In "A Coyote Columbus Story," as well as in other short stories, King recovers and privileges the female Coyote character, giving her the same dangerous creative power of the male tricksters.

Some critics associate Coyote with the colonizer in King's fiction. In "A Good Story, That One," some anthropologists visit the narrator to collect Native stories for their research. Margaret Atwood recognizes the association of the anthropologists with both the colonizer and Coyote. In the story, the anthropologists act as colonizers in trying to possess Native culture, and the narrator has to clean up the coyote tracks when they leave. According to Atwood, the anthropologists are "sneaky coyotes, mischief-makers, indulging in disguises and fooling around" (249).

Revisions of the story of Columbus and American history show that the colonizer acts as Coyote when he disturbs communities in order to achieve his capitalist aims. In chapter two, I suggested that Columbus described the Native Cannibals according to his European fantasy and capitalist interests. When he emphasized that they ate human flesh and considered them savages, his strategy was to pretend he was a hero because he would bring civilization to the savages. Besides, he affirmed that the Cannibals were outside the realm of natural human law in order to justify the Natives's enslavement and deny their right to resist. In "A Coyote Columbus Story," Columbus's capitalist

interests become clear when the admiral enslaved the Indians. America is not the rich land of the Grand Khan, and Columbus can not find much gold, but he can make some money by enslaving the Natives.

In the previous chapter, I tried to show that Vizenor celebrates the trickster's playful attitudes. Although *The Heirs of Columbus* points to the instability of such a strategy of resistance, the characters and the narrator rewrite the history of Columbus by playing with official documents. They also defeat the windigoo in the moccasin game through a language game. In "A Coyote Columbus Story," the narrator also presents a trickster character who plays with history. In Old Coyote's ball game, she does not only play *with* the colonizer, but she also plays *the* colonizer herself. However, the narrator does not celebrate the trickster's play because Old Coyote's creative power and her games exemplify imperialist attitudes.

Old Coyote's actions reflect many of Columbus's attitudes in the colonization of the American Continent. Old Coyote invents the Indians and Columbus in the same way as Columbus invented America according to his own interests. She creates the Indians because she needs someone to play with. Old Coyote also plays Columbus in her relationship with the Indians. Her ethics is the ethics of winning, therefore, she creates the rules and is always victorious.

It is important to note that the Indians in the story give up playing with the imperialist Coyote: reality is more important than play. However, she needs to keep up her game. She starts to sing a song, to dance, and to think about playing. The narrator warns the reader that whenever Old Coyote gets bored and starts to think, anything can happen: "Stick around. Big trouble is coming, I can tell you that" (125). The narrator's premonition, of course, is confirmed, and big trouble comes when Columbus decides to act on his own.

Old Coyote's play with Columbus first deconstructs the figure of the admiral with parody and humor. Parody and humor are subversive devices in the story, since they operate as a form of transgression of the official narratives. Old Coyote's comic opinion about Columbus's appearance and manners subverts the official history which describes

Columbus as a “noble” and “brave” hero. Columbus is presented as one of the men who arrive in “silly clothes:”

And pretty soon, she [Coyote] makes some people on the beach with flags and funny-looking clothes and stuff.

Hooray, says Old Coyote. You are just in time for the ball game.

Hello, says one of the men in silly clothes and red hair all over his head. I am Christopher Columbus. I am sailing the ocean blue looking for China. Have you seen it? (125)

As I suggested in the historical revisions in the second chapter, Columbus only sees the Natives as subalterns who have to give him gold. In King’s narrative, Columbus and his people also have this imperialist attitude. However, the trickster’s strategy is to describe them as ridiculous people who become angry and start to jump and shout, asking Old Coyote where China and gold are:

Boy, what a bunch of noise, says Coyote. What bad manners. You guys got to stop jumping and shouting or my ears will fall off.

We got to find China, says Christopher Columbus. We got to become rich. We got to become famous. Do you think you can help us? (126)

Old Coyote realizes that he had made a mistake in creating these ill-behaved people: “Boy, says Old Coyote, and that one scratches her head. I must have sung that song wrong. Maybe I didn’t do the right dance. Maybe I thought too hard. These people I made have no manners” (126). Old Coyote deconstructs Columbus and his people through a Native point of view. The colonizers do not behave as Native people, since they do not have a good relationship with the land, the animals and other human beings. Old Coyote says of them that “they act as if they have no relations”² (126).

Although the tribal mythic figure transgresses official history when she creates the colonizer and criticizes his behavior, the reversal of the colonizer’s and the Native figure’s positions does not eliminate the colonialist process. As Old Coyote creates Columbus, she also becomes responsible for colonization. Old Coyote criticizes Columbus’s selfish attitudes, but she repeats the colonizer’s attitudes when playing with the Indians. Furthermore, Columbus is created by Old Coyote’s selfish interests. As the narrator puts it in the beginning of the story, colonization “was all Old Coyote’s fault” (124).

Old Coyote's mistake is to create a force she cannot control. Columbus and his people do not want to play Old Coyote's game. She can not play her imperialist game because Columbus's imperialist dream is much stronger. When playing with the Indians, Old Coyote always sets the rules. In the interaction with Columbus, however, she begs him to play with her: "I'll let you bat first, says Old Coyote. [. . .] I'll let you make the rules, cries Old Coyote" (126). Unlike Columbus, she seems to think that playing is more important than winning, but Columbus and his people do not listen to her; they go on "looking for China. Looking for stuff they can sell" (126).

The trickster character loses control of her game completely when Columbus and his people decide to take some Indians to sell in Spain. Old Coyote still believes that Columbus has come to play with her, therefore, she believes that the idea of selling Indians is a trick; indeed, she thinks it is a joke: "Who would buy Indians, she says, and she laughs some more" (127). Old Coyote's playful attitude cannot prevent the enslaving of the Indians. Old Coyote cannot stop laughing, while the Indians argue about the seriousness of Columbus's decision: "Wait a minute, says the Indians, that is not a good idea. That is a bad idea. That is a bad idea full of bad manners" (127).

Columbus is a more powerful player than Coyote: the perpetuation of colonization is confirmed by the dissemination of capitalism in the narrator's story. In the next section, I will show the transition from colonialism to capitalism in Monkman's pictures to King's children's book, and in the short story. I will also argue that the narrator's tale functions as a decolonizing strategy in the narrative.

Narrative Voice and the Critique of Capitalist Values

Peter Hulme affirms that the power relations established in the colonial period remain operative in the capitalist system, since capitalism involves a system of slavery in which new consumers need to be colonized for the market. The pictures in King's children's book emphasize the movement from a colonization based on the violent conquest of territories to the colonization based on the penetration of capitalist values. Monkman's pictures show the expansion and consolidation of colonialism in the

Natives's life. In the first picture in the Appendix, Columbus and his people arrive in the American Continent. Monkman makes fun of Columbus's mistake in thinking that America was India and shows that Columbus's map is upside down. In the picture, however, while Coyote is ready to play baseball, Columbus's men are carrying weapons (*A Coyote Columbus Story* 13). This contrast shows that historical domination was made through the use of weapons, and reaffirms that Columbus did not come to America to play; his achievement as colonizer was based on the violent domination of the Natives.

Picture two shows how colonization is consolidated by capitalist domination. This picture is significant because it juxtaposes the natural environment of the Native reservation with capitalist values. Capitalism also implies violence, since it destroys natural environments. Thus the Indians leave Coyote and her games and go sky diving, or to a Caribbean cruise, or to a big-time wrestling. The wrestling happens on the meadow, near the river and the forest. Also, some of the Native huts become shops and trade markets (11).

The first picture in the children's book, which is picture three in the Appendix, already shows how capitalism violates nature: both the Natives and the animals have surrendered to capitalist domination. On the left, a Native couple dressed in American clothes, and a moose with a surfboard ride in a car. On the right, a fish, a frog, and a sunbathing turtle watch a television commercial. The irony is that, from the back of the picture, Coyote seems to be very happy watching everything she has created (2-3).

In "A Coyote Columbus Story," the mixture of Columbus's colonial time and contemporary values evinces the continuation of imperialism. Columbus's people do not look only for gold. They also want "silk cloth," "portable color televisions" and "home computers" (125). What is surprising is that both Columbus and the Indians end up having capitalist values in their desire to consume products that are part of our contemporary capitalist society. When the Indians give up playing with Old Coyote, the narrator says that, after a while, those Indians find better things to do:

Some of them go fishing.
 Some of them go shopping.
 Some of them go to a movie.
 Some of them go on a vacation. (124)

Although the Indians give up playing Old Coyote's imperialist game, they continue to be colonized by the forces of capitalism. As Ruffo points out, materialism raises the issue of the erosion of traditional Native American values in contemporary society (151). King's use of contemporary capitalist values in the narrative of Columbus's arrival shows how capitalism destroys Native culture and perpetuates colonization in contemporary Native society. As Arnold Krupat reminds us, there is no "post" for Natives colonial history, and "A Coyote Columbus Story" confirms this statement, since the Indians give up Old Coyote's imperialism to perpetuate colonialist values. When the story ends, they have become slaves of Columbus, which highlights that Natives are still colonized.

Both Monkman's pictures and King's short story emphasize the continuation of colonialism and the transition of imperial forces from Europe to capitalist America. In contemporary society, European colonialist interests are reproduced in the American capitalist market. Coyote creates the Natives, the colonizer and the capitalist environment in which the Natives live. Therefore, she is responsible for the colonialist forces which unbalance the Native world and violate Native values. However, King shows that Coyote is not alone in promoting the perpetuation of colonialism. The author shares Vizenor's idea that it is useless to portray Natives as victims of Columbus in contemporary literature. When the Indians leave Old Coyote to go shopping, they accept capitalist values and help their continuation, which means that they contribute to the perpetuation of imperialism. Hence, the narrator's attempt is not only to warn Coyote of the danger of her play, but also to make readers aware that "the oppressed" may also contribute to the perpetuation of colonialism either by playing with colonization, as Coyote does, or by reinforcing materialism.

In the children's book as well as in the short story, colonization is also described as a process made through both physical and ideological violence. In both cases, the

colonizer makes the rules and imposes them over the colonized people. Columbus does not come to America to be Coyote's or the Natives's friend, as the naive Old Coyote thinks. In "A Coyote Columbus Story," physical violence appears in the enslavement of the Indians, and ideological violence is emphasized when the narrator explains how colonized thoughts and ideas can be destructive. Coyote's and the Indians's actions are examples of ideological colonization: Coyote is colonized by the official history which celebrates Columbus as the discoverer of America and the Indians, so that she is going to the party to celebrate the colonizer. The Indians are psychologically colonized because they have internalized capitalist values.

Ideological colonization is even more dangerous than the violent conquest of territories because it is not explicit. Coyote and the Indians are not aware of the colonizing process that victimizes them. Therefore, the narrator's strategy is to attempt to decolonize both Coyote's and the readers's minds. He exposes the dangerous force of misguided ideas when he says that Coyote created Columbus because she did not pay attention to her thoughts. Columbus's thoughts are also destructive for the Native community, since he decides to sell the Indians.

Coyote is a dangerous force because she does not adopt an ideological position in her play, which is the reason she is not careful with her ideas. She wants to play the same game with both the Indians and Columbus. However, in her play with Columbus, she is not as strong as she is when playing with the Indians, which proves that victory in play depends on the unequal forces which take part in the game. Once Coyote has created the colonizer, her play can no longer stop the colonizing process, and it is impossible to recover the situation of the Natives before Columbus's arrival. The narrator expresses this concern about the irreversibility of colonization when he says to Coyote that "once you think things like that, you can't take them back. So you have to be careful what you think" (128). In short, time and history are realities that cannot be toyed with without consequences.

Armand Garnet Ruffo recognizes that King also innovates Native tradition by introducing contemporary metafictional aspects in his Coyote stories. According to him,

textual self-awareness, self-reflexiveness and parody provide the means of expressing contemporary artistic and political concerns (136). In “A Coyote Columbus Story,” these qualities are present in the narrator’s story. His narrative about the Old Coyote who creates Columbus confirms the power of storytelling as the means to produce alternative histories. In storytelling, furthermore, there is the possibility of advancing critical views, as in the case when the narrator shows that Coyote repeats Old Coyote’s attitudes.

The narrator’s story is the most important element in the narrative. It takes almost the whole short story, so much so that the reader only returns to the first level of the narrative, in which Coyote is going to the party, in the conclusion. This story is a rewriting of Columbus’s narrative, since the narrator tells his version according to Native oral tradition. Although this hybrid and parodic history subverts the official discourse, Old Coyote eventually surrenders to imperialism by creating Columbus. Colonialism is thus perpetuated and gives rise to celebrations of the Columbus myth.

The narrator wants to decolonize Coyote because her happy preparations for Columbus’s party denounce her naive complicity with the process of colonization. However, the end of “A Coyote Columbus Story” shows that Coyote will go on unbalancing the world. The narrator tries to finish his story precisely when Old Coyote is sad because she did not believe Columbus. In this part, Old Coyote tries to bring Columbus back, but she is not successful. The narrator’s intention is to warn Coyote of the danger of her thoughts and playfulness and he emphasizes it is a sad end: “things don’t get any better, I can tell you that” (128). However, the narrator cannot control Coyote’s play and does not succeed in decolonizing her. He can only make Coyote stop crying when he says that Old Coyote does not end up alone, because some blue jays come to play with her. The narrator’s surrender to Coyote’s crying and the presence of the blue jay, which is another common form of the trickster, reaffirm the continuation of the trickster’s dangerous games.

The narrator fails to decolonize Coyote especially when she reaffirms colonization by identifying herself with Columbus and considering Columbus’s victory a happy end

to the story. She asks the narrator about the Indians, and he answers that Columbus became rich and famous because he sold them. Coyote does not care about the situation of the Natives who were sold. Instead, she seems to approve of Columbus and his actions. In addition, she does not give up going to the party for the admiral.

The narrator's interaction with Coyote not only recovers Native oral tradition, but also implies an attempt to resist colonization by telling an alternative version of the history of American colonization. The Native narrator tells this forgotten history by recovering the moment *before* Columbus's arrival. He shows that the Indians and Coyote were in America before Columbus, therefore they were not "discovered." Since King's fiction questions the effects of colonization on the Natives's contemporary situation, the narrator also points out that the Native figures prove to contribute to the victory of colonization in the contemporary world. Coyote's celebration of the colonizer and the Natives's capitalist values exemplify this myth of the "post-colonial" condition.

In conclusion, "A Coyote Columbus Story" contributes significantly to the discussion of Native postcolonial resistance. While in *The Heirs of Columbus* the tricksters attempt to stop colonial forces temporarily, in "A Coyote Columbus Story," the narrator tries unsuccessfully to decolonize Coyote. "A Coyote Columbus Story" suggests, therefore, the danger involved in plays and games. King's narrative questions the trickster, and consequently deconstruction and hybridity, as forms of postcolonial resistance. Also, the story suggests that the best resistance is achieved by the narrator's interaction with Coyote as he tries to tell the trickster an alternative version of the history of Columbus. Consequently, it is the trickster story, whose structure allows the narrator to tell an unofficial history, which is the ultimate form of resistance to Columbus's discourse of colonization. This story privileges the narrator's rather than the trickster's actions.

In theoretical terms, Coyote's and the narrator's actions exemplify the two strategies of postcolonial resistance presented in the story. Coyote, in an oversimplified way, plays the game of deconstruction. Coyote's play deconstructs the system of oppositions between colonizer and colonized, since she acts as both. Coyote is the

colonizer when she plays with the Indians, but she is the colonized when she reproduces official history. Also, Coyote takes part in the history of the colonizer, while Columbus promotes changes in the Native world after he arrives, as is the case when he takes the Indians to Europe. Although Coyote represents deconstructive and postmodern discursive strategies, her actions do not resist colonization. The narrator, on the other hand, tries to keep the world balance when he tells his story and criticizes Coyote's play.

The narrator's position echoes Hulme's and Brydon's suggestion that postmodern devices only become a form of postcolonial resistance when an ideological position is taken. This is precisely what Coyote does not do, since she reaffirms official history because of her selfish and imperialist interests. She defends the idea of historical truth and the power of official history encyclopedias when she believes that Columbus discovered America and the Indians because she read it in a "big book," "a big red one" (123). Also, Coyote cannot listen to the silences and contradictions in official narratives. She does not understand that Columbus's happy end was negative for the Indians. In fact, her trickery is just to believe in the happy end of Columbus's story because it justifies her act of going to the party for the admiral.

According to Native tradition, Coyote unbalances the world when he tries to improve it. Hence, the role of the narrator in Coyote stories is to try to set the world right. In "A Coyote Columbus Story," Coyote violates the Native sense of community by her selfish interest in playing, but the narrator tries to reinstall the balance through oral storytelling. Anne Doueihi affirms that the trickster divides himself into narrator and character in order to keep the balance; he both tells the story and is "in" the story (200). King's short story keeps this balance by means of the interaction between the narrator and the trickster character: while the Coyote character insists on playing with history, the narrator tries to set the world right.

Ruffo points out that, in Native literature, Coyote's act of creating is also a meddling with the world. Old Coyote's creation of Columbus confirms the danger of Coyote's creative power. The narrator is aware that, whenever Coyote tries to set the

world right, something bad happens. Therefore, the narrator's task is to help Coyote "fix the world." In order to do that, he has to decolonize and rewrite the history of Columbus and America which Coyote has mixed up. The narrator's words to Coyote suggest that history is just a narrative, and storytelling can transform it: "Sit down, I says. Have some tea. We're going to have to do this story right. We're going to have to do this story now" (124).

Columbus's definitions of the Natives in his *Journal* exemplify how the colonizer produces history according to his colonizing interests. Colonization is the product of words, thoughts, intentions, and last but not least, weapons. In the short story, the narrator shows Coyote that official history is a text produced by the colonizer's point of view. Old Coyote's dangerous thoughts and Columbus's ideas confirm that our mind has the power of creation, the power of making things come true. Therefore, official history only becomes true when we believe it and choose to repeat it endlessly.

Thomas King's alternative version of the history of Columbus's arrival in the American Continent is an attempt to recover the past in order to illuminate the present. "A Coyote Columbus Story" recovers Native oral tradition and the moment *before* Columbus's arrival. However, this retelling of the past only makes sense when we perceive its present consequences. In the short story, these consequences are Columbus's violent attitudes with the Natives and the capitalist colonization of minds.

The narrator does not succeed in decolonizing Coyote, but his efforts amount to an attempt to decolonize the reader. Coyote repeats Old Coyote's playful attitudes and perpetuates colonization. When warning Coyote of the danger of her attitudes, the narrator warns the reader not to play Coyote. He shows that we perpetuate colonization when we internalize and reproduce official history and capitalist values.

Thomas King questions the celebration of official history in the year of the five hundredth anniversary of Columbus's arrival in America. His basic message is that we should not repeat the ideas imposed by the dominating culture and celebrate the official discourse. We need to be aware of our historical past and listen to alternative histories.

Of course, listening to these stories is only possible when we exorcise colonialism from our minds.

NOTES

¹ “Coyote tales” are a synonym for “tall tales:” improbable or absurd stories.

² In the introduction to *All My Relations* (1990), Thomas King affirms that “a most important relationship in Native cultures is the relationship which humans share with each other, a relationship that is embodied within the idea of community” (xiii). In Native tradition, the phrase “All my relations” is a reminder of who the person is and their relationship with the family, the relatives and all human beings. A common form of criticism is to say of someone that he or she acts as if they have no relations.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Poststructuralist and postmodern theories perceive history as a text as unstable and fictional as a work of literature. Postcolonial studies also recognize that official history is an ideological construct usually produced by the dominant classes of imperial nations. In this sense, language works as a means of imperial domination, since the rulers decide which *facts* are to be reported to the people, and define them as *historical truths*. Furthermore, history produces myths and heroes which reaffirm the colonizer's superiority over the colonized, as in the case of the colonizer presented as the one who saves the savage Natives and brings them to "civilization." In my analysis, I argued that the myth of Christopher Columbus as the discoverer of the American Continent is an example of the way official history produces the heroes of colonization. The official documents about the admiral, including his *Journal*, privilege the voice of the colonizer and acknowledge Columbus's heroism in discovering America in the name of Spain.

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said shows that literature has also been used as an imperialist weapon. The concept of the *canon*, for example, established the superiority of European literature over the literature of colonized America. However, Said also shows that language and literature can be used strategically to oppose and resist the colonizer's official discourse of domination when colonized people use it to assert their own identity and history (xiii). My analysis of historical and literary revisions of Columbus's *Journal* deals with the criticism of the discourse of the colonizer. I tried to show how critics and literary authors recognize that the spreading of Catholicism and civilization was just an excuse for Columbus's capitalist enterprise.

In this thesis, although I could not leave out the vast criticism and historical revisions of Columbus's official documents, my point was to show how authors of Native American and Canadian literature, such as Gerald Vizenor and Thomas King, present strategies of resistance to the myth of Columbus and to the history of American

colonization. Vizenor's novel and King's short story rewrite the "discovery" of the American Continent and the colonial encounter between Columbus and the Natives through a Native point of view. Both stories are appropriately contextualized in the anniversary of Columbus's arrival in America. While the official authorities of Spain and the American countries celebrate Columbus's conquest, Vizenor's and King's narratives not only revise the official history, but also subvert the imperialist concept of the *canon*, since they challenge Western literature by incorporating oral culture and the discourse of the trickster. Nevertheless, these narratives propose two different strategies of postcolonial resistance, as evinced by the authors's different approaches to the trickster figure.

The Heirs of Columbus defends the politics of survival through play and hybridity as resistance, since the novel celebrates the trickster's deconstructionist game. Jacques Derrida's deconstructionist theory and Homi K. Bhabha's definition of hybridity were fundamental to explain the relational definition of the colonizer and the colonized in the novel and the trickster as a form of Native resistance. Derrida's concept of *différance* questions binary oppositions which are essential for colonialism, such as colonizer versus colonized, savage versus civilized; and Bhabha's notion of hybridity revalues this concept by claiming that the colonial encounter between the European colonizer and the Natives promoted changes in the reality of both the colonized *and* the colonizer. In the novel, Columbus's identity and his colonial encounter with the Natives are mediated by hybridity. The admiral's reality has been changed by the contact with the Natives even before coming to America: he is a mixedblood from Jewish and Mayan descent. When he arrives in the American Continent, his sexual relationship with the Native hand talker Samana saves him from his sexual disease and produces the lineage of the heirs of Columbus.

Columbus's trickster heirs are mixedbloods who live in capitalist America. This hybrid condition of the Native in the urban world is a result of the colonial encounter. In addition, imperialist oppression is still present in the heirs's lives, and it is represented in the novel by the evil forces which constantly threaten the heirs's community, such as

Doric Michéd, the mixedblood member of the Brotherhood of American Explorers, and the cannibal windigoo who comes to play the moccasin game. Yet, since the trickster is a deconstructionist figure, the tricksters's resistance comes from inside the same capitalist and technological society which oppresses them, and the heirs of Columbus recover their history and invent an identity by blending the Natives's *and* the colonizer's culture: Stone Columbus retells the story of their descent in the radio, through a mass media channel, and the heirs retell Columbus's history through a parody of the documents about Columbus and his four voyages to America in a tribal gathering at "Stone Tavern." This blending of cultures is also illustrated by the fact that the heirs have to defend themselves according with the American law system in order to recover Columbus's remains.

The trickster's resistance is also based on movement, chance and imagination, so much so that after Felipa's death and the failure in recovering the heirs's history through Pocahonta's remains, the heirs decide to move and invent a new nation and a new tribal identity. The nation of Point Assinika also evinces the deconstruction of the Western concept of "nation." The heirs define the concept ironically, since there is no frontier in Point Assinika: it is the nation on the border. In addition, tribal identity is based on tribal values, and not only on tribal blood, and one needs to become a mixedblood in order to have tribal blood, which contradicts any idea of pure racial identification.

When Vizenor recovers the tale of the trickster *Naanabozho* in the beginning of the novel, he already defines his strategy of postcolonial resistance. As *Naanabozho*, the heirs of Columbus are earthdiver tricksters, who dive into their mixedblood urban reality in order to recover the colonial encounter and survive in their ambiguous condition by imaginatively creating a new definition of themselves and of their nation. Moreover, the myth of the earthdiver points to the instability of any resistance in contemporary society, so that the Native heirs of colonization need constantly to dive in order to imagine new possibilities of survival.

The Heirs of Columbus and "A Coyote Columbus Story" rely on the concept of intertextuality, the power of humor, and literary tropes which are based on doubleness,

since the two fictions are parodical rewritings of Columbus's history. Nevertheless, Thomas King's approach to the trickster defines a different strategy of postcolonial resistance. Instead of celebrating deconstruction and hybridity, the narrator's tale about Coyote's dangerous games and their consequences points to the need of taking an ideological position when resisting colonial and imperial domination. In the story, the deconstructionist play with history does not stop colonization and capitalist domination.

Differently from the *Anishinaabe* trickster *Naanabozho*, the trickster Coyote disturbs the harmony of the world, so that his game is destructive for the Native community. In "A Coyote Columbus Story," the females Coyote and Old Coyote disturb the Native world because they reaffirm colonization: Coyote celebrates Columbus when she goes to the party for the admiral; Old Coyote plays the colonizer in her imperialist game with the Natives and creates Columbus because of her selfish necessity of playing.

King recovers oral storytelling tradition to show that playing by itself cannot resist colonization. In Coyote stories, it is the interaction between the narrator and Coyote which keeps the balance, and this relationship is important to explain how postcolonial resistance operates in "A Coyote Columbus Story." In King's narrative, the Native narrator who retells the history of colonization in a Coyote version of the Columbus's myth is the voice which decolonizes official history by assuming a position against Coyote's dangerous play and ambiguity.

The ideas of postcolonial scholars such as Peter Hulme, Edward Said and Diana Brydon were instrumental for the analysis of the strategy of postcolonial resistance proposed in the short story. These three critics are more concerned with the ideology involved in the construction of binary oppositions than with the ambivalence of meaning. They are aware that the ideas of European superiority in the period of colonization are still operative in our contemporary society through the celebration of historical myths and heroes in official history, and through the spreading of capitalist values. Furthermore, they are aware that playing with the colonizer is a risky business

because, in our present society, hybridity does not make the colonized as powerful as the colonizer. The colonized eventually loses in the imperialist game.

Brydon's ideas in her essay "The White Inuit Speaks: Contamination as Literary Strategy" apply to "A Coyote Columbus Story". She offers important insights about the Natives's possibilities of resistance, especially in terms of narrative voice. In King's fiction, postmodernist and deconstructionist devices, exemplified by the trickster Coyote, only contribute to postcolonial resistance because the strongest voice in the narrative identifies with the Natives and criticizes Columbus's process of colonization. The narrator is the Native voice in the story, and he tells an alternative history when he opposes Coyote's dangerous play with colonization.

While *The Heirs of Columbus* presents a "survival" strategy of postcolonial resistance, "A Coyote Columbus Story," on the other hand, privileges "to live" rather than "to survive." Postcolonial resistance is here achieved when one constructs an "oppositional identity." For Said, resistance occurs when a rewriting of the past opposes the culture and the official history which defines the colonizer's superiority (260). Following Said's concept, I suggest that King's fiction does not defend resistance as movement. On the contrary, the narrator's rewriting is a contrapuntal reading of the myth of Columbus, therefore it emphasizes a definition of a Native history in opposition to the history of the colonizer. In this manner, the contradictions of the colonial discourse are exposed.

In conclusion, my reading of Vizenor's novel and King's short story did not intend to define which text proposes the best form of postcolonial resistance. Nevertheless, it confirmed that the strategies of resistance defended in the two narratives analyzed depend on diverse perceptions of the postmodern world. In *The Heirs of Columbus*, deconstruction and hybridity reflect a disbelief in the possibility of separation and opposition of colonizer and colonized in our contemporary society. Thus, playing with this opposition and deconstructing the system of colonialist concepts is the only possibility left to survive in a world in which no absolute value can be recovered. On the other hand, the narrator of "A Coyote Columbus Story" shows that resistance is

achieved by the political positioning of the subject. When a minority group defines its identity and opposes colonial oppression, it does challenge the postmodern world. In the short story, King suggests that the Native's interference in the imperial culture which oppresses minorities is the narrator's possibility of decolonizing the reader through his rewriting of history.

To conclude, I would like to point out that, although Vizenor's and King's fictions present two different possibilities of resistance to the history of American colonization, the similarities between the two texts are significant. Both suggest that it is possible to listen to a Native version of the history of colonization in contemporary literature. In the two stories, the use of the trickster figure, who inhabits the border between Western and tribal worlds, shows the writers's concern with the impossibility of recovering the original Native of the colonial encounter, and the necessity to be aware about the Natives's ambiguous mixedblood condition in postcolonial society. Furthermore, the trickster figure suggests that Natives become conscious of their past and present when they recover their tribal culture and oral tradition.

In *The Heirs of Columbus* and in "A Coyote Columbus Story," Vizenor and King dive into the Natives's past and recover the history of Columbus's arrival in America to reflect about the results of the colonial encounter for the Natives in contemporary North America. In my opinion, these two narratives resist the imperialist history of Columbus because they promote an awareness of the continuation of imperialism through the spreading of capitalism. They also show that the Natives can be complicitous to colonization today, especially when they reproduce capitalist values. The Native in contemporary North America is not the victim of Columbus's enterprise, nor the defiled savage of official history, and he can only achieve a "post-colonial" condition when he is aware that imperialism is not a fact of the past. As Vizenor's novel makes clear, "the game never ends."

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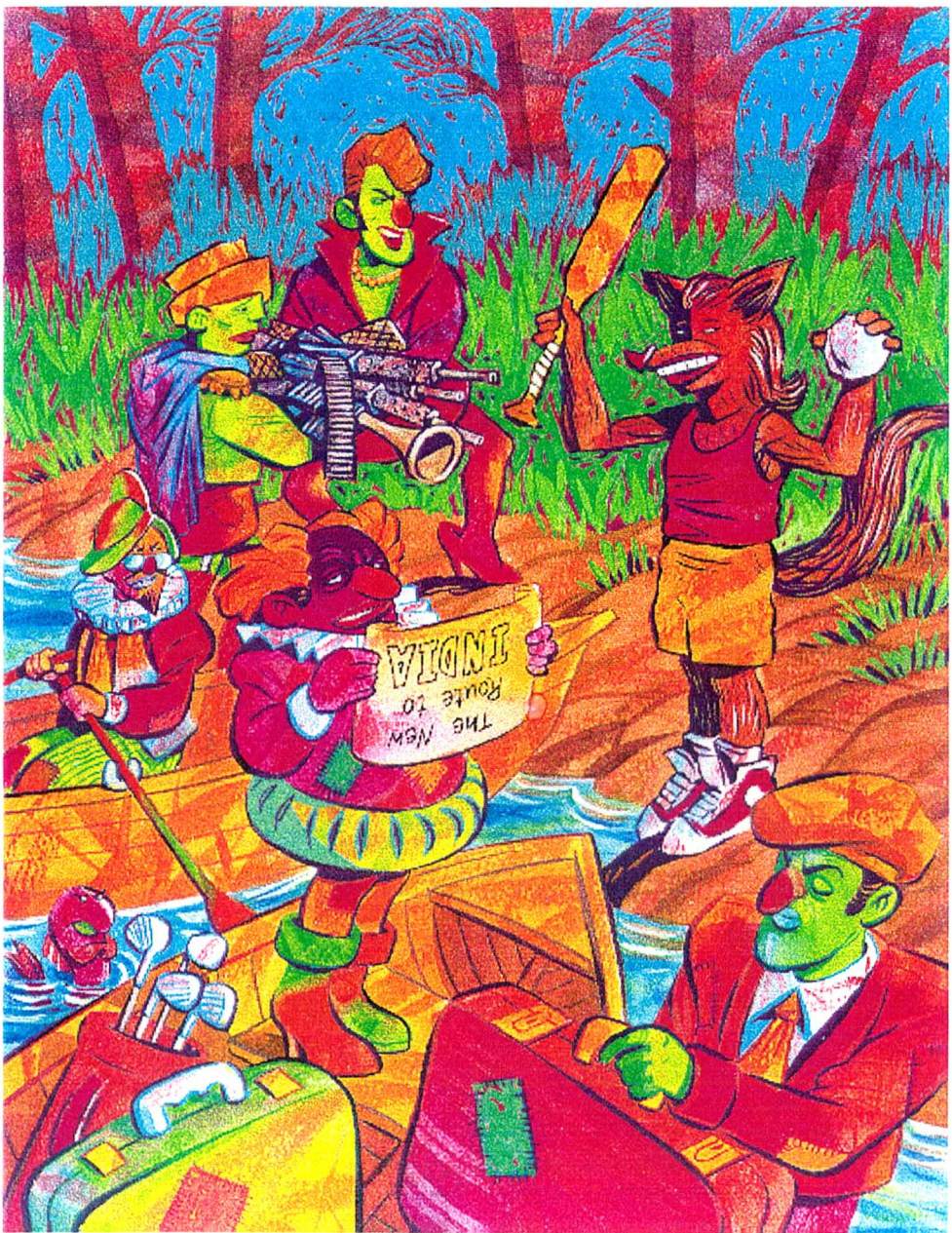
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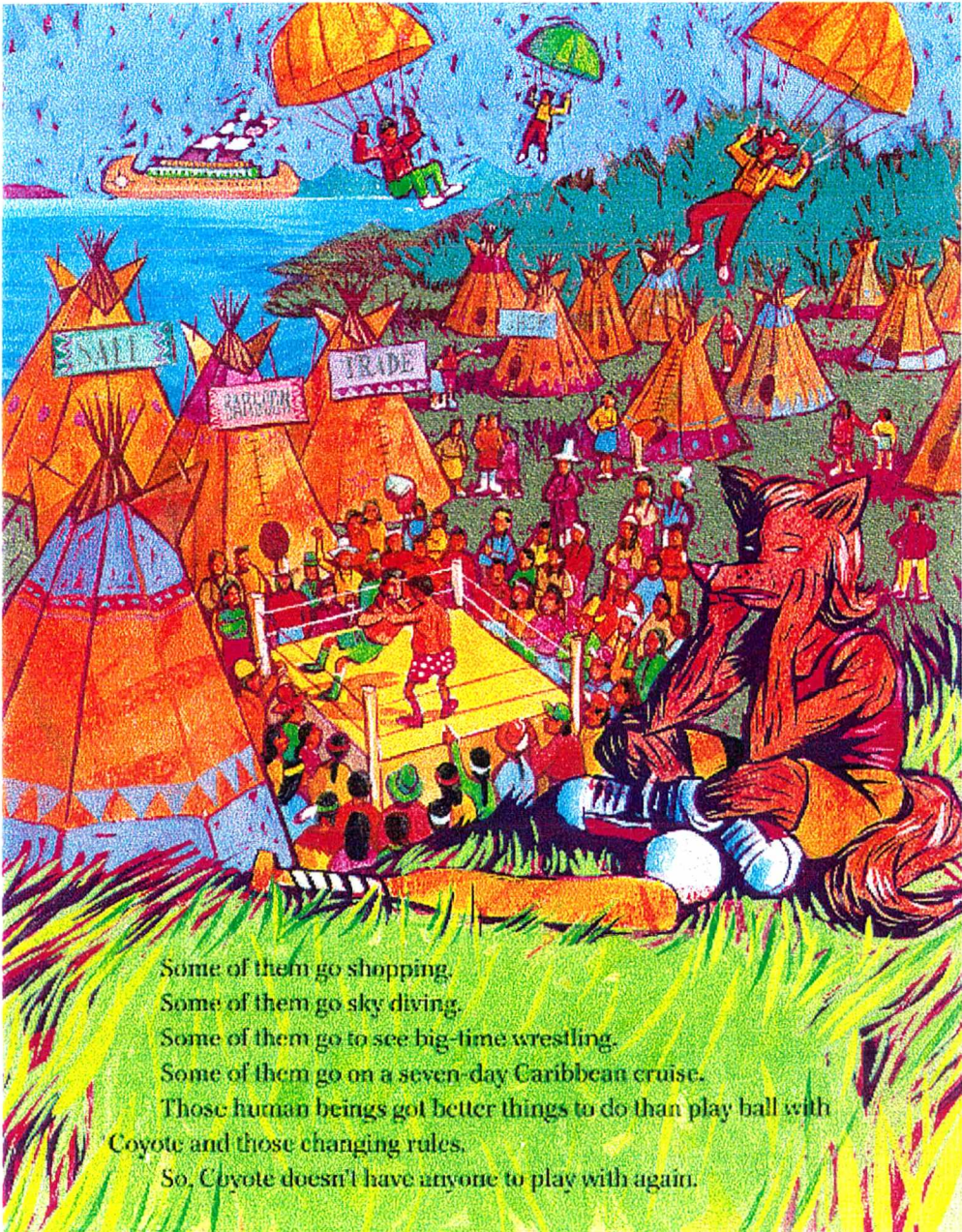
APPENDIX

Illustrations taken from Thomas King's and William Kent Monkman's children's book
A Coyote Columbus Story. Toronto and Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1992.

PICTURE 1



PICTURE 2



Some of them go shopping,
Some of them go sky diving,
Some of them go to see big-time wrestling,
Some of them go on a seven-day Caribbean cruise,
Those human beings got better things to do than play ball with
Coyote and those changing rules,
So, Coyote doesn't have anyone to play with again.

PICTURE 3



IT WAS COYOTE who fixed up this world, you know. She is the one who did it. She made rainbows and flowers and clouds and rivers. And she made prune juice and afternoon naps and toe-nail polish and television commercials. Some of these things were pretty good, and some of these things were foolish. But what she loved to do best was to play ball.