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# Capitalism beneath the Mythical Beginning:<sup>1</sup> The “Discovery” of America as a Topic of Twentieth-Century Croatian Literature

To hell with such an achievement! You want me to sell natives with you?  
To become a stockbroker? To establish a joint-stock company for the exploitation of Colombia? Ha-ha! Is this the New that I dream of?

Miroslav Krleža, *Kristofor Kolumbo* [Christopher Columbus] 142<sup>2</sup>

## The “Discovery” of America—Myth, History, Fiction

The “discovery”<sup>3</sup> of America is one of those grand historical events that has become petrified over time in its mythical significance and epic proportions. The mythical power of the “discovery” is certainly supported by its utopian projections that were

<sup>1</sup> The research for this article was supported by the Croatian Science Foundation in the project IP 2016-06-2613. I would like to thank Professor Stipe Grgas with this essay for his relevant and inspiring insights into the problems of the United States of America and capital(ism) in his books *Ispisivanje prostora: čitanje suvremenoga američkog romana* [Writing Space: A Reading of the Contemporary American Novel] (2000) and *Američki studiji danas: identitet, kapital, specijalnost* [American Studies Today: Identity, Capital, Space] (2014). His reflections on these particular problems far exceed the narrow disciplinary framework of American studies and are relevant for the humanities and social sciences in the broader sense as well as for the understanding of our present cultural and economic moment. In this essay, I want to show how the archives of twentieth-century Croatian literature that portrays some cultural and civilizational aspects of the United States can also be a challenging subject of reflection on the trace of the above-mentioned problematics. One such aspect is the theme of the “discovery” of America, which has an almost mythical framework and whose historical aspects are elaborated in some canonical and some less familiar texts of Croatian literature which until now have not been read from that perspective. The literary topic of “discovery” reveals its historical logic, closely connected with the imagination of capitalism, whose tensions are shaped and represented in the texts selected in this analysis. Some of the aspects of this topic I have already discussed in Kolanović 2014. My previous analysis is now highlighted by some valuable insights from Grgas’s latest book.

<sup>2</sup> All translations from the Croatian language in this chapter are my own unless otherwise indicated. The titles of books written in Croatian in their first appearance in the text are kept in the original, with the English translation in brackets. I also encourage the readers to check out the original texts, especially the poems.

<sup>3</sup> With regard to the terminology used in this essay, it would be more appropriate to talk about the *European* discovery of America, which is why I primarily use the word *discovery* in this essay, regularly putting the term in quotation marks. For the native population that lived on the continent before the arrival of European conquerors, the continent was certainly not discovered. Creation and dissemination of the meaning of “discovery” is part of the problem that I will discuss in this essay.

inscribed in this event before it actually *happened*. According to literary critic Richard Ruland (9), even before it was discovered, “America”<sup>4</sup> existed as a construct of the European imagination of the “promised land,” the “undiscovered paradise,” the New World, El Dorado, Arcadia, Atlantis and similar utopian fantasies, for example, in the works of Plato, Homer, Plutarch, Dante, and others. This fantasy received actual geographic coordinates when “America,” itself a metaphor, was invented to designate a geographical location of the possible utopia of the New World (Polić-Bobić 43). This “structural precondition for ‘utopic reprocessing’ of the modern world picture” (Blasopoulos 11) has in a way shaped Christopher Columbus’s perception, as well. At the time of his third journey, Columbus was convinced that he had found paradise on earth, as evident from his journal (Columbus). The “imaginative rationality” (Lakoff and Johnson 193) of Columbus’s perception of the paradise on earth which he believed he found on his journey anticipates the perception of “America” in a later period and is largely driven by the imagination from pre-Columbian times. From the very beginning seen as a “paradise,” “big mine,” or later, an “oasis of political freedom,” a land of “great possibilities,” “America” never ceases to generate utopian desires, which means that “our view of America is apparently largely shaped by images of America rather than its reality” (Fischer 45). Thus, in the primordial images of “discovery” of the American continent, we recognize the outlines of the myth of the American dream, the central imaginative narrative of the modern United States. This image of “America,” already inscribed in the topic of the “discovery,” quickly became the literary focus of numerous authors such as Lope de Vega, Friedrich Schiller, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Walt Whitman, Paul Claudel, Pablo Neruda, Ilf and Petrov, Carlos Fuentes, Paul Zumthor, Salman Rushdie, and others.

The “discovery” has long been articulated as a grandiose event, “the largest since the creation of the world,” as claimed by the sixteenth-century historian Francisco Lopez de Gómara (Wilford 355), despite the fact that, even then, critical voices of the Spanish conquest of a new continent were registered, like those of the Dominican priest Bartolomé de Las Casas, who testified to the cruelty of the conquistadors (Casas). Thus, the questioning of the grandeur of this event began to emerge parallel with the mythologization of the “discovery,” pointing to its devastating effects in which the

<sup>4</sup> The word *America* here dominantly refers to United States of America, and I am deeply aware of the contradictions of that naming. Although the word *America* in its most common official meaning indicates the geographical space of the two continents, it is often reduced as a signifier of the United States of America. As Vladimir Mayakovski (74) lucidly puts it, the USA has definitely annexed the word *America*. Though at first glance the use of the word *America* in this chapter does not seem to change this traditional usage but continues to produce its conceptual inequalities (Sardar and Davies 10), I want to stress that my use of the word *America* when referring to the USA, much like my use of the word *discovery*, primarily implies a cultural and social imagery of the United States of America which stands between the real and the imagined nation, which is also part of the problem discussed in this essay. By putting *America* in quotation marks when referring to the United States, I want to stress that this articulated idea of “America” works in a deconstructive sense as a crossed term: the idea that you cannot think in the old way, but without which certain key questions cannot be thought (cf. Hall 358).

“discovery” of something *new* illuminates itself as a continuation of the “familiar story of the rise and power of the West, which began with the expansion of Europe” (Sardar and Davies 137). As an instance of the anti-mythological understanding of the immense importance of the “discovery” of America, we shall also note Marx and Engels, who referred to the “discovery” as a crucial event in the development of capitalism in the *Communist Manifesto*:

Modern industry has established the world market, for which the discovery of America paved the way. This market has given an immense development to commerce, to navigation, to communication by land. This development has, in its turn, reacted on the extension of industry; and in proportion as industry, commerce, navigation, railways extended, in the same proportion the bourgeoisie developed, increased its capital, and pushed into the background every class handed down from the Middle Ages. (15)

“Discovery” spelt trouble not only for local inhabitants of the American continent but also native people from other continents. As Grgas (259) notes further, “for African Americans the New World was not a place of redemptive beginning, but it meant ‘rejection, plight, and disaster’” where slaves proved to be the most profitable capital for the conquerors of the New World. These early and more recent deconstructions of the myth of discovery require a more comprehensive inclusion of the genealogy of capitalism in order for the full impact of that historical event to be understood.<sup>5</sup> That is why the topic of “discovery” and its literary representation in this article will be discussed following the previously elaborated problems which are closely related to this issue lurking beneath its mythical gilding since it is the case that the mythologization was reinforced by its continuous literary articulation. From the sixteenth century on, Columbus was celebrated in poetry and plays as a Christ-like figure, and in Romanticism, he gained the aura of a genius,<sup>6</sup> which he kept till the beginning of the twentieth century, when a significant rise in the critical literary articulation of the “discovery” in the genres of utopian satire and historiographic metafiction may be observed.

In the context of the demythologization and questioning of “discovery,” the literature of Latin America and the literature of American Indians have particularly important roles which put the issue of the conquerors and the conquered in the center

<sup>5</sup> As claimed by Grgas (86): “perhaps we could consider the discovery of the New World, the development of the American colonies and the establishment of the new cross-atlantic republic as a ‘spatial fix’ ... that introduced tectonic changes on the world stage and contributed to the supremacy of the West in the last few centuries.” Following Christopher N. Matthews, Grgas also claims that the discovery of America has spread and empowered the interests of commercial capital, offering a space of seemingly unlimited possibilities of accumulation, especially in comparison to the restrictions imposed on feudal estates in the Old World (ibid.).

<sup>6</sup> For examples in the poetry of Friedrich Schiller and Casimir Delavigne, see the anniversary issue of the journal *Treći program hrvatskoga radija* [Croatian Radio Third Program] (no. 39/1993), dedicated to the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of discovery of the New World.

of their problematization. Thus, a section of Pablo Neruda's epic *Canto General* bears the appropriate title of "Los Conquistadores" (Neruda 108).<sup>7</sup> Although the theme of "discovery" was primarily thematized in the dramatic and poetic genres in previous periods, in the late twentieth century several novels on this issue were published. A good example of a revisionary historical novel is *The Heirs of Columbus* (1991) by Gerald Vizenor (himself of American Indian descent), in which the character of Columbus is a descendant of the Mayans and the Sephardi Jews who wants to return to America, while his modern descendants are trying to bring his bones *home*, making for a plot full of historical twists and turns, casting irony on the (hi)story of "discovery" and confusing the roles of conquerors and victims (Hardin 33).<sup>8</sup>

Similar approaches in the symbolic politics of the interpretation of "discovery" in the manner of counterfactual history can be found in the novel *Los perros del paraíso*, by Abel Posse (1983), in which the discovery of the Old World is represented by the superior civilizations of the Aztecs and the Incas, who finally do not engage in the imperialist conquest of Europe. In the novel *Cristóbal Nonato* (1987) by Carlos Fuentes, the character of Columbus is shown as a Mexican born in 1992 whose activity is directed towards the Pacific coast, i.e., the symbolic future, not the bloody past of the eastern side of the Atlantic. Michael Hardin's thesis is that, in these texts, the character of Columbus becomes a signifier discharged from Western colonial ideology and freed from the history of hegemonic discourse. Against the historically accepted mythic dimension of "discovery," Hardin posits that the representations in this narrative thus point to the hegemonic construct of history, causing the victimized to tell a different story of this monumental event.

More recent historical interpretations of the "discovery" also emphasize the aforementioned controversy. Thus, the very notion of "discovery" is stripped of its Eurocentric connotations by the more recent phrase of the "invention of America" (Riddel 904). After centuries of mythologization, the realization of the cruelty of the conquistadors, at least in recent historical and literary interpretations, escalated in commemorations of the quincentennial of the "discovery." The U.S. was then swept by a wave of anti-Columbus activities of Americans of native and Hispanic origin. As claimed by John Noble Wilford (359), "Columbus again become a symbol, this time a symbol of exploitation and imperialism," and one of the greatest results of this symbolic protest was the revision of the official interpretation of this event in the education system. Howard Zinn (628) commented on this interpretational change: "For generations, exactly the same story had been told all American schoolchildren about Columbus, a romantic, admiring story. Now, thousands of teachers around the country were beginning to tell that story differently." In the symbolic demythologization

<sup>7</sup> An excerpt of this epic is available in Croatian translation; see also texts by Nicolás Guillén, Jorge Rojas and others in the special issue of *Treći program* (1993).

<sup>8</sup> For the concept of the revisionary historical novel, originally taken from Brian McHale, as a novel that interprets official historical record in a new way and transforms the conventions of historical fiction, see Hutcheon 56.

of "discovery" which escalated around its five hundredth anniversary, it is unavoidable to mention Tzvetan Todorov's study *Le Conquête de l'Amérique* as a precursor to this momentous shift. Todorov analyzes historical sources related to the "discovery" as a literary text without losing sight of their historical implications, since history, unlike the myth, actually happened (4). The "discovery" of America for Todorov means a paradigmatic encounter of Europe with its Other that was also the largest genocide in human history that established the existing European identity (5). Since the "discovery" of America, Western Europe has been trying to assimilate the Other, looking at the space of the Other as a space for exploitation, not as the space where the Other actually lives.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the history and fiction of the second half of the twentieth century are significantly changing institutionally codified interpretations of the "discovery," whereby historical, mythical, and utopian tensions overlap. Different national literatures and different authors developed a metaphor of the "discovery" of the New World in accordance with their own culture and worldview as well as the current historical moment as they sought ways to place the event of the "discovery" in relation to their own cultural, national, and political identities. A substantial archive of texts of Croatian literature has reflected this topic ever since the historical "discovery" of America.

### Allegories, Panegyrics, and the Seeds of Criticism

In the absence of documentary sources, there are only assumptions that the news about the "discovery" of a New World reached the Croatian regions<sup>10</sup> relatively early, and in this context we can observe the earliest echoes of overseas discoveries in Croatian literature. In the prologue of the comedy *Dundo Maroje* [Uncle Maroje], by Croatian playwright Marin Držić, the character Long Nose, Magician from the Great Indies, speaks about the exotic space shaped through images of material well-being under the influence of various utopian perceptions from the Renaissance, especially those of Thomas More's *Utopia* (cf. Fališevac 129).<sup>11</sup> In the above-mentioned monologue, the utopian image of such a paradise is located on the shores of the Ancient Indies, where "happy and sweet spring weather undisturbed by winter's cold, roses and varied flowers unshrivelled by the burning summer heat" abound and where "there is no 'mine' and 'thine' for all is everyones." The people inhabiting that land are "gentle

<sup>9</sup> Together with Todorov's study, Kirkpatrick Sale's 1991 study *The Conquest of Paradise: Christopher Columbus and the Columbian Legacy*, which also brings into question the mythical and Eurocentric dimensions of the "discovery," should also be mentioned (Hardin 29).

<sup>10</sup> As claimed by Stjepan Krsić (9), sailors from Dubrovnik had merchant colonies all over the Mediterranean, so it would be hard to imagine that such important news as the "discovery" remained unknown. For example, thanks to Jakov Baničević of Korčula, who was the secretary of Charles V, people from Dubrovnik found out about the journey around the world made by Sebastian Elcano in 1522 less than a year after its completion.

<sup>11</sup> It is worth mentioning that it was the overseas discoveries that initiated the wave of the utopian genre in the sixteenth century, which indicates not only their importance in the world economic order but the importance of their metaphorical implications, as well (Claeys and Tower Sargent 3).

people, quiet people, wise and reasonable people” (Držić 9–10).<sup>12</sup> This utopian image is eroded by greed for gold that as a result has the activation of “would-be people” (11) who ruined the original harmony and well-being. Greed for material wealth at the allegorical level is also thematized in *Pjesanca lakomosti* [Poem to greed] by Mavro Vetranović, which was included in the special issue of the journal *Dubrovnik* dedicated to the five-hundredth anniversary of the “discovery” of America. Though the New World<sup>13</sup> is not mentioned explicitly, material greed is mentioned as the generator of wars and conquests for which the editors, I suppose, have included this poem in the thematic issue of the journal. These literary texts, of course, are not examples of the explicit thematization of the “discovery” but can be seen as its allegorical echoes. Their authors articulated the first critical voices on this topic in the historical climate of the awakening of mercantile capitalism, driven by the overseas discoveries.

The first text of old Croatian literature in which the “discovery” of the New World is explicitly mentioned appeared a century later. This is a play by Junije Palmotić entitled *Kolombo* [Columbus],<sup>14</sup> in which the “discovery” is articulated through a panegyric to Columbus and a Croatian sailor. Palmotić’s play thus supports the myth of Columbus and the local myth of Dubrovnik sailors who, according to legend, were members of Columbus’s crew (cf. Potthoff). The character of Columbus is presented in the text as a noble conqueror whose primary goal is not the material exploitation of the New World, but the spreading of Christianity.<sup>15</sup> Palmotić’s play provided a basis for later literary shaping of the character of Columbus as a Promethean figure in Croatian literature (Franić-Tomić 160). For example, in the poem *Navis aëria*, written in Latin by Bernard Đamanjić in 1768, the character of Columbus is celebrated as a mythical hero who is superior even to Hercules and Odysseus (Đamanjić 131). In the poem, the utopian image of material wealth and exoticism is transmitted through the perspective of Columbus, who “brings a heretofore unseen prey from a foreign world” (131) and spreads the word about the great wealth and beauty of the new land, provoking the exploratory desire of sailors throughout the world.

On a similar track, the narrative of the “discovery” is shaped in a poem in praise of Columbus by the Franciscan Grgo Martić written on the four-hundredth anniversary of the “discovery.” Martić’s poem shows Columbus’s fate “from glory to chains,” which is told by the character of Columbus in the first person and later in the third

<sup>12</sup> Quotation from the English translation of Držić’s play by Sonia Bičanić.

<sup>13</sup> Before the common use of the name America, derived from the name of the Italian navigator Amerigo Vespucci, the names of the American mainland at that time included the *New World*, the *West Indies*, or simply the *Indies*. The very name *America* became common after it was used by the German cartographer Martin Waldseemüller in 1507 (Petrović 81).

<sup>14</sup> According to literature about Palmotić’s text, *Kolombo* is usually classified as a shorter dialogue scene, a dialogue poem, a panegyric, given that in the text there is no real dramatic conflict (Fališevac 128).

<sup>15</sup> As it stands in the text of the drama whose verses I find important to mention in the original: “er od zlata želja huda, / ko vitezom starijem prije, / od našega uzrok truda, / i od našega puta nije: / za uzvišenje vjere prave / svaki od nas naglo hrli / nove iskati sad države, / očeän brodit plahi i vrli” (Palmotić 129).

person by the narrator, who is celebrating Columbus's merits, of which the spreading of the Christian faith on a new continent is the most important. The representation of the New World and its inhabitants in this poem is not lacking in stereotypical representation of the natives as primitive and filthy on one side and the European conquerors as cunning and culturally superior on the other.

This brief overview of an array of texts that deal with the "discovery" of America in early Croatian literature allows us to conclude that the literary imagination of the "discovery"—with the exception of allusive texts by Držić and Vetranović that criticize the moral qualities of the time on an allegorical level—symbolically supports the myth of the "discovery" of the New World without problematizing the colonial policy of the conquerors.<sup>16</sup> The aforementioned texts contribute to the forging of symbols which glorify Columbus as a Promethean figure and the New World as a promised land, primarily in terms of material well-being. Written in the spirit of the times, these texts primarily celebrate the spread of Christianity to a new continent through the act of conquest, and stand at the beginning of a transitional phase in which the "religious order" is supplanted by the "monetary order" (Greenblatt, qtd. in Hörisch 169). These literary imaginations of the topic of the "discovery" of America in Croatian literature do not bring this problem into question until the beginning of the twentieth century, although in non-fictional writings this approach appears a bit earlier.<sup>17</sup> As the twentieth century progresses, critical voices in the literary articulation of this historical event become more and more prominent.

<sup>16</sup> In the context of this literary politics of representation of the "discovery," we must also mention the discussions by the Dominican Vicko Paletin, who was in the Spanish army on the American continent roughly between 1530 and 1540 (Krašić 20). Paletin writes on several occasions about the discovery of the New World, especially the policy of conquest and the colonization of the Spanish way in overseas colonies. His most important work on this topic is *De jure et justitia belli contra Indos, ad Philippum II. Hispaniarum regem*, in which he discusses various issues of international law and the procedures of the Spaniards towards the indigenous peoples in what was morally and politically justified as the Spanish colonial policy. After a failed attempt to print his work in Flanders in 1558, Paletin received approval to have it printed in Venice in 1564. Nevertheless, the work was never published, and the original is gone. The controversy surrounding this work revolves around reports that Spanish King Philip II himself, probably at the instigation of Bartolomé de Las Casas, prohibited the printing of Paletin's work. Paletin was thus, together with the French Franciscan Jean Focher, one of two monks who defended Spain's right of conquest (33).

<sup>17</sup> One such exception is the book *Kristof Kolumbo i otkriće Amerike* [Christopher Columbus and the Discovery of America], by the writer and maritime expert Juraj Carić. Carić's book was published on the four-hundredth anniversary of the "discovery." Although his book belongs to the genre of non-fiction, it has literary qualities, such as interesting, sometimes very tense narration in shaping the historical event of the discovery. But the greatest distinction of this work in relation to the above-mentioned texts is its explicit criticism of the colonial policy of the Spanish conquerors. Carić severely criticizes the "shameful violence," the "inhumanity and barbaric acts" against innocent people (201, 222), and the Spanish greed for gold (218), unambiguously condemning such a policy: "this much insolence history had not recorded so far" (220). Although Columbus's historic merit is unquestionable and he is portrayed as an ultimately positive historic figure, Carić's text was the first articulated critical voice in the Croatian cultural imaginary, which until then had always portrayed the navigator as "saintly."

## The Dialectic of Utopia and History

The play *Kristofor Kolumbo* [Christopher Columbus], by Miroslav Krleža, stands at the beginning of the twentieth-century articulations of the “discovery” in Croatian literature as a kind of intertextual threshold for its later literary progeny. Although Krleža’s play has been considered from literary, theatrical, and theoretical perspectives, the ideological and historical aspects of its treatment of the “discovery” have so far evaded analytical attention.<sup>18</sup> The possible reason for neglecting this topic in reflecting on Krleža’s play might lay in the fact that “discovery” in this text is primarily articulated as an abstract idea in which reference to its historical dimension falls into the background. Also, avant-garde concept of the play treats the historical personages and events symbolically and not as contingent historical entities which was my earlier assumption. In this section I continue to examine how in such a literary articulation elements of historical and ideological layers of “discovery” are particularly challenging for interpretation, especially when compared with the similar motifs from Krleža’s other texts which can be used the better to elucidate the argument. In fact, the very idea of the new land carries traces that reveal the literary consciousness deeply aware of twentieth-century “America” at the height of development of monopoly capitalism.<sup>19</sup>

But let us stop for a moment on twentieth-century “America” in Krleža’s texts. Although “America” is not among the prominent themes and motifs of Krleža’s literary texts and essays, we can assume that Krleža, as a leftist thinker, is critical of the foremost capitalist country, an assumption that is confirmed by some of Krleža’s later texts which illuminate the motif of the “discovery” in the play *Christopher Columbus*. As claimed by Darko Gašparović (“Američki motivi”), the explicit mention of “America” can be found in several of Krleža’s texts. For example, the character Joža Podravec, in *Povratak Filipa Latinovicza* [*The Return of Philip Latinovicz*],

had been in America twice, but he had no use for America, devil take it that made it! He had been told by old and experienced seamen, who had pissed often enough in those waters, to look out, for he would see sea-deer swimming alongside the ship. He had stood on deck for two days and two nights, and wouldn’t go to bed: he had waited to see the sea-deer, how they came up out of the water, but not a single sea-deer had he seen! (55)<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> See: Lešić; Foretić; Lasić; Gašparović, *Dramatica krležiana*. The topic of the “discovery” was briefly discussed by Branimir Donat, who compared Krleža’s play with *Columbus* by Paul Claudel (38-42).

<sup>19</sup> Krleža’s play was first published in 1918 under the title *Cristobal Colón* and it was dedicated to Vladimir Ilich Lenin. After its first appearance in the book *Hrvatska rapsodija* [Croatian Rhapsody] the text was later revised, in 1933 when it was published in the book *Legende* [Legends] together with other plays from this cycle and in 1956 for premiere in Belgrade. In this analysis, I will highlight the significant differences of the different versions of the play when that is relevant for the topic discussed in this essay.

<sup>20</sup> Translation by Zora Depolo from the English edition of Krleža’s novel.



Also, the character Eva in his play *Vučjak* is a former owner of an African-American bordello, while her behavior and gestures are represented as a caricature of modern cosmopolitanism. Eva embodies the uncritical fascination with materialism of American provenance that is typical of a specific type of Krleža's female characters intoxicated by the "trivialities" of consumer culture: "This here is a scandal, not life! Now, Chicago, New York, Pittsburgh, San Francisco, Ohio—everything over there shines like a Christmas Eve mass! Those trams, that music, those turntables! Now, that's life! America! The United States of America! That's life!" (*U logoru; Vučjak* 40). Krleža's largely negative attitude towards "America" in his literary works can also be gleaned in his essay "Amsterdamske varijacije" [Amsterdam Variations]. In that essay, Krleža also reflects on Hollywood movies, among other things. His remarks about Hollywood, its cultural influence, and world audience are written in the spirit of classical Marxist criticism:

This Hollywood lamp has become a new opium of the masses and the people, even more dangerous than religion, whose intoxicating power in the narghiles of church doctrine is already quite weak. Poisoning of even the most innocent of personal tastes, falsification of the more or less innate human sense of "beauty," calculated killing and refined tainting of the most intimate forms of human excitement and of every sincere emotional feeling, conscious steering towards the overestimation of social lies, criminal hoaxes, and deception of all sorts, glorification of the hollowest of all business and commercial successes—in one word: that dangerous, black-and-white, of celluloid shadows and light woven Taylorization of social lies, that magic lamp of human self-deception, that refined inspiration of Messrs. Goldwyn-Mayer and Fox, today, in this European darkness that surrounds us, shines as the only lighthouse from the Malay Islands to the Transvaal and from Koprivnica to Greenland. (*Evropa danas* 48–49)

In this essay about film,<sup>21</sup> "America" is unambiguously articulated as a negative symbol of superficial cultural production. As claimed by Gašparović, "a Humanist, actually an old-school moralist, grafted in the habitus of Central Europe (regardless of what he said about it), Krleža could only address the 'New World' from an ironic distance" ("Američki motivi" 237–38). It is in a similar vein that we can read the articulation of the New World in Krleža's play *Christopher Columbus*.

The setting of Krleža's play is the Santa Maria, as it sails the ocean on the eve of the "discovery" of the New World. Aside from the Admiral Christopher Columbus, the play has many characters, sometimes indicated just through their symbolic function (e.g., Broken, Defiant, Drunk, Timid, etc.) or indicating the tone of their voice (e.g., One Rescuing Voice, One Wild Voice, etc.). The inexorably driven crew, consisting primarily of slaves who keep the ship afloat, reaches the point of utter physical ex-

<sup>21</sup> For a more detailed insight into Krleža's view on film in the book *Evropa danas* [Europe Today], see Kragić.

haustion and low morale because navigation seems both endless and without purpose. In this atmosphere, heterogeneous voices from the ship connect through their dissatisfaction, resignation, and even insinuation of rebellion against Columbus, who is considered to be the main culprit. The dissatisfaction of the exhausted and embittered crew is enframed and subdued by the voices of the Admiral's Phalanx, which persuade the mutineers to move towards the New World, adorned in their exhortations by utopian images of material abundance: "Bread grows where we are sailing to! There, that bread is before us! Men! Just this one more night!" (*Legende* 116).

Almost every mention of the New World by the Admiral's Phalanx is coupled with imagery of material well-being, from which I cite here only a few typical examples: "He is leading us to the New World! Men! There, the rivers churn up gold as our rivers churn up gravel! There, the sweet smell of honey and milk is everywhere! In the New World, bread grows on tree branches! Just don't give up this one night!" (116–17) or "Behold, land is before us! There, jewels abound just as ordinary stones back home! Gold! Spices! Bread! Have faith, men! We shall return as wealthy men!" (118). The "drama" of the first pages of this play is carried out by the dialectic of a utopian goal, on one hand, and the "real" navigation conditions, on the other, which radicalizes class conflict on the ship's deck. Against the Admiral's Phalanx utopian images, the Crowd exposes them as a lie, demanding that they return to Spain and that Columbus be executed (120). In the chaotic atmosphere of navigation in which the conflicts branch out at different hierarchical levels, the first ideological appearance of capitalist "America"—which was not present in the original version of the play in 1918—was added by Krleža in the 1933 version. In one such argument, the Crowd says to the Slaves: "Why do you protest, slave? Punch him in the nose so that his blood spurts! It's that simple! Beat the slaves! *A fistfight ensues*. Get below the deck! We're not anarchists like you. We can only be saved by the scientific organization of work! Taylorism! Get below deck on the double! Man the chain!" (129–30).

Taylorism is evoked as a saving recipe for the position of the Crowd, which is threatened by the rebellion of the slaves. A reference to the system of organization of labor named after the American Frederick Winslow Taylor, the father of so-called scientific management, is the first semantic link with the image of capitalist "America" in the early twentieth century. I am aware that this intentional anachronism is part of avant-garde poetics, but my focus is on the specific quality and critical potential of this motif. Taylorism was occurring at a time marked by the consolidation of monopoly capitalism and the growth of giant corporations (Foster xvi), which mark the context of the original version of Krleža's play. The principles of economic efficiency developed by Taylor form the core of the capitalist organization of labor even today (cf. Witt; Braverman 60). Taylorism was already at the time of its emergence criticized from the American left as an exploitative system in Upton Sinclair's sharp formulation (cf. Locke 20),<sup>22</sup> while a critical thrust is to be observed even in late twentieth-century

<sup>22</sup> Lenin, for example, argued that, while Taylorism epitomized the brutality of bourgeois exploitation, it was also the greatest scientific achievement, and that its best aspects must be implemented in Soviet industry

studies, such as Harry Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*. Braverman called Taylorism "explicit verbalization of the capitalist mode of production" (60). Braverman's focus on the three principles of Taylorism—namely, the separation of the working process from the workers' skills; the separation of the concept of work from its performance; and the monopolizing of knowledge in order to control each step of the working process and its performance (86–95)—is echoed by the mood on Columbus's ship. Because of the extreme polarization of those whose time is extremely valuable and those whose time is worth nothing, Taylorism contributes to the degradation of work in capitalism, to evoke the subtitle of Braverman's book. In light of the proposed divisions, we understand how this motif underlies the character of the Admiral's Phalanx as the "brains" of the operation, while the Slaves are the manual labor that moves the ship:

ADMIRAL'S PHALANX: We are all the same! That's right! From this night on, we are the same! Now you are no longer slaves! You are free sailors as are we! It's just that someone has got to pull on the oars! We must go forward! To your oars, free sailors! You are our equals, but rowing is your expertise! We are for the division of labor! (Krlježa 130)

A clearcut division of labor can be viewed here as a kind of metaphor for the historical role of the maritime classes in overseas discoveries that, according to Blasopoulos (131), will just become a prototype of the organized labor, dominant in industrial capitalism. Taylorism, which Krlježa ironically mentions when it comes to Hollywood (Krlježa, *Evropa danas* 49), is an explicit sign of the twentieth-century capitalist United States, incorporated into the topic of "discovery" in a later revision of the play as a kind of symbolic prolepsis of capitalist development in the further course of American history. In contrast to the pragmatism of the crew, symbolically contained in the motif of the evocation of Taylorism, on one hand, and Columbus's idealism, on the other,<sup>23</sup> lies the second point of conflict in this drama. Though the myth of the "discovery" is criticized and has been associated with twentieth-century capitalist "America," the genuine myth of Columbus is not brought into question in this play. Columbus thus remains an enlightened, idealistic Promethean character, not a "speculator whose greatest speculative gain is North America" (Chancellor, qtd. in Grgas 142). In fact,

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(Braverman 8–9). Before the Cold War, the Russians closely followed American technological development in order to apply its achievements to improve their own progress. For example, in 1920 Vladimir Mayakovski wrote in his travel reports from America that the implementation of American futurism for the benefit of the Soviet Union could mean a "second discovery of America" (104). Mayakovski also harshly criticized the division of labor. As claimed, the division of labor is destructive to human livelihoods because capitalists appropriate all the material value to themselves, treating the masses of workers as inexhaustible goods (103).

<sup>23</sup> Taylorism is often interpreted in the light of pragmatism—the typical American philosophy—which contrasts with the traditionally understood European idealism (cf. Ormerod 907).

unlike the Admiral's Phalanx, which seemingly protects Columbus, advocating colonial ethos and material enrichment (*Legende* 123), Columbus's vision of the New World as a utopia is radically different from theirs. For Columbus in Krleža's play, the New World is primarily an abstract idea of the New as a negation of the Old Europe and its symbolic values. In contrast to this utopian abstraction, the Agents of the flagship perceive the New World as a real material given: "Forward, Men! Forward! We must hurry and to reach the New World! It is not Utopia, it is reality!" (129). The Phalanx finally manages to calm all who are dissatisfied by means of the rhetorical strategy embodied in the ecstatic "Rhythm of Revival Work" (131), which is the culminating point of the play. After that scene comes the Unknown, who as a character sows suspicion in Columbus by pointing out the fundamental difference between the abstract ideas of the New with what the rest of the crew actually want: "UNKNOWN: They are not seeking the New! They believe they will return! They want to go back rich and mighty! Mightier than they were before. Pirates—that's what they are—and they think that the New is their booty!" (133).

With the arrival of the Unknown, different ideas of the New cause Columbus to gradually distance himself from the rest of the characters. For the rest of the crew, the New is actually the Old in disguise, in whose name they will make a colonial march all over the new continent:

VOICES OF THE ADMIRAL'S PHALANX: And when we return home, laden with gold and spices and birds with tails of silk! And with diamonds as large as millstones! We will have to give such a diamond to the Queen as a sign of our loyalty! Oh—what a feast it will be! Bells will ring as on the Resurrection! And the Crown! The Crown will have to reward us! How many new lands must we give to the scepter? And when the King touches us with his sword! To name as the Masters of Calatrava! Maybe Calatrava as well as Alcantara?

The Church must proclaim us saints! How many provinces we will place in her lap?

And all the trade, gentlemen! Just think of the trade! . . . We will free all white galley slaves, declare them equal citizens, and pin the natives to the oars. Trade will restore our business life! Banks, currencies, profits, dividends. And we are the first! Hey! We are the first! We have discovered a new reality! We have opened a new period in history! What a glorious feeling! (138–39)

The New World is from the crew's perspective reduced to a "holy prey" (138), and with its "discovery" comes the "new historical phase of prosperity" (151), in which the utopian ocean is replaced by a mercantile one.

In Columbus's opposition to such an exploitative idea of the New once again speaks the twentieth-century critical spirit against capitalist "America," which only exists in the revised version of the play: "To hell with such an achievement! You want me

to sell natives with you? To become a stockbroker? To establish a joint-stock company for the exploitation of Colombia? Ha-ha! Is this the New that I dream of?" (142). Columbus's visionary insight into the further course of history firmly positions him in opposition to the idea of the Old. The idea of the New fell into the bilge of stock ventures, and the idea of "discovery" is articulated as "a continuation, and by no means a new beginning" (Grgas 257). Columbus as a historical figure is not questioned in this play. At the end of the play, he is crucified as a misunderstood genius, and his final words are different in the various versions of the play. In the version of the drama from 1918, Columbus's last words are: "A LIE! PEOPLE! IT IS ALL A LIE!" (Krlježa 1918: 115), while in the later version of the play, he remains consistent in following the utopian postulates of the New, believing that the people will one day "get rid of the specters"—"the gods, kings, cardinals, banks, and dividends"—and "swim to the other shore, discover new continents . . . and travel to the stars" (*Legende* 152). The two different endings in a way represent the dialectic of utopia and anti-utopia that shapes the idea of "discovery" in this play, thus linking it with the archive of representations of the event. These tensions will be taken up by two plays which later sprout from the intertextual soil of Krlježa's play.

### The Intertextual Afterlife of Krlježa's *Columbus*

The radio play *Admiral Kristofor Kolumbo* [Admiral Christopher Columbus], by Nedjeljko Fabio, also takes place on the deck of the Santa Maria on the night before the "discovery." But in Fabio's play, the historical topic of the "discovery" is primarily articulated through existential symbolism, according to which the New World functions as a metaphor for a goal that must always remain out of reach. Similar to Krlježa's play, Fabio's Columbus striving towards the New World contrasts with the pragmatic goals of the other crew members.<sup>24</sup> For Columbus, coming to a new land and achieving the goal means the loss of a sense of his own existence, which is why he frantically insists on its delay. This Columbus is a much more cruel and unbalanced character than in Krlježa's text. He murders the messengers of the New World, and his prayer is directed towards the non-discovery of the land. For Columbus, the possible arrival in the New World means fame and power as the legacy of greedy old Spain: "If I set foot on land tomorrow, then I have thrown a greasy bone to the Palace and it will gratefully bite. It will triumphantly and greedily gnaw at its prize, as every authority does when it gets ahold of a bone and when that bone submits to it" (Fabio 84). Besides this comment, the historical reference to the "discovery" is barely indicated, while existential symbolism is central to this play. The ending resembles Krlježa's text: The New World is a lie for Columbus, and its "discovery" is a punishment.

After Fabio's play, dialogue with Krlježa's *Columbus* continues in Slobodan Šnajder's play *Dijalektički Anticolumbus* [Dialectical Anti-Columbus], the subtitle of

<sup>24</sup> In comparison to Krlježa's play, the number of characters in Fabio's text is significantly decreased and does not contain abstract sounds and appearances.

which is “Fantasy on a given topic.” In his play, Šnajder engages in more direct dialogue with Krleža’s *Columbus*, further radicalizing the dialectic of historical, mythical, and utopian layers, already problematized in Krleža’s play. Criticism of the utopian subtext of Krleža’s play is hinted at with the motto from Krleža’s repeatedly cited comments on the student protests in 1968, a year that, from distant historical perspectives, almost functions as a trope of revolt and the collapse of many ideals: “The difference between us and them is only that we already were what they are today, and what happened to us will also happen to them; that they will experience the realization of their ideals” (Šnajder 236). This quote anticipates the strategy of questioning utopian ideals as one of the main aspects of Šnajder’s *Columbus*, or rather, *Anti-Columbus*, which is also further elaborated in the extensive introductory note serving as a kind of prologue to this short play. The polemic with Krleža’s and generally utopian articulation of *Columbus* primarily takes the arguments from history that critically ground the Promethean symbolism so far inscribed in his character:

Indeed, only a poet, in building his poetry *res publica*, could believe that Columbus and Ferdinand, the Spanish king, spoke as two scientists before the crazy hypothesis, from Eros for the New, guided by inclinations to show Europe, which is being reborn, that it is much smaller than it flatters itself to be, and to correct Ptolemy. No, the persuader here is one of the smaller shareholders of a large company in which he would like to take the reigns. And Ferdinand, as the first shareholder, is basically finding out for himself how much it will cost him and how much it will benefit him. (237)

Columbus is shown here as a shareholder and not a Promethean figure, regardless of the the critical historization of the “discovery” in Krleža’s play. Not only does Šnajder attempt a polemical rewriting of Krleža’s *Columbus*, but he does so in a way that puts a considerable stake on the traces of twentieth-century capitalist “America.” In these fictional reflections on Krleža’s *Columbus*, the dramatic focus is primarily on the dialogue between Columbus and the Unknown, who has the role of anti-utopian agent with a highlighted historical perspective, similarly as in Krleža’s play: “. . . yes, like eternity itself. You will become immortal, Admiral. On the bones of laboring mortals – that’s easy. Your Utopia is well fed. Your journey is sprinkled with corpses” (246). The deconstruction of history and the synchrony of modernity are thus integrated into the mythical trope of the “discovery” by emphasizing the critical potential of the “discovery” but also every other utopian and ideological project in history. Columbus will ultimately rhetorically capitulate in front of the Unknown, and just before his arrival in the New World, he will be crucified “on a historical timetable” (252), where references to the conquistador’s conquest are mixed with allusions to the socialist work ethos as a sort of version of the “Rhythm of Revival Work” from Krleža’s play (254). But, in a specific way, the ending of the play still allows for the possibility of utopia: after Columbus’s death by crucifixion, the only one who hears his cry for the New is the poet Arthur Rimbaud (254). The ending of this drama thus leaves the

realization of the utopia of the New to a poetic language whose metaphor is Rimbaud, usually stamped in literary history with the phrase "revolutionary of the new poetic language." If achieving utopia, as shown by history, is not possible through political projects and ideologies, it is perhaps possible in poetry, as Šnajder's play suggests. Such an ending also points to future strategies in the articulation of the topic of the "discovery," where poetry will have a prominent place.

### In Search of the *New* Poetic Language

A new strategy in the articulation of the "discovery" is based on a discursive turn that freed the topic from the Promethean pathos that invariably pervades the aforementioned texts. This symbolic step of realizing the Columbus depicted in the pathos-laden literary legacy in Croatian literature in an altogether different manner will be also indicated by the poem "Kolumbo" [Columbus], by Ivan Slamnig, from his book of poetry *Naronska siesta* [The Naronian Siesta]. Slamnig's poem can be read as a parody of sorts of Walt Whitman's poems "A Thought of Columbus" and "Prayer of Columbus," in the latter of which the lyrical voice is that of Columbus, who is "crucified" by great existential thoughts:

A batter'd, wreck'd old man, / Thrown on this savage shore, far, far from home, / Pent by the sea and dark rebellious brows, twelve dreary months, / Sore, stiff with many toils, sicken'd and nigh to death, / I take my way along the island's edge, / Venting a heavy heart. // I am too full of woe! / Haply I may not live another day; / I cannot rest O God, I cannot eat or drink or sleep, / Till I put forth myself, my prayer, once more to Thee, / Breathe, bathe myself once more in Thee, commune with Thee, / Report myself once more to Thee. (Whitman 476)

The speaking voice in Slamnig's poem is also that of Columbus, but unlike Whitman's Columbus, this voice is torn by the weaknesses of the opportunistic common man. Grouchy and nervous, a little bit unsure of himself, the Columbus in Slamnig's poem symbolically indicates a move from high to low register:

Nerves are after me so I walk on the deck. / It seems to me that everyone is watching. / They are actually happy for being in sleep. / If I could find at least a little island. / I'm unbearably nervous. / Horizon is flat. / How stupid of me to risk this / like I couldn't foresee all / emptiness, infinity and my frustration. // How fortunate it would be that I find / some small island, some land. / If I say that I was not mistaken, at least not completely. / I'm spinning nervously, I wet at corners over the side of the boat. (47)

In the poetic articulation of Columbus's thoughts, there is no Prometheus longing for the New as in the previously-mentioned plays. Columbus's thoughts in Slamnig's poem are dependent on the crew's approval: "Finally, I'd like to find something/ not

for the sake of finding it/ but this anxiety comes down to whether I can justify/ this journey of mine before these guys” (47). Slamnig’s poem thus symbolically opened the way for a new approach<sup>25</sup> in the articulation of the topic of the “discovery.”

One such articulation can be found in Dubravka Oraić’s book of poetry *Urlik Amerike [American Scream: Palindrome Apocalypse]*<sup>26</sup> from 1981 and its imagery of the “discovery” articulated as a search for the new possibilities of poetic language. Moving away from the Promethean-shaped figure of Columbus, Oraić’s poetry points to its ludic, linguistically creative, but also critical potential, where the idea of the New is primarily related to the avant-garde imperative for a new poetic language (cf. Katušić; Vidan). In shaping the topic of the “discovery,” its historical, mythological, and literary dimensions intertwine to the level of language puns and sound abstraction. The collection is crosslinked with multiple quotations by Dante and Baudelaire, from the Bible and Homer to Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Marx, Gogol, Mayakovski, Khlebnikov, and many others, in which the lyrical subject builds its metaphorical vision of “America.”

The basic discursive strategy in forming images of “America” is thus contained in the work of tension between mythical, historical, and social significance, between its real and metaphorical images, in one word: between “ideology and utopia” (Ricoeur, qtd. in Moura 162). The pathos of the previous literary articulation is replaced by irony, whose central point is the paradox of Columbus’s “discovery” as a source of new poetic figures. India as a misnomer for the New World is one of the central motifs of the collection whose semantic metamorphosis is the main strategy in the construction of metaphoric images of “America.” The speaking voice searching for India regularly finds “America”:

One and the same thing everywhere  
 Everywhere finding of the unfindable  
 Everywhere research of the unsearchable  
 Everywhere destructions within reach of home  
 Everywhere Americas nowhere India. . . (Oraić 51)

The motif of the search for a New World blends with the motif of seeking new poetic language where the speaker of the poem recognizes her defeat:

With the striped flower of India / In the black buttonhole of America /  
 Killing dust from the shoes / That did kiss the sea // And when my organ

<sup>25</sup> Here I insist on the importance of Slamnig’s poem as a shift in the articulation of the theme of “discovery,” whereby this importance should not be understood in the literal sense of its direct influence. It is rather an opening of a new sensibility and new possibilities in the artistic articulation of the topic of the “discovery.”

<sup>26</sup> Oraić’s book was translated into English by Sibelan Forrester and published in the United States in 2005. All quotations from Oraić’s book are from its English translation. It should be mentioned, however, that there are some important differences between the Croatian original and the English translation, such as the addition of new poems, by which the original sequence of the poems was changed.



that beats / On the left side under the rib / One wonderful day convincingly spake: // Poets can change the world / It's a matter of changing / The poems // I sensed I was no longer sailing anywhere, anywhere / I sensed I was shuddering along my whole body / I sensed I had two ankles / In the eternal dilemma of Columbus of the slime / Of new lands / New horrors / And I vomit / without warranties // In the name of the father and of the son / And there's nothing besides the circle / The white circle / Of high to high / Sky. (69)

The tensions between the mythical and the historical, the utopian and the critical are always associated with the poetry itself, and they implode in the voice of the speaker. But the mythic motifs of "America" are often shaped within its historical and ideological paradoxes that evoke the modern image of "America": "America! America! America! / On you broke the yellow tooth of discovery / All that happened afterwards was again that American / Americanic through plan and misappropriation / Through blood and sacred things Americanesquely / Das amerikanische, americheskoe ochen' / Ochen' americheskoe // " (71). The mythical symbolism of the New World is often carnivalized with contemporary American consumer culture. *American Scream* emphatically speaks with a literary awareness of twentieth-century capitalist "America," lucidly estranging its mythical, historical, and utopian dimensions. One such strategy of estrangement is the frequent use of its distinctive cultural markers, including the indispensable *Coca Cola*: "Water our water / Why are you so / Sought-after // Shore to shore shore / Sea to sea sea / Someone spake: 'We came!' / Someone added: 'A shame!' // And enormous merriment breaks / Through the hot lips of America / The icy-cold taste of / INDI-COLA // What refreshment / For traveling in place // " (50).

### Coca-Columbus, or the Carnivalization of History

The motif of the famous American soft drink which conquered the world has often been used in shaping the topic of the "discovery" and its relation to the twentieth-century United States. In the context of the carnivalization of the "discovery" motif by signifiers of twentieth-century "America," it is not irrelevant to mention the satirical story "Columbus Approaches the Shore," by the Russian writers Ilf and Petrov.<sup>27</sup> In this Ilf and Petrov's story from the 1930s, the New World is shown as a contemporary "America" where the fifteenth-century Columbus arrives. The great historical gesture of the "discovery" happens on the land of the contemporary United States, where the natives carry on with their daily routines and activities, "not even suspecting they have been discovered" (Ilf and Petrov 6). In such a synopsis, Columbus's "discovery" is perceived by the natives in the context of the contemporary American "society of the spectacle," in which, in order for an event to actually happen, it must be covered

<sup>27</sup> In 1937, the Russian writing duo also published the famous travelogue *One-storied America*, in which the critical mode of irony shapes their view of the United States.

by the media: “If you are going to discover a new country, several cheerful jokes in written form should be prepared for distribution among reporters. Prepare a hundred photos, as well, because otherwise you won’t succeed. Publicity is required” (7). The New World is in the story shaped through the recognizable imagery of twentieth-century consumer culture and the “society of the spectacle” (Debord). The natives, for example, invite Columbus to Hollywood to play a role in a movie titled *Amerigo Vespucci*, the screenplay of which has been adapted from the novel *The Count of Monte Cristo*, by Alexander Dumas. At the end of the story, Columbus writes a letter to the Spanish queen in which he describes the New World as a place where the natives eat hot dogs, where everybody smells of gasoline, where everybody has

many gods, whose names are written with the fire on their huts. They mostly worship, it seems, the goddess of Coca-Cola, the goddess of the Soda Fountain, the goddess of Cafeteria and the great god of the gasoline aroma, Ford. Apparently, he’s something like Zeus here. The natives are very greedy and all the time they are chewing on something. (14)

Coca Cola, chewing gum, Ford, and other signs of capitalist “America” thus form the image of the continent, which can no longer be imagined in any other way.<sup>28</sup>

The strategy of framing the topic of the “discovery” with signs of consumerist “America” will be used at the end of the twentieth century by Croatian poet Luko Paljetak in his poem entitled “Kolumbo” [Columbus], published in the special edition of the journal *Dubrovnik* commemorating the five-hundredth anniversary of the “discovery.” The theme of the “discovery” in this poem is articulated with recognizable signs from twentieth-century “America” which cannot imagine the pre-Columbian mainland as culturally innocent. So, for example, the first contact with the New World once again is unimaginable without the indispensable Coca-Cola as the first word said by the native people: “when they came to the New World, / they met an Indian bare naked. / What do they call this country? / He only said: ‘Coca-Cola’” (Paljetak 144)<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Here I would also like to mention the humor piece “Sreća zvana Kolumbo” [Happiness called Columbus], by an unknown author, which was published in *Vjesnik* in 1957 as a commentary on the opening of the American pavilion at the Zagreb Fair, which introduced modern American technology and consumerism to the Yugoslav public. In this piece, the issue of the “discovery” is ironically associated with the discovery of American consumer culture, which is blindly worshipped by the Yugoslav public, such as: “Our Columbus admiringly looks at the splendor of this precision mechanics. He simply forgets how many times he has struggled to find two five-dinar coins to put them in an ordinary local payphone and that he has put on perfume several times from an automatic bottle of cologne. . . . But that is nothing—there is also a slot machine which pours out Coke! People gather around that giant of technology, and in their enthusiasm, they forget that the machine is not pouring out plum brandy, but only a widely popular soft drink, and that the machine does not have a human heart, that in case of need, it can serve a customer on credit” (“Sreća zvana Kolumbo,” 4).

<sup>29</sup> In the translation of these verses, the rhyme *gola* [naked] – *Cola* has been lost.

The anniversary issue of the journal *Dubrovnik* is where we also find the poem "Otkriće Amerike" [The discovery of America], by Slavko Mihalić. The speaking voice of this poem is a native who is watching the arrival of the Spanish caravels. The perspective of the native warrior–observer anticipates the downfall of a civilization that comes with European conquerors whose trading contagion is spreading through the native people:

I do not know why priests took so long? Have they already asked the sky / and sacrificed the young men? Again, we can hear / those who are greedily staring at sailing ships / and think about the treasure in them. They mock with / the old people and say that the solution is / in trade! We warriors know the truth: / if we don't sink those ships / it is over with us. (142)

This kind of articulation provides a reverse perspective on the "discovery," shaped by the voice of the victimized as a kind of paradigm shift regarding the historic event of the "discovery" as already mentioned at the beginning of this article. The shift of paradigm is also present in a poem by Tonko Maroević entitled *Otkriće Europe* [The discovery of Europe], whose paratextual data reveals that the poem was written in Genoa on May 10, 1991, ahead of the Columbus jubilees. What remains from the great Columbus in this poem? Only the monument, which is "now closer to the tracks than to the waves / the seagulls don't even succeed in soiling it", and "the booty is embedded in the walls, daring is pulled taught / like cement, the sediment of heritage is piled up to the top / so that it encircles the entire space *intra muros*, / barring all challenge and response save from the outside" (141). In these civilizational layers of deposited wealth after centuries of European colonial history, the lyrical voice reveals his own position on "the first bank, which is actually the last" (141). The "discovery" thus comes down to an ontological impossibility of the "discovery," and only a possibility of transferring the old European idea onto new lands.<sup>30</sup>

### A New World After "America"

The twentieth-century literary articulation of the "discovery" of "America" as one of the great metanarratives of the West, as I have tried to show, cannot be exempted from the socio-political context in which they arise. Thus, in contemporary literary texts that thematize the "discovery," it is impossible to avoid the picture of twentieth-century capitalist "America," and the century that has been labelled as the "American Century" (Zunz). However, the twentieth century is also the century of demythologization, which is the fundamental strategy in shaping the literary motif of the New World, both around the world and in Croatian literature of the twentieth century.

<sup>30</sup> A decline in the belief in the *utopian* and the *new* could also be supplemented with the argument that the identical process of the rise in skepticism towards the utopian role of poetry, the belief in the restorative role of the poetic experiment, and generally, the belief in the emancipatory role of art in a historically changed context in general undoubtedly accompanies the articulation of this particular motif.

Twentieth-century solipsism in shaping the imaginary “discovery” of America is present in different proportions in all of these authors and inevitably reflects the consequences of the diachronic perspective in the development of capitalism and consumer culture in the United States of America. Such literary articulation disintegrates the utopian imagery of “discovery” whose roots date back to pre-Columbian times. The utopia of the New World is no longer on the horizon in the fictional representations in which the “earth can now no longer be thought to contain any spaces that are immune to or insulated from the predations of a capitalist mode of production, and there is nothing comparable to the early modern oceanic novum” (Blasopoulos 149).

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