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## Re-reading Alencar's *Iracema* through Saer's Lens

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## “Re-reading Alencar’s *Iracema* through Saer’s Lens”

### 1. Introduction

This paper analyzes two novels on the colonization of the Americas and the representation of indigenous populations. In *El entenado*, Saer presents a more realistic representation of indigenous populations and the experience of colonization, while Alencar’s *Iracema* presents a more idealized version of history. Throughout this paper, I compare various components of the two novels to explain how the two novels differ but complement each other at the same time. The aspects analyzed are the language utilized by the authors, narration, syntax, symbolism and form. The paper is finished by a re-reading of *Iracema* through Saer’s lens which demonstrates the complementary nature of the two works and the need to read the two together.

### 2. Narration, language, syntax and symbolism in *Iracema*

*Iracema* is told from a third-person omniscient point of view. The novel recounts the tale of a Portuguese soldier who has resided with the members of the Pytiguára tribe and has wandered into the lands of the Trabajará tribe. It is here that he meets and falls in love with the chief’s daughter, Iracema. Throughout the novel, their forbidden love continues and ultimately leads in tragedy. From the third-person omniscient point of view, the reader knows the thoughts and emotions of the main characters, Iracema and Martim. The novel is narrated in the present, as if the events are occurring in the present moment even though the historical events which the 1865 novel are “loosely” based upon, occurred in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (“Nationality and the ‘Indian’ Novels” 207). *Iracema* follows a lineal, chronological structure with the occasional interruption of dreams and fantasies. When Alencar wrote this novel, he intended it to be “an experiment” or “an exhibit,” containing Brazilian poetry “absorbed from the language of the savages” (Alencar 137). The “Brazilian poetry” created in this novel helped to establish Alencar as a writer of

literature of nationality in which he created a uniquely Brazilian language that combined Tupi words with Portuguese grammar (Sommer 148). While for many readers this creation of a Brazilian language is one of Alencar's great accomplishments, it is also a main point of criticism. Portuguese critics often chastised Alencar for deviating from the "mother tongue" of Portuguese and creating a language that was full of "Americanisms" (Bosi 151).

Alencar also engaged in word play, hiding discreet messages in the text. The best example is the fact that the heroine's name and the title of the book, *Iracema*, is an anagram for America. The heroine is also described entirely in terms of nature, with the author comparing her voice to "the murmur of a honeybird" and her "body being sweet like the wild amaryllis" ("Nationality and the 'Indian' Novels" 207). All of these attributes add to the symbolism behind *Iracema* that is constructed throughout the novel: she is the symbol of the Americas prior to European colonization, the untouched lands and the native tribes that existed happily before the Portuguese conquistadors arrived. Through the superfluous use of symbolism and figurative language, Alencar was attempting to create a hybrid language that existed between poetry and prose. In his "Letter to Dr. Jaguaribe," Alencar explains his rationale for this decision stating:

Verse, because of its dignity and nobility, does not admit of a certain flexibility of expression that nevertheless is not unbecoming of the most elevated prose. The elasticity of the sentence would thus permit the indigenous phrases to be utilized with greater clarity so they would not go unnoticed (Alencar 136).

Alencar began writing *Iracema* as a poem which explains the poetic language utilized throughout, including the vivid descriptions and imagery. However, verse did not allow him the flexibility in grammar to create the Brazilian language he wished to utilize to accurately depict the native tribes. To satisfy his needs, Alencar therefore created a style of narration that utilized

aspects of both poetry and prose. In addition to frequent imagery, other distinct aspects of Alencar's narration in *Iracema* include short sentences and short paragraphs, that despite combining two distinct languages, abides by an "almost classical syntax" ("Nationality and the 'Indian' Novels" 214). As a writer of Brazilian literature, Alencar adapted traditional European forms to the culture around him, creating a "myth of national origin," that recounts the story of how Brazil came to be ("Nationality and the 'Indian' Novels" 188-89). As such, *Iracema* reads very similar to European romantic fantasies (Guzmán 104). Despite his achievements, I do not believe that Alencar truly created an "experiment" in *Iracema*, I feel that he showcased a different culture, but abided by the majority of traditional European cultures, including the style of the "cartas de las Américas" of de las Casas and Columbus detailing their discovery of the Americas and the indigenous populations. In this sense, he did really create something new, just changing something old. While what he created was new and different, it is still very reminiscent in style and content of European literature, unlike *El entenado* by Saer which is more adventurous and experimental in style in the fact that it varies from the traditional testimony of the discovery of the Americas by Europeans.

### **3. Form, narration and language in *El entenado***

In the novel *El entenado*, Juan José Saer retells the story of the colonization of Río de Plata, Argentina by Juan Díaz de Solís in 1516. The novel is told from first person point of view but does not follow a lineal structure as the story is told from memory with frequent interruptions from the present, 70 years after the original events. The novel begins with the narrator and a crew of men from Spain discovering land that believe to be uninhabited. To their surprise, when the men begin searching the island, they are attacked by a tribe of cannibals. The lone survivor is the narrator, reminiscent of the historical event where Francisco del Puerto is the lone survivor.

This text is very experimental, engaging numerous forms of narration and creating something new and unique. In fact, Saer has been described as experimenting “con la función de la prosa narrativa que propone el *nouveau roman* francés” (López- Calvo 530). In other words, Saer sought to reject the typical narrative styles and language used during the *Boom* era, utilizing mainly a first-person narrator and mixing the languages utilized in both prose and poetry. The narration utilized by Saer incorporates characteristics of modern philosophy, ethnography, and historiography (Pons 94).

In her article, “El lenguaje de ‘caos’ en *El entenado*” María Cristina Pons explains the intensity of the poetic language of Saer, stating:

La intensidad poética de este texto se desprende fundamentalmente del manejo del lenguaje simbólico, arquetípico y poético del mundo del mito; en particular, en el manejo de la dimensión simbólica contenida en la noción del caos, que subyace tanto al texto de Saer como al universo borgeano (Pons 95).

She goes on to state that chaos can be repeatedly perceived throughout the novel “en la vida y rituales de la tribu” and in the experiences of the narrator (Pons 104). While at first, the rituals may seem strange to the narrator, he learns to accept and appreciate them. At no point in the text does the narrator ever refer to the rituals as chaotic or barbaric, but simply observes and appreciates their culture as an ethnographer would. While I do agree that the language used by Saer is sometimes chaotic, producing run-on sentences with uncommon words and incorporating neologisms such as *def-ghi* in the language of the natives, this “chaotic” language adds to the beauty of the text, creating a very dynamic experience for the reader. The narration and “chaotic” language utilized by Saer reinforce the idea that the narrator is relaying his thoughts. The jumbled thoughts that sometimes intertwine the memory and elements of the present are very

reminiscent of the thoughts of someone who is experiencing something completely different than what they are used to and who is likely in shock. Carlos Barriuso offers a different analysis, which better captures the “chaotic” environment of *El entenado*:

No existe así un espacio coherente que se pueda conocer, sino un continuo juego entre los elementos narrativos. O si se prefiere, el yo se convierte en el espacio de la interrogación donde al movimiento entre los elementos narrativos no se le pone un fin prefijado de antemano (Barriuso 14).

All of the narration is relayed through the narrator’s memory. As such, there is no concrete space. Everything being told has already happened. Barriuso underscores that Saer plays with different narrative styles. It is impossible to pinpoint only one type of narration because Saer implements elements from a variety of different narrative styles. Barriuso furthers his analysis of the writings of Saer stating “la escritura es, como la orgía que sigue al canibalismo, la de una cópula frustrada, frustrada y olvidada” [the writing is, like the orgy that follows the cannibalism, the image of frustrated copulation, frustrated and forgotten] (Barriuso 15). In other words, Saer’s writing is jumbled, the words converging and colliding just as the bodies of the natives did in the orgy depicted in the novel. This chaotic language serves the purpose of the novel well, the narrator is a young orphan, stranded in an unfamiliar land surrounded by unfamiliar people who speak a language he cannot understand. The jumbled, chaotic descriptions provide the reader with a sense of how the narrator would be feeling in the moments he is describing.

As previous stated, in this novel Saer creates something original through his narration. Throughout the novel the reader can see different narrative styles at play including ethnographic narration and picturesque narration reminiscent of the narration utilized in *Lazarillo de Tormes*. Part of the reason the narration utilized by Saer in this text is because he is attempting to narrate

something that is “unnarratable,” that is memory. Through the narration of memory, there is also a “scene of forgetting” that both “exceeds and sustains testimony” (Riera 97). The use of memory as the primary source of narration does not allow for a fixed scene and the dream like scenes evoked through the use of memory create an atmosphere that is not able to be narrated by anyone but the person who experienced it firsthand which strengthens the role of the narrator-protagonist of this text, the reader has no choice but to believe what he retells because there is no other source of information provided. In addition to appearing to be seemingly “unnarratable,” the events of the novel can be described as those of *speculative anthropology*, a term coined by Saer in his 1991 essay “El concepto de ficción.” Saer believed that fiction was not necessarily the opposite of truth and is not a vindication of something false, but rather a coming together of the two. Through this joining of what is true and what is false, a writer can create a *speculative anthropology* which is both subjective and objective at the same time and serves as a retelling of history that incorporates fictitious elements (*El concepto de ficción* 12-16). When literature is looked at in this sense, it allows the reader to see past what is already known and opens the door to “what condescends to be shown” (Riera 99). This allows us to look beyond the history of the event and see what could have been, the experience of the survivor with the tribe for ten years which is what the narrator seeks to recount the reader through his memories.

In addition to the differences in narration, style, and language, *Iracema* and *El entenado* also differ in terms of ideology. Alencar saw himself as a writer of nationalist literature and this was at the heart of all of his works. Saer, on the other hand, believed that literature should expand beyond nationality. Saer states that he does not write to showcase being Argentinian and does not write as an Argentinian, but as a writer. He goes on to state that regardless of the nationality of the author, all narrators live in the same space “la espesa selva virgín de lo real” and that an

author should be “un hombre sin atributos” (*El concepto de ficción* 260-63, 267). That is to say, Saer puts aside his nationality and his ideology so that these factors cannot frame what he is writing and all that is seen is the literature. This is the biggest difference between Saer and Alencar and it is for this reason that I feel the two should be read together. This difference in ideology plays a large role in the creation of the indigenous peoples in the texts and through reading *Iracema* through the lens of Saer, a much more complete understanding can be developed.

#### **4. Representations of *lo indígena* in *Iracema***

While both novels are based on historical events, they recount these stories in vastly different ways, including how the indigenous peoples are described throughout the story. In *Iracema*, it appears as though there is a great respect for the tribes, especially Iracema herself, due to her beauty; however, the narrator constantly refers to the indigenous people as “savages” and as being submissive to Martim’s wishes. Iracema is a great example of the submission of the native people to Martim. She instantly falls in love with him and obeys his every wish calling him her “lord” and saying that once he leaves “No more shall joy visit the breast of Iracema” (Alencar 25). The feigned respect also quickly falls away as Martim begins to lament being separated from his home land and in doing so, casts Iracema away, resulting in her suffering and ultimately leading to her death. Before Iracema dies, she gives birth to a son, the symbol of the union between the Portuguese and the native Brazilians to create modern day Brazil, while her death symbolizes the cruelty suffered by the natives as the Portuguese took their land and subjected them to violent conquest. At the very end of the novel, Poty, who is also submissive to the whims of his “brother,” says that he wishes to share the same God as Martim (111). As such Poty is baptized as a Christian and soon the religion spreads to the other natives of his tribe,



representing the mass conversion of natives by the Europeans during the conquest. Renata Wasserman states that in his Indian novels, Alencar deals with “problems of hybridity rather than separation” (Wasserman 194). However, I believe that *Iracema* addresses both issues of hybridity and separation. The issue of separation is made clear through the frequent comparisons between Iracema and the “blond virgin” that awaits Martim in his homeland. The girlfriend who is never named and is never present serves as a constant reminder of the differences between Iracema and Martim which implies a separation. The separation is also illustrated through the differing descriptions of each of the characters, the natives are frequently described as savages while Martim is described as a “warrior” and a “Christian.” The use of derogatory description for natives is not unique to *Iracema*. In fact, in his novel, *O guarani*, Alencar uses terms such as “os *bárbaros* (barbarous), *horrendos* (horrendous), *satânicos* (satanic), *carniceiros* (bloody), *sinistros* (sinister), *horríveis* (horrible), *sedentos de vingança* (vengeful), *ferozes* (ferocious), and *diabólicos* (diabolical)” to describe the indigenous people (Bosi 148). These negative descriptions further the separation of the “civilized, Christian” who is the colonizer from the “savage” natives that inhabit the land being conquered, creating a Eurocentric depiction of the colonization of the Americas where the Europeans were the heroes and perhaps suggests that these two groups are too different to be able to exist in harmony. In terms of issues of hybridity, this is seen in the failure of the union between Iracema and Martim. The two of them can only be together if each rejects their culture (“Nationality and the ‘Indian’ Novels 211). This is illustrated by both of them having to abandon their respective cultures and homes to be with the other. While this is a problem of hybridity because it prohibits the true union of heterogeneous parts, I also believe it illustrates a problem of separation: the two pieces may exist separately but not together, neither can fully be who they are if they wish to continue this union. The only true

example of hybridity in the novel is the child born from the union of Iracema and Martim. While at other points in the novel it may appear that there is hybridity such as Martim adopted the paint of the Pytiguára tribe and Poty later adopting Christianity, each of these instances implies a separation rather than hybridity. The person adopting the new customs, must abandon their own to adopt those of the new culture, proving that this is an example of further differentiation rather than hybridity.

Wasserman makes another interesting point about the reality of the Brazilian population presented in *Iracema*:

It has to incorporate the violence against the land and the rejection of the real Amerindian, and it has to make itself readable in a world that does not automatically see it as the harmonious blending of heterogeneous elements. Each of the three novels under discussion centers on the beneficial marriage of different unions [Alencar's Indianista romances, including *Iracema*]...but their unhappy consequences deny the overt message that the merging is possible or desirable ("Nationality and the 'Indian' Novels" 196).

I agree that this is a focal point of *Iracema*. The novel centers around Iracema's union with Martim and their life together. While Iracema was happy for a short time, Martim soon left her to fight wars, pregnant and alone. Martim desired to return to his native land and had begun "to withdraw his spirit from Iracema" (Alencar 95). This withdrawal ultimately led to Iracema's death which proves that perhaps there can be no real union between heterogenous groups further adding to the argument of separation versus hybridity.

The issue of separation between the natives and the colonizers is further differentiated through the act of submission practiced by the natives in the "Indian" novels of Alencar. In each

of these novels, there is a romance between a white man or woman and an indigenous man or woman. Bosi describes these relationships as having the following characteristics:

The Amerindian unconditionally gives him or herself over body and soul to the white man or woman, an act that implies the Amerindian's sacrifice and abandonment of his or her tribal identification. The savage accepts the possibility of suffering and death without hesitation, as if the feeling of devotion displayed toward the white man or woman represented the fulfillment of a destiny (Bosi 149).

The ill-fated romance between Iracema and Martim demonstrates all of these characteristics. From the moment she meets him Iracema falls in love with him, calls him her "lord" and serves his every need. When he demands that she go and fetch the ceremonial wine of Tupan so that he can sleep guilt-free, Iracema obeys without question (Alencar 52). When Martim tries to leave, Iracema will not allow him to leave without her stating that "Araken no longer has a daughter" (59). She abandons her people for a man that she barely knows, knowing that she will likely die and will never be able to return to her home. While Iracema is painted as being submissive to Martim, she is also described as seducing him. Wasserman says that this seduction is symbolic of the pull the promise of new land exerted over the conquistadors and the disruption caused by their union represents the disruption caused by the settlements (Wasserman 208). This duality troubles me, I have a hard time seeing Iracema as someone who lures Martim and "seduces" him to stay with her while at the same time being submissive. While it is true that he feels an attraction to her, there is nothing that Iracema does that would force him to stay, she merely follows him. In fact, Martim insists that Iracema return home when she attempts to follow him, if he were truly "seduced" and drawn to her as the Europeans were drawn to the Americas. While I disagree with Wasserman stating that Iracema exerts a pull or seduction over Martim, I do agree

that she is representative of the land and Martim is representative of the conquistadors. Their union results in his success, the conquering of the land, and her suffering and ultimate demise. These ends are almost identical to the ends suffered by the natives of the Americas after the settlement of Europeans: death and mass assimilation.

### **5. Representations of *lo indígena* in *El entenado***

In his novel, *El entenado*, Saer retells the story of the colonization of Río de Plata from a point of view which Saer described as speculative anthropology. His work is fiction, but strongly based on historical events and told as if his narrator were experiencing it first-hand. In his masterpiece, *Iracema*, Alencar tells of the colonization of Brazil by the Portuguese from a third-person omniscient point of view, allowing the reader to experience the feelings and thoughts of each character. Alencar describes everything in great detail, making the reader feel as though they are actually experiencing what the characters do. It is my belief that while both novels recount stories of conquest, Alencar's seems to be more suited to the Eurocentric point of view, utilized by conquistadors such as Columbus where the indigenous people were presented as submissive and willing to accept the new rule, whereas *El entenado* presents the natives in a realistic, but appreciative manner. Alencar presents his native as one who is submissive and gives into the Europeans willingly, begging to take on the "true God" (Alencar 111). Saer, on the other hand, presents a more complex view of the natives, showing them engaging in rituals including cannibalism and an orgy. While these events may be "chaotic" to an outsider as Pons states, they are seemingly presented in an unbiased manner that allows the reader to witness the culture of the indigenous people created by Saer in this novel. In *Iracema*, the culture of the natives is seen, but it is not appreciated in the same way, sort of disappearing as Martim begins to appropriate it. The narrator of *El entenado* does not attempt to impose his culture on the

natives, but instead begins to adopt their culture, not as a means to an end, but because he learns to appreciate their way of life. Saer's narrator describes the natives as living "en la vecinidad del paraíso" and that "esos hombres eran sin duda la descendencia putative de Adán" (*El entonado* 39). This is an important distinction while at the end of *Iracema* Martim converts the natives to Christianity as was done by many conquistadors, the narrator in *El entonado* recognizes these men and women as being descendants of Adam even though they do not know what Christianity is. This is a significant point because it shows the narrator's respect and admiration for the members of the tribe.

Another key difference in the two novels in terms of creation of a native population is the description of the traditions and rituals practiced. In *Iracema*, the reader is only exposed to a few traditions including the wine of Tupan to induce dreams and ritual painting to signify which tribe one belongs to (Alencar 56, 83). In *El entonado*, the narrator is exposed to every tradition and ritual practiced by the tribe which gives the reader an in-depth view into their daily lives. One such ritual is cannibalism and then an orgy, which is repeated every year (*El entonado* 58). Despite the seemingly gruesome nature of this tradition, the native people are only ever referred to as "salvajes" once in the entire book and are revered with a familiar respect and admiration by the narrator. One reason for the reverence of the narrator towards these people is their complex nature. There are two scenes frequently presented together: cannibalism and children at play. These two scenes are direct opposites and recur together at several points throughout the novel (Riera 83). This contrast allows the reader to see the duality of the tribe, they engage in a ritual that on the outside could be perceived as gruesome and filled with debauchery, but at the same time the children peacefully play. This contrast allows the reader to get a complete understanding of the tribe and understand their traditions more thoroughly. This understanding is much deeper

than that of the Trabajará tribe presented in *Iracema*. Through the memories recounted by the narrator, the reader is able to develop a much better understanding for the members of the tribe in *El entenado*. It is interesting to note that the understanding and appreciation for the tribe's traditions is developed without the use of language. This is another difference between the two novels, Martim speaks with the natives frequently, while *el entenado* does not, but *el entenado* is able to appreciate their culture much more.

According to Wasserman, *Iracema* presents a "myth of origin" and I believe it is a myth because it recounts the story of colonization in a mythical way that is skewed in favor of the Europeans, this can be seen in the fact that Martim is able to communicate with the indigenous people (Wasserman 196). To an extent, *Iracema* does explain how Brazilians came to be, forming a mestizo between varying races; however, *El entenado* tells a much compelling and complete story of the conquest of the Americas and provides a much more complex representation of the native people. This complexity is due in part because Saer narrates through speculative anthropology, providing the reader with a narrator who has lived through the historical event and relates to the reader his experiences, while *Iracema* recounts a legend. The other cause for the difference lays in the ideologies of the authors.

## **6. Re-reading *Iracema* through Saer's Lens**

The biggest difference between the two authors of these novels is their ideologies. Alencar was a nationalist writer and the idea of being Brazilian was at the heart of everything he wrote. Saer, however, believed that nationality should be removed from literature and the narrator should be more than just a result of the author's nationality (*El concepto de ficción* 260). I propose now an analysis of *Iracema* from a perspective free of the influence of nationality, that is stripping the "Brazilian literature" of the Brazilian nationality.

On the surface the reader immediately notices the impact of nationality on the novel. The events of the novel are recounted in a way that the “white warrior” is always victorious, dedicating almost no detail to the bloodshed exerted by the Europeans. Even though Alencar established Brazilian literature, he did so in a way that highly favors the Europeans. His style of narration is almost exactly like that of European romance fantasies and the details included, and more importantly those excluded, compel the reader to look upon the “white, Christian” favorably. If the tale was told as a speculative anthropology there would likely be several key differences. First, there would be much more detail given to the lives of the tribe members such as the rituals, the language spoken, and relationships among the members. In *Iracema* these details are glossed over which prohibits an in-depth understanding of the members of the Trabajará tribe. Another difference is the descriptions would likely not be so idyllic. This is a common description of Alencar’s “Indian” novel because they recount myths of origin, they are idyllic and almost dreamlike similar to a fairy tale (Bosi 149). A speculative anthropology would recount the not so pretty details of the events. For example, Martim is described as going to war several times throughout the book, but the most gruesome description offered is “blood staining the ground” and “the skulls of her brothers staked around the Caiçara” (Alencar 64, 67). This is done to maintain the idyllic nature of the tale where Martim is viewed as heroic, if he was described as being murderous in battle, it is not likely that he would be viewed as a hero by the reader. Another aspect that would have likely changed if *Iracema* was told from a point of speculative anthropology would be the lack of dialogue between Martim and the tribe. The fact that Tupi is considered to be understood by the protagonist and the indigenous populations, it reflects the idea of cannibalism, both symbolic and literal. Oswald the Andrade reflects this duality in his *Manifesto antropófago* when he says “Tupi or not Tupi, that is the question”

(Andrade). This phrase is a play on words which alludes to William Shakespeare's famous quote in *Hamlet*. This reference symbolizes the eating, or absorption of language, in this case Tupi into Portuguese. This absorption resulted in the rich dialect that is Brazilian Portuguese. The choice to allow the protagonist to understand the natives is interesting because it allows for dialogue and a more thorough experience of the narrator. This is the case in *El entenado*, the narrator spoke Spanish and was unable to engage in dialogue with the tribe which adds to the realistic nature of Saer's tale, but also creates a tale of exclusion while *Iracema* focuses more on inclusion, or rather absorption and assimilation. However, because *Iracema* is a legend it makes sense that events seem more fantastic than realistic at times.

Nationality is tightly woven in the writing of *Iracema* so much so that it is impossible to separate the events occurring from being Brazilian. The novel recounts the legendary origins of the Brazilian people formed by the union of the Portuguese and the native people. While it is impossible to read this novel as a speculative anthropology, due to the necessity of nationality to the creation and understanding of the text, I think that by reading both *Iracema* and *El entenado* together offer the reader a more complex understanding of the history of the colonization of the Americas. *Iracema* retells the story as it is told in the letters of Christopher Columbus and Bartolome de las Casas, the colonization of America and the conversion of the natives. This is an important reading because it tells of the coming together of two separate cultures, Portuguese and the Trabajará natives, to create the Brazilian people. This joining of two groups to create a new hybrid is not told in Saer's novel because it lacks national identity. What *El entenado* relays that *Iracema* does not is a detailed view into the lives of the members of the native tribes. While based on historical events, Saer creates events that may have happened or may not have happened, creating a rich story that allows the reader to experience the traditions of a forgotten



people. These descriptions offer insight into traditions that are often misconstrued and misrepresented through history, such as anthropophagy. Saer's novel sheds light on these rituals that allow the reader to develop a deeper understanding of indigenous people. This story also recounts the consequences of the settlement of the Europeans as seen as the massacre of the natives. Both novels present two versions of the same story, told from different perspectives. While neither novel recounts the full story, when read together, the reader can fill in missing details from one novel with details from the other.

It is difficult to say if one story offers a more reliable depiction of the indigenous people because the term reliable is subjective and both novels are works of fiction. However, it is important to take into consideration the potential bias of each author when writing. As previously stated, Saer removes nationality and ideology from his writing, focusing on the results of what he writes rather than his ideological intentions. Alencar, however, set out to write a piece that depicted the origins of Brazil. As such, his work appears to be skewed in favor of the Portuguese, but he does break from European traditions and has been criticized for diluting the "mother tongue" with Americanisms (Bosi 151). Even though Alencar's writing was based entirely in nationality and appears to be biased in some respects, he created a beautiful work that showed appreciation for the indigenous people and offered an explanation for the creation of the Brazilian people.

## **7. Conclusion**

*Iracema* by José de Alencar and *El entenado* by Juan José Saer offer differing, but complimentary descriptions of the colonization of America by the Europeans. The former recounts a myth of origin, describing the legend of how the Brazilian people came to be. Alencar is a nationalist writer who strives to recount the history and culture of Brazil through his work.

His novels *Iracema* and *O guarani* offer explanations of the union between the Portuguese colonizers and the Amerindians resulting in the creation of a new people, the Brazilians. This work, narrated by a third-person omniscient narrator in present tense follows Iracema and Martim as they engaged in a marriage that ultimately fails, but results in a son who is symbolic of the birth of the Brazilian people. Alencar created an experimental work that combined Tupi words with Portuguese grammar to create narration between poetry and prose to accurately describe the lives of the indigenous Amerindians.

*El entenado* by Saer is a speculative anthropology, told from first-person point of view. The narrator-protagonist recounts the events of the massacre of his shipmates and his capture by a tribe of cannibalistic Amerindians sixty years after it happened. The narrator tells the events from memory, with several interruptions from the present. This novel also utilizes a language that is somewhere between poetry and prose, uses poetic descriptions and vivid imagery. There is no dialogue between the narrator and the tribe as they speak a language he is unfamiliar with, but the text contains some neologisms such as the term “def-ghi” used to refer to the narrator. Saer removes all nationality and context from the story just focusing on events without an exact time or location.

While both novels tell a relatively similar story, they should be read together as they are very complimentary of one another. Alencar’s nationalistic view partnered with Saer’s speculative anthropology allow the reader to form a complex understanding of the events surrounding the colonization of America. Through a close reading of both of these works together, the reader is able to understand the events from both the perspective of the colonizer as well as the colonized. Both works focus on pre-colonial America but show the effects of the colonization in vastly

different ways: one positive and the other negative. It is important to understand that both perspectives are valid and to fully understand the events told, both perspectives are needed.

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