

**REWRITING COLUMBUS IN THE NEW LATIN AMERICAN HISTORICAL
NOVEL**

By

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Federico Cervantes Atía

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Chairperson: Dr. Verónica Garibotto

Dr. Santa Arias

Dr. Robert Schwaller

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The Thesis Committee for Federico Cervantes Atía
certifies that this is the approved version of the following thesis:

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Chairperson Dr. Veronica Garibotto

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Abstract

This work intends to analyze the historical and social relevance of the New Latin American Historical Novel (NLHN) based on the parallel evolution of this literary genre and the new postmodern trends in history. This work will primarily explore how fictional texts question the past from the present perspective and challenge history as a unique discipline for understanding past events. As a specific example of historical revisionism in NLHNs, the research will examine the rewriting and demystification of Columbus as a hero, highlighting how historical literature has questioned the conquest and its consequences for the history and culture of Latin America. It is evident that the NLHN attempts to explain the actual underdevelopment of Latin America as an outcome closely connected with European intervention, in opposition to a more antiquated view that has seen it as a positive event for this region.

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Rewriting Columbus in the New Latin American Historical Novel

Introduction

The approach of the five hundredth anniversary of the arrival of the Europeans in America in 1992 was a special occasion to reflect on the impact of this event, which completely changed the course of history in the continent in a positive way for some intellectuals and negatively for many others. Starting in 1979 (Menton, *La nueva* 31), historians and fiction writers of the Caribbean and South America reread the chronicles of the conquest of America and often rewrote or reinterpreted many of them (López 2). This meaningful commemoration increased the production of historical novels that in the past had dealt with the subject of the conquest from a less critical perspective than the official European history¹. At the same time, since the second half of the twentieth century, there has been a reformulation in historical scholarship regarding the interpretation and the meaning of the historical documents and discourse. The historians' turn to social and cultural history incorporates the possibility of subjective viewpoints applied to historical truths. This significant change not only impacted historical concepts but the historical novels' content and structure as well (Perkowska 41). Therefore, Latin American fiction writers used historical novels as a preferred intellectual vehicle to challenge and problematize the official European history of the conquest. This hybrid literary genre, whose validity has been a subject of dispute, was used to reflect on the event that

¹ Authors such as Viviana Plotnik and Seymour Menton state that the topic of the Iberian domination in the Americas had been present in the Latin American historical novel during the nineteenth century, but it was mainly presented in romantic way. Their novels are filled with heroes and villains and they represented a colonial past in order to exalt the cultural roots of the new independent nations.

redefined and completely transformed the lives of the indigenous people of America and African slaves.²

The figure of Christopher Columbus, unfailingly attached to the initial episode of the so-called “discovery”, has been one of the favorite subjects of Latin American authors. The rewriting of Columbus’s life, who led the European’s conquest, has served to explore the fissures and contradictions in the official history of the conquest of America. The original history was written from the European point of view without regard to its American counterpart. Consequently, important works of Latin American literature were written with a fictional Columbus in order to find new meanings in what occurred from 1492 on. These literary works have social and political content that use the aesthetics and freedom of the imagination to rewrite the history of the native peoples of the Americas whose lives were dramatically altered by the conquest. The New Latin American Historical Novel (NLHN)³ recreates the facts of the Europeans and Americans’ encounter to raise the voices of traditional “others” in the conquest⁴.

² In his book *La novela histórica en Colombia: 1844-1959*, Donald McGrady analyses the different arguments in favor and against the genre known as historical novel. He argues this dispute has been in place since the time the genre was born with Walter Scott’s novels.

³ From this point on I will use the acronym NLHN to refer to the New Latin American Historical Novel.

⁴ For Seymour Menton, the New Latin American Novels were primarily engendered by Alejo Carpentier and he designated the year 1979 as the starting point of this literary tendency whose main characteristics and ideas are based on the impossibility of knowing the historical truth, the distortion of history (through omissions, exaggerations and anachronisms), the use of metafiction or the narrator’s reference to the creative process in the novels, intertextuality and the use of concepts of dialogic, carnival and parody to represent the historical facts.

To accomplish this objective, they use colonial era documents as well as new findings of historical research into indigenous and non-European perspectives. As a result, demystification of that period occurs, and, at the same time, an exposition of a different vision of the emergence of Latin American culture and identity.

This work intends to analyze the historical and social relevance of the NLHN based on the parallel evolution of this literary genre and the new postmodern trends in history. This work will primarily explore how fictional texts question the past from the present perspective and challenge history as a unique discipline for understanding past events. As a specific example of historical revisionism in NLHNs, the research will examine the rewriting and demystification of Columbus as a hero, highlighting how historical literature has questioned the conquest and its consequences for the history and culture of Latin America. It is evident that the NLHN attempts to explain the actual underdevelopment of Latin America as an outcome closely connected with European intervention, in opposition to a more antiquated view that has seen it as a positive event for this region.

To achieve its proposed objectives, this research uses varied bibliographic sources and the direct analysis of a literary work within the genre. The primary novel to be examined will be *The Harp and the Shadow*⁵ by the Cuban author Alejo Carpentier, who initiated the NLHN in 1979. In the last pages, it briefly addresses the novel *Vigilia del almirante*, by the Paraguayan author Augusto Roa Bastos as a supporting material of the investigation, since this novel, published in 1992, coincides with the five hundredth anniversary of the “discovery”, and it challenges Carpentier’s vision. Both novels are critical portrayals of Columbus and the conquest. The first shows Columbus as a liar and as a human being only interested in material

⁵ Original title in Spanish *El arpa y la sombra*, published in 1979.

possessions, while the second depicts him as a mysterious and complex individual with many possible interpretations.

The first chapter of this paper is a theoretical review of the different positions intellectuals have adopted regarding the validity of the historical novel. Later, this dissertation will briefly show the evolution of the genre, situating it with Latin America's history. The second chapter is a textual and critical analysis of the novel *The Harp and the Shadow* in order to support the paper's central argument, followed by a brief allusion to Roa Bastos's *Vigilia del almirante*.

Chapter 1

1. Validity and Evolution of the Historical Novel

1.1. Validity discussion

The debate on the legitimacy of the historical novel has its origin at the dawn of the genre in the nineteenth century. Since it is considered a hybrid genre that combines history with literature, debates have arisen. Literary critics of the nineteenth century questioned its validity as a work of art, since its main livelihood was reality and not the ingenuity of the author. Conversely, this genre failed to manifest historical validity, since the author was free to alter reality. From the moment in which Walter Scott⁶ achieved worldwide recognition with his historical novels, voices have criticized the emerging use of historical material in literary creation. Some critics disdained the singular value of historical novels as they believed historical novels ignored history rather than highlighting it. One of the first critics to refute the value of the historical novel was the Cuban poet José María Heredia, who in 1832 held the following opinion:

El novelista histórico abandona al historiador todo lo útil, procura apoderarse de lo que agrada en los recuerdos de la historia, y desatendiendo las lecciones de lo pasado, solo aspira a rodearse de su prestigio. Su objeto es pintar trajes, describir arneses, bosquejar fisonomías imaginarias, y prestara héroes verdaderos ciertos movimientos, palabras y acciones cuya realidad no puede probarse. En vez de elevar la historia a sí la abate hasta igualarla con la ficción; forzando a su musa verídica a dar testimonios engañosos. Genero malo en sí mismo, genero eminentemente falso, al que toda la flexibilidad del talento más variado sólo

⁶ Walter Scott is recognized as the writer whose historical novels gave the genre worldwide recognition. He wrote famous novels of the genre, such as *Ivanhoe* and *Waverley*.

presta un atractivo frívolo, y del que no tardara en fastidiarse la moda, que hoy la adopta y favorece. (McGrady 8)

Another important critique of the genre came from a renowned Spanish intellectual, José Ortega y Gasset. In 1925, he reflected on the subject:

Yo encuentro la causa, nunca bien declarada de la enorme dificultad –tal vez imposibilidad- aneja a la llamada “novela histórica”. La pretensión de que el cosmos imaginado posea a su vez autenticidad histórica, mantiene en aquella una permanente colisión entre dos horizontes. Y como cada horizonte exige una acomodación distinta de nuestro aparato visual, tenemos que cambiar constantemente de actitud; no se deja al lector soñar tranquilo la novela, ni pensar rigurosamente la historia. En cada página vacila, no sabiendo si proyectar el hecho y la figura sobre el horizonte imaginario o sobre el histórico, con lo cual adquiere un aire de falsedad y convención. El intento de hacer compenetrarse ambos mundos produce solo la mutua negación de uno y otro; el autor –nos parece- falsifica la historia aproximándola demasiado, y desvirtúa la novela, alejándola con exceso de nosotros hacia el plano abstracto de la verdad histórica. (McGrady 8)

Although these opinions opposed the validity and legitimacy of the historical novel, another common feature was derived from the approach given to the subject: both intellectuals had a concern for the value of historical truth. They thought that history was corrupted if it was used freely in literary creation, for they posited that uninformed readers did not have enough discernment to know what was false and what was true in a historical novel. As a result, the historical novel was able to alter the absolute value of truth in the consciousness of the reader.

Only a critical reader, well-educated in history, was able to find the aesthetic value in a historical fiction narrative while being able to separate true historical facts from those fictionalized.

Fiction may certainly affect reality. A good example of how fictional history may disturb facts is cited by Reid in his book *Forgotten Continent*. In the second chapter, he refers to the already well-known "Massacre of the Banana's Zone" in Colombia, which occurred in 1928, in the midst of a strike against the United Fruit Company in the Department of Magdalena⁷. He analyzes how in the celebrated novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the writer García Márquez describes the massacre of 3,000 people by state security troops in defense of the multinational company. As García Marquez himself acknowledges, the number of casualties is exaggerated in his novel because he wanted to create an extraordinary scene with all of the train carriages full of corpses. A number of historians indicate that no more than 72 people were killed in that historical episode; however, the figure invented by the winner of the Nobel Prize in literature has been sometimes cited as true, even in official settings, as occasionally happened in the Senate of the Republic of Colombia (Reid 38). This example illustrates the powerful effects that historical fiction discourse may produce: even though it does not alter the historical facts, it has the ability to influence people's perceptions of those events.

Authors such as Leonard argue that history sometimes receives the vigorous impetus of literature. This hypothesis, although not completely new⁸, is widely exposed in his work *Los libros del conquistador*. In this book, Leonard states that the books of chivalry inspired the

⁷ In Colombia's political and administrative division a "department" is the equivalent to a "state" in The United States of America.

⁸ Rolena Adorno claims this idea has been supported by other authors such as William Prescott in his book *History of the Conquest of Mexico* and Ida Rodriguez Prampolini in *Amadises de América*.

actions of the conquistadors, which indicates that it is not surprising that conquest accounts frequently have a taste of adventure and mythology (Adorno 139). At that time, crossing the Atlantic Ocean was an adventure as well as an economic enterprise, and it was also perceived by many as a major challenge as they were facing the unknown. Whereas it is true that many documents of the colony were written with a literary tone, it cannot be legitimately ensured that literature played an important role in those undertakings. It would be more appropriate to maintain that the books of chivalry served to present the historical facts of the conquest as literary exploits, and their characters as heroes, rather than assure that those books were the conquerors' motivating force.

An illustrative case is brought by Prescott, who uses two important literary references to show the adventurous character and courage of the Spanish conquerors. *Don Quixote* by Cervantes and other chivalry novels create a romantic vision of the conquerors as servants to others and their own interests, simultaneously (Adorno 128). This view of history, closely related to literature, in which both worlds intervene, complement and are affected by each other, is very imaginative and original, but it seems too exaggerated to be true. Actually, as Adorno states, the heroic dimension loses credibility and reveals its fragility since it is now generally accepted that the conquest brought death and devastation and reduced the native population to miserable lives (129).

The debate of the historical novel's value and legitimacy has important defenders as well, especially in modern criticism that has sustained the significance of the historical novel. A scholar of the period was the Spanish polygraph Menéndez Pelayo, who wrote positively of the history as a literary device:

El arte libremente opera sobre el material histórico con la misma independencia que sobre la varia y complicada urdimbre de la vida del día presente, vida, que por otra parte, que es tan histórica como la que en las crónicas se representa. De donde bien puede inferirse, que, siendo el sujeto humano común a la historia y a la fábula de pura invención, y siendo la representación de la vida humana el fondo común y eterno del drama y de la novela, no se atenta en nada a esta intrínseca condición suya porque la acción se coloque en un tiempo o en otro, ni menos porque se representen afectos y acciones de personajes que realmente existieron, en vez de atribuírselos a figuras creadas por la imaginación del poeta. (McGrady 9)

Without doubt, Menéndez Pelayo makes a vital point regarding artistic and literary creation: each work of art or fiction has as its main source actual facts as its initial raw material. It is possible to say that there is no fiction without certain real events preceding it; in such a way, fiction feeds primarily on reality. Even science fiction uses the projection of the present to invent the future or the unknown.

The difference between the historical events and the facts of the daily lives of common human beings is the importance that these events have in the life of a community or social group. The historical facts have the special role of being important to the whole society. Through historical events, human beings have given qualities to heroes or villains, and to them, what matters are the social and historical dimensions, not their personal and intimate sphere. Only the latter is important if it affects society or it has significant impact on history.

The historical genre most associated with fictional production is known as micro-story⁹, which is the historical discipline that reconstructs the daily life of societies devoid of archives and illustrious personalities (Aínsa 40). As I have been maintaining, fiction feeds on real life. Some facts, perhaps most, belong to everyday life and do not transcend beyond the private sphere of every human being who is involved in them. Ultimately, literature thrives on such daily events to tell their stories freely without pressure from the truth. In the historical novel, by their literary nature, there is no pressure to define what is true either. But because historical events are in the foundation of historical fiction, the effects of these novels can be projected in society, or the majority of it, in the same way as history itself. The historical novel uses the great historical achievements and great heroes or villains, as raw material, to develop a fictional plot.

In general, this kind of literature deals with the historical characters only in its public dimension. However, we see some authors who have chosen to talk about the private life of the heroes or historical figures and their works have become accepted within the genre. Some contemporary historical novels, for example *The General in his Labyrinth* by García Márquez, concentrate on showing the human side of a historical character to ultimately look for alternative truths to Latin American independence. Simón Bolívar¹⁰, a Creole hero who liberated five nations in Latin America from colonialism and who was filled with self-glory and power, is portrayed by the famed novelist as another human being assaulted by despair and loneliness in

⁹ Fernando Aínsa (40) cites as examples of this historical model the research by Giovanni Levi in the Italian town of *Piamonte* in the seventeenth century and the one by the French scholar Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie in the community of *Montaillou* in France.

¹⁰ Simón Bolívar was a Venezuelan General who led Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia's independence from Spain.

his last days. García Márquez discusses these two worlds of the Bolívar to explore new meanings of his legacy. The author of the novel recognizes his creative freedom in portraying Bolívar in his last trip down the Magdalena River, since it is the least documented time in his life (Pulgarín 131). Similarly, Augusto Roa Bastos in *Vigilia del almirante* represents a more humanized Columbus trying to find a more impartial understanding of the real dimension and consequences of the conquest.

Although it is recognized that historiography and historical research depart from the study of certain factual sources, such as documents, archives, letters of the protagonists, and other reliable sources (i.e. anthropology), the conclusions do not always accurately reflect the reality of the past. Clearly, the intention of the historian is to approach the truth. Even though that is their goal, they do not always succeed, and what is often believed to be known as historical fact can be an interpretative exercise of the historian.

If it is acknowledged that authors of other novel genres use details from human lives to create fiction, then the historical novel's construction ultimately suffers the same process. However, what differentiates the facts of other literary novel genres from those of the historical novel are the historical significance and its importance within the collective society. Noé Jitrik, shares this thought in his book *Historia e imaginación literaria: las posibilidades de un género*.

In it, the author states:

Si toda novela es referencia de un ya sabido o ya acontecido, la novela histórica es la novela por excelencia puesto que el saber histórico es el modo más pleno y total del saber, porque es reconstrucción, añadidura, completamiento (Jitrik 16).

At first, probably the most important examination of the historical novels, like most fictional stories, is the one made by the public who reads and accepts them as a valuable piece of art. We have already seen that criticism and acceptance has a divided opinion of its value. However, the fact that the historical novel has existed since ancient times (McGrady 12) and continues unabated in the present times, denotes that the public willingly accepts and recognizes it as a valued literary genre. Since the nineteenth century in America and since middle of twentieth century in Latin America, virtually every major literature writer has written a historical novel (Henderson xvi), a fact that confirms that public recognition. McGrady has this to say about it:

Que la novela histórica presenta graves problemas de elaboración, no cabe duda; pero esto no implica que no se debe incluir entre los reconocidos géneros, más exactamente subgéneros, literarios. Podemos poner reparos a su ejecución tal como se presenta en la mayoría de los casos al mismo tiempo que reconocemos su perfección teórica, que se expresa en los mejores ejemplares del género. La imperfección de la mayoría de sus manifestaciones no indica la imposibilidad congénita del género, sino la falta de genio de sus cultivadores. (McGrady 11)

Ultimately, the validity of the historical novel is a discussion that will continue to have advocates and opponents. However, critics are beginning to give more acceptance to the contemporary historical novel, as it is serving an additional social function, as will be discussed later in this paper. Today, when the role of historiography has been restated and it is accepted that there is not absolute truth in historical research, the historical novel is playing a more relevant role as a complement to history.

Contemporaneous critics, such as David Roberts, argue that the analysis should begin with a basic premise: "The historical novel is not historiography" (Roberts 1). Although historical novels are based on historical studies, these facts are at the service of fiction in this kind of novel, for as Roberts notes, "That is to say, the historical novels are not falsifiable by an appeal to evidence. Historiography by contrast comprises an ongoing intrasubjective process of investigation and research which is always open to revision" (1). As a result, there must be recognition that we have two different types of history-writing. However, as Roberts states, this acknowledgement does not solve the problem of the nature of the relationship between fact and fiction. According to his opinion, which is drawn from Lukacs, this tension can be approached from the side of history, and this genre "can be comprehended only in the context of European history since the French Revolution, where the frame unifying text and context is provided by to Hegelian-Marxist philosophy of history"(2). On the other hand, the tension can be confronted from the side of fiction, following Geppert, "for whom the poetic of the historical novel derives from the consciousness of the hiatus between fact and fiction *within* the narrative" (2).

Lukács and Gepperts may have opposite approaches to the genre, but they concur that the "historical novel thus serves to accentuate and thematize more sharply their contrasting conceptions of realism" (2). For Roberts, both positions and perspectives cannot be seen as a paradigmatic opposition between classical and modern types of historical novels, "since they reflect from opposite sides the general problem of realism in the novel" (2).

As Hutcheon maintains, in the last decade of the twentieth century marginalized groups have driven historical literature to a new dimension, with greater involvement on it and political activism. Hutcheon, quoting Frow, claims that these groups are clamoring for a historical literature that understands the stories are fictions of power and therefore can be rewritten;

likewise, their canons can be retrospectively altered or displaced. In Frow's opinion, historical novels no longer narrate stories in an innocent way, but they are an activity where politics, history, and interpretations converge (Hutcheon, *Rethinking* 6).

The shift in discourse not only reflects the influence of post-structuralism, but it also demonstrates a need to see Latin American history in a new, subjective light. In Valdes's opinion, "the radical rethinking of literary history begins with Foucault's challenge to the prior claims of objective history" (Hutcheon, *Rethinking* 105). He argues that the crucial role literary history has played in evolving the ideology of nations has come together with the system of exclusion and marginalization of certain groups from cultural participation. This exclusion, he claims, was "determined on the basis of race, ethnic, background, gender, sexual orientation, social class, ideology, and languages, other than the official language" (105). According to this perspective, historical literature is a response to the marginalization of certain social groups that have been outside or segregated from the historical discourse of power, and in some cases from the understanding of the majorities.

In modern times, especially since the mid-1950s, history as a discipline has sought new canons, abandoning its alleged ancient purity. In fact, the historical discipline has come closer to other disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, and literature (Aínsa 37). This movement of history toward other disciplines that complement it is a natural consequence of the expansion and complexity reached by human knowledge. History then, cannot ignore the advancement of these disciplines but must integrate them with its method and use them to present more accurate information and achieve even more reliable results, for as Aínsa notes, "Polysemy and the crisis of the traditional historiography discourse translate to the effort to

recover all of the historical facts, integrity that needs a more organic relationship between history, economics, geography, ethnology and other social sciences of man" (37).

As well as historiography, the contemporary historical novel raises a challenge of the historical sources. In particular, it confronts the validity of the historical document, which for centuries was given the character of irrefutable truth of the past. The faith former readers deposited into the documents, mainly emanating from the sources of power, has been drawn into question. Cassier considers that today it is more important to discover what is false rather than what is true in the historical documents (Aínsa 62). Other authors such as Foucault in his book *The Archaeology of Knowledge* propose a search for what has been excluded, prohibited, and sometimes deliberately omitted in historical documents (62). It is clearly recognized that many of the historical documents, especially those emanating from the conquest and the colony, were produced by the same actors of history. They reflect all the subjectivity of their authors, in this case, with a Eurocentric view of the facts and of the world. It is the speech of the powerful, which is their opinion on the subject that is now undergoing a trial from the perspective of the present.

Boccardi challenges the notion of historical truth and persists in the idea that historical knowledge is textually mediated. The perception of an ideological component of all discourses "are precisely the elements that Hutcheon identifies in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) as characteristic of the postmodern attitude towards representation and narrative generally, and historical representation and narrative particularly" (Boccardi 8). This evolution in historiography and postmodernism has been well assimilated by newer fictional historical narrations, which have experienced a huge change in their forms and contents. Modern historical novels have incorporated the new historical perspective and the outcome is visible. A new kind

of historical novel has emerged that rewrites and challenges the interpretations of traditional historiography and tries to explain the past by challenging the official history, including what innocently or intentionally has been omitted.

1.2. Evolution of the NLHN

The discussion about the validity of this literary genre appears within the framework of the evolution of classic historical novels. These literary works date back to the nineteenth century and are identified with romanticism. Subsequently, they evolved in the twentieth century toward modernism, *criollismo*¹¹, and even existentialism. The romantic historical novel in Latin America began with the work *Jicoténcal*¹², the story of the encounter of the two worlds, in which the anonymous author exalts the Indians and denounces the Spaniards (Menton, *La nueva* 35).

Although the romantic historical novel¹³ was replaced with realistic historical novels by the Chilean author Blest Gana in the 1860s, the romantic historical novel continued to be

¹¹ *Criollismo* was a period of the Latin American Historical novels from 1915 to 1945, whose main feature was to seek national identity, but with emphasis in contemporaneous problems, such as the fight between the urban civilization and rural barbaric, economic exploitation and racism. See Menton, 37.

¹² Seymour Menton argues *Jicoténcal* was the first historical novel written in Latin American in 1826.

¹³ The so-called traditional historical novel reached great popularity during the era of romanticism in the nineteenth century. For this reason, some authors, such as Menton (35), identify it and call it romantic historical novel. As McGrady (13) says, these novels are identified by the love of the past and exotic civilizations. A sense of escapism pushes them to escape from the present, taking refuge in the past, in search of a world more perfect.

cultivated until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The purpose of these novels was to support the political cause of the liberals fighting against the conservatives who identified with the political, economic, and religious causes of the Spanish Colony. The realistic novel was characterized by contemporary topics and an emphasis on customs and regional speech (Menton, *La nueva* 36). Very few novels can be framed within the realistic style, but among them were the series of six narratives entitled *Tradiciones peruanas* by Palma, published between 1872 and 1883.

For authors such as Menton, the main purpose of Latin American historical novels in the era of modernism (1882-1915) was to find alternatives for traditional realism, positivist naturalism, bourgeois materialism, and revolutionary turbulence in Mexico. These novels tried to faithfully recreate the past as a form of escapism (Menton, *La nueva* 37).

The following three decades were predominantly Creole (1915-1945). In this period the search for national identity was reborn, but with an emphasis on major contemporary issues, such as the struggle of urban civilization, rural socio-economic exploitation, and racism (37). It was a time with few historical novels, but it was characterized by the recreation of the historical environment as the background to stories and fictional characters.

However, the analysis regarding the evolution of the historical novel has been renewed since the early 1990s. Recent authors have understood that the definition and classification of the historical novel based on the romantic, realistic, and Creole novels of the post-colonial era were not consistent with the new works of the genre. The NLHN corresponds to new social and historical conditions and a different concept of what is meant by history. The NLHN deviates from its predecessors in both form and content. It has adopted numerous innovations in themes and structures and assumed a critical function and resistance to the legitimizing discourse of

power. In general, it proposes new readings, reviews, and rewritings of the historical past and the discourse that constructs it (Perkowska 33). For some authors, such as Aínsa, since ancient times there has been the acknowledgment that literature "illustrates and delights" and that it can meet the mission of being a complement of history. It can be history's possible metaphor or paradigmatic synthesis, and it can occasionally serve as a moral of the historical events (Aínsa 20). The NLHN meets these described settings, allowing the stories of the past to educate the readers about the present.

This new era, which marked the transformation of the content and form of the Latin American historical novel, was preceded by dictatorships, authoritarian regimes, and armed civil wars in the 1970s and 1980s. As a result, there was an alliance between literature and ideology which responded to the imposition of the official truth. The literature then represented the resistant role that intellectuals employed against official stories and discursive practices. With literary forms such as parody, irony, and intertextuality (which is the juxtaposition of different texts in literary discourse), the NLHN questions the language and manipulation of the official narrative. Also, it insists on the use of documents as instruments of credibility to undermine powerful and deceptive speech (Perkowska 38).

Furthermore, the evolution of the NLHN follows the trends and changes in society that have been recorded in the study of historical sources, showing a shift in preference from the fixed to the unstable or imagined and unknown. Previously, historical knowledge had an ontological basis in reconstructive traditional history, which is an empiricist premise that argues that the past can be recovered by a stand-alone universal subject through the observation and study of evidence. Usually this evidence came from official documents that lay in the same category. The task of the historian was to unravel the meaning of the structures of the past, and

historical truth was constructed in the correspondence between the facts and these structures. Historical truth was assumed to be a fixed truth, coming from the objective judgment of the historian. It requires a separation of the historical facts and the historian's assessment, and its language does not hold subjective value but instead reflects an objective reality described by the historian (Perkowska 70). This historical perspective is reflected in the historical novel, both classical and traditional, as well as the realistic works of the Creole period in Latin America. In the literary works of this time, authors reconstructed history that usually served only as a backdrop to the plot of the historical novels.

At the same time, traditional literature and colonial history, as author Adorno maintains, collect myths and legends of the Indians, but they strive only to show the triumph of the Spanish and Christian gentleman over the ignorant Indian and the pagan witch (Adorno 63). The Eurocentric view of history and Latin American historical literature prevailed until the mid-twentieth century, when authors of the literary boom began to criticize and challenge what until then was considered an absolute truth about the past of the new world.

Within the new perspective of the historical novel, major reinterpretations of the life of Christopher Columbus critically address the official history of the navigator who discovered America. These works attempted to demystify the figure of the hero associated with Columbus, and through this resource, they challenged the conquest and its consequences for the indigenous peoples of Latin America and the black population brought from Africa to serve as slaves.

From this body of work produced in the second half of the twentieth century come important works such as *Los perros del paraíso* (1983) by Abel Posse, *Cristóbal nonato* (1987) by Carlos Fuentes, and most recently, *Las puertas del mundo* (1992) by Herminio Martínez, *Vigilia del almirante* (1992) by Augusto Roa Bastos and *The Harp and the Shadow* (1979) by

Alejo Carpentier. The following chapter of this work will analyze the contents of Carpentier's novel to unravel the theoretical keys and practices of NLHNs.

Chapter 2

2. The Harp and the Shadow

The last novel published by Alejo Carpentier, *The Harp and the Shadow*, has been the subject of multiple analyses, reviews and academic revisions. Its value goes far beyond the simple aesthetic, as its influence is projected throughout areas of social development such as history and politics. This chapter aims to consider how this novel approaches the chronicles of the Indies in the framework of the NLHN. It will analyze how the vision and the concepts of postmodern historiography had a parallel development in literature and served as the foundation for the critical rewriting of conquest documents. To this point, this work by Carpentier has essentially been read as a demystification of Christopher Columbus, but such an analysis is inadequate in explaining how the author's ideological and political convictions influenced the Admiral's characterization. I intend to demonstrate that Carpentier's demystification of Columbus as a hero and mystification as a villain reflect the author's particular political vision. In addition, this chapter will highlight how the figure of Columbus and his historical legacy serve the purposes of reinterpreting the past and provoking the exploration of a more complex view of colonization and how its consequences reached beyond the independence of Latin American nations.

This chapter has been organized into five sections. The first contains a brief introduction about the author and the plot of the novel. The second will be an analysis of Carpentier's novel and its identification with the post-modern currents of historiography and literature and how this novel served as a model to other works from the same genre. Later, in the third section, it will make a comparative analysis of the Columbian texts and the novel by Carpentier in order to demonstrate that it accomplishes more than rewriting or rectification of

historical facts. The novel essentially functions as a reinterpretation of the historical events, keeping the colonial accounts practically unchallenged. In the last two sections, this work will examine the characterization of Columbus as a villain and the influence of Carpentier's ideological perspective in Columbus's representation. Supporting this claim will be an examination of the auxiliary text, *Vigilia del almirante* by Augusto Roa Bastos, whose characterization of Columbus contrasts with that of Carpentier.

2.1. Carpentier and *The Harp*

Authors led by Menton identify Carpentier as the first cultivator of the LNHN genre. According to Menton, Carpentier's novels are clearly distinguished from indigenous and classical historical novels¹⁴ (Menton, *La nueva* 42). Menton, in his book *Narrativa de la revolución cubana*, differentiates Carpentier from the post-revolutionary Cuban authors. He argues that Carpentier as an author is a product of the avant-garde period of 1920s and was a revolutionary, both in politics and in the arts, who actively fought against the dictator Gerardo Machado (65). Since its initial moments, Carpentier was a defender of Cuban revolutionary values and became part of the Cuban Socialist Government as Subdirector for the Direction of Culture and Executive Director of the National Editorial (1959-1967) and cultural attaché in Paris in 1967. At that point, Carpentier was undoubtedly the Cuban author with the greatest international recognition. His fictional and critical works acquired a universal character without the deep local roots seen in the works of other Cuban writers of the post-revolution. His writings were by and

14 By 1949, the author had shown his tendency toward the new historical novel in his work *The Kingdom of this World*. Some critics, such as Menton, argue this novel written by Carpentier marked the genesis of the NHLN, thirty years before the boom of this genre.

large a notable critique of bourgeois society and Western civilization. *The Harp and the Shadow* provides sufficient evidence of that intellectual attitude in his passionate condemnation of colonialism and the imposition of bourgeois values in the new continent.

According to Menton, Carpentier embraced surrealism and the revolutionary politics of the 1920s (56). In Carpentier's *Explosion in the Cathedral*¹⁵, a historical novel according to Menton, Carpentier raises questions about the revolutionary idealisms. Carpentier's doubts could even later apply to the Cuban revolution, even if it was not the Cuban author's intention. The interpretation is valid, Menton states, considering it was an attribute of Carpentier's style to eliminate the chronological limits and to construct universal myths and archetypes. Carpentier notes this, saying: "I am passionate about historical themes for two reasons: because for me, modernity does not exist in the sense given to this word; humans are sometimes the same in different time periods and placing them in past could be the same as placing them in the present" (Menton, *Narrativa* 57). Carpentier's devotion to create paradigms led him to conceive an iconoclastic piece of art to collapse the old myth of the discoverer of America, his famous enterprise and sponsors, in *The Harp and the Shadow*.

To better understand the creation process of this piece of Carpentier's literature, in the Mexican edition of the novel *The Harp and the Shadow*, cited by Forgues, Carpentier offers readers important insights into his initial motivations for the origin of this work:

En 1937, al realizar una adaptación radiofónica de *El libro de Cristóbal Colón* de Claudel para la emisora Radio Luxemburgo me sentí irritado por el empeño hagiográfico de un texto que atribuía sobrehumanas virtudes al Descubridor de América. Más tarde me topé con un increíble libro de León Bloy, donde el gran

¹⁵ Its title in Spanish: *El siglo de las luces*.

escritor católico solicitaba nada menos que la canonización de quien comparaba, llanamente, con Moisés y San Pedro.

Lo cierto es que dos pontífices del siglo pasado, Pio Nono y León XIII, respaldados por 850 obispos, propusieron por tres veces la beatificación de Cristóbal Colón a la Sacra Congregación de Ritos; pero ésta, después de un detenido examen del caso, rechazó rotundamente la postulación.

Este pequeño libro solo debe verse como una *variación* (en el sentido musical del término) sobre un gran tema que sigue siendo, por lo demás, misteriosísimo tema. Y diga el autor, escudándose con Aristóteles, que no es oficio del poeta (o digamos: del novelista) el contar las cosas como sucedieron, sino como debieron o pudieron haber sucedido. (Forgues 89)

Furthermore, in *The Harp and The Shadow*, Carpentier develops a specific structure to achieve his purpose, which consists of three parts: "The Harp," "The Hand," and "The Shadow." The author intertwines the three in a strategic manner in order to achieve his purpose of demystifying Columbus and his endeavor. Carpentier creates his version of the historical character through the superimposition of various narrators (Hernández 102). According to Bibiana Hernández, the image of Columbus that the author constructs is the product of a synthesis of perspectives from which his journey has been studied and interpreted. Hence, the author uses different narrative devices that question the Columbus enterprise and his legendary figure. The novel uses voices that move from the omniscient narrative to the first person and ends with the polyphonic narrative, a method that involved both of the previous voices (107). This literary structure, described by Hernandez, is known as heteroglossia, and Carpentier used it brilliantly to reinforce his discourse.

The first part, “The Harp,” recounts the experiences of the future Pope Pius IX in Latin America and his thoughts about canonizing Christopher Columbus. The novel shows how this possibility had become an obsession of the young Canon Mastai since returning from America (Carpentier, *El arpa* 16), and how this cleric, who would eventually become Pope, considered this idea long before his election to office. Once elected Pope in June 1846, Pius IX¹⁶ decided to pursue the idea and presented the petition for beatification in a preliminary stage. The novel also states that for Pope Pius IX, making Christopher Columbus a saint was a necessity, both on the grounds of faith and in the political arena (16). Through this portrayal, Carpentier illustrates how European nations continued to consider Latin America as dependent upon the approval and domination of Europe, even after Latin American countries had achieved independence.

Contrary to the Catholic tradition of initiating postulated saint beatifications immediately after their death, Pius IX decided by "exceptional means" to begin the procedure¹⁷ of canonizing the discoverer of America several centuries after his death. The novel also presents the Pope as having no doubt that Columbus deserved such high dignity. The work of fiction reveals how 13 years earlier the Pope himself requested Count Roselly of Lorgues to write the “true story” of Christopher Columbus, using the most advanced techniques of research at the time (38).

Before making the crucial decision, according to the novel, the Pope had reread Roselly’s research over twenty times (38). Roselly’s study demonstrated why Columbus deserved a place

¹⁶ While explaining his motivations to write this novel, Carpentier argues as a true fact that Pope Pius IX and Leo XIII proposed three times Columbus’s beatification, but it was always rejected.

¹⁷ The novel does not give a date when the process of canonization started, but it was under Pope Pius IX papacy from 1846 to 1878.

among the saints of the Catholic Church. For the Pontiff in the novel, Count Roselly “was a scrupulous, rigorous, dedicated historian, completely trustworthy; and he maintained that the great mariner had lived his entire life with an invisible halo over his head. It was time to make it visible¹⁸ *ad majorem Dei gloriam*¹⁹” (Carpentier, *The Harp* 31). The future Pope had conceived the idea of making Columbus a saint as a crucial element to unify Europe and Latin America through faith. Columbus, whom the Pope saw as designated by God, struck him as the best antidote against the ideas of the French encyclopedists and philosophers, like Voltaire and Rousseau, who had invaded the conscience of Americans, contributing to Latin American political independence (Forgues 88).

Through the technique of confession, Carpentier deepens his project of demystifying Columbus in the second part of the novel, "The Hand." In that crucial chapter, he presents Columbus on his deathbed, waiting for his confessor. Carpentier attempts to convince the reader that everything around the figure of Columbus is a farce, a sham. The act of confession plays a role of authoritative speech: it is the voice of Columbus, who while on his deathbed, recognizes his mistakes and weaknesses. The author creates a favorable environment to discredit the navigator and his endeavor and thus exposing him to be different from how he had been conceived of in legend (Forgues 89). Throughout this chapter, Carpentier uses confession to explain Columbus's weaknesses:

I will have to tell him [to his confessor] everything. Everything, simply everything. I will have to put my entire self into words and somehow convey even more than the words themselves say... (Carpentier, *The Harp* 35). ...But inside my body, worn down by exhaustion and illness, reside inside the interior "I," still

¹⁸ All English quotations of *The Harp and the Shadow* are from the English version of the novel.

¹⁹ Latin expression for “the great glory of God.”

lucid, keen, of sound mind and memory, witness to marvels, stained with weakness, hedged with caution, repentant today for what I did yesterday, tortured when I regard myself, but calm when I face others...(36). ...Of the cardinal sins there is only one that has always been foreign to me, and that is sloth. Because I suffered from lust, I lived a lustful life until I was freed from that sin by greater affairs...(39). ... But when I wrote to Their Highnesses was lying yet again...(113). ...When I search through the labyrinth of my past, in this my final hour, I am astonished by my natural talent as an actor... (122).

The last chapter of the book, called “The Shadow,” describes Columbus’s beatification hearing as though it were a burlesque comedy. It utilizes both living and dead historical characters to represent a forged trial. Among the characters are Joseph Baldi, who appears as Postulator, León Bloy as a Challenger, the President, the reader, and the lawyer of the devil Schiller. Carpentier bring into play Victor Hugo, Julio Verne, Alfonso de Lamartine and San Bartolomé de Las Casas as witnesses. The burlesque event was also attended by the invisible ghost of Columbus. In this section, the most fictional moment of the novel, the author merges fictional space and time with space and time based on real events. At the end, the beatification of Columbus is denied and his ghost is left in the middle of St. Peter's Square in Rome, tasting his own failure.

In his effort to demystify Columbus, the author not only uses legends, but he distorts history as well. From the beginning, he portrays Columbus with a dual personality that as much accuses him as absolves him. The author puts words in the mouth of Columbus, claiming that in his diary he mentioned “god” only fourteen times and the word “gold” more than two hundred. The truth is that the word “god” was mentioned in that document more than fifty times and the

precious metal about one hundred twenty five times (Forgues 92). By deforming the facts, Carpentier seeks to expose Columbus as more concerned about material goods than spirituality. In his novel, Carpentier characterizes Columbus as a chameleon ready to change colors and roles as long as it was useful for his purposes. His Columbus is not an intrepid mariner but a hostage of his and the Spanish king's ambitions for gold and power (Juan-Navarro 235).

At the same time the author is striving to demystify the hero, he also pursues to discredit his endeavor. Carpentier exhibits Columbus enterprise as devoid of scientific basis. The legend about the Normans that the Jew character, Master Jacob, told Columbus, serves to amplify and emphasize the thesis of the lie and the farce of the “discovery” of America in the novel (Forgues 93).

However, Carpentier not only puts his eyes on the figure of Columbus. His analysis goes much further and seeks to find deeper explanations in the largest beneficiaries of the conquest and colonialism. He also draws our attention to the Catholic Church, the European monarchies, and their bourgeoisie successors of the old continent. It could be said that the novel attempts a more comprehensive reflection of the conquest and its results. Carpentier’s analysis transcends different epochs and includes different sponsors who participated in and benefited from this enterprise. Even more, Carpentier highlights how the independence of the Latin American countries continues to be threatened by the insatiable desire of the domination of Europe and, most recently, of the United States. Notably, he exposes the consequences of the conquest from different angles and time periods and appears to reveal the same, or very similar colonial practices in the now independent republics. For him, the colonial oppression has been like a big weight that the Latin American people have not been able to recover from. Even the political

ideas that have benefited the continent's independence have been imported from Europe without a significant Latin American contribution.

Carpentier uses the historical novel as a vehicle, as he tells us, to present things as they must have been or should have been and to deliver the voice of the story by the "other" who has been relieved of official history. The novel is based primarily on official documents of the conquest, written by Columbus or based on his texts, but it highlights his incoherent points in favor of the native cause. The author singles out with expertise the asides that uncover the unholy motivations of the conquest. Every chapter of the book includes the keys and inputs that enrich this longstanding debate.

2.2. Postmodernist Vision and *The Harp and the Shadow*

As mentioned earlier, Menton considers *The Harp and the Shadow* one of the first NLHN. This group of literary works identifies with the advent of a new historical-fictional narrative that differentiates its fullness from its predecessors of the same literary sub-genre. Their transgressive character, which could also be called subversive, departs from the respect for history professed by the traditional historical novels of the nineteenth century. The narrative and conceptual evolution experienced by the historical novel of the second half of the twentieth century coincides with the profound changes undergone by the historiography and the influence of postmodernist concepts.

Simultaneously, as Ángel Rama claims, there was a change in the fictional discourse of history, separating it from the romantic historicist model of the reconstruction of past periods to "build vast interpretative structures of the long Latin American time and large space of the continent" (Perkowska 21). This was a change in the paradigm that would lead into what today is

known as NLHN. Fictional history moved from a respectful, obedient, and almost literal reconstruction of facts of the past towards a critical reinterpretation of history that freely operates in the art of writing novels.

According to the Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes, the NLHN rebels against realism and the bourgeois values associated with it and against the stereotyped images of the twenties and thirties creole realism that were structured on the dichotomy of civilization and barbarism or progress and regression. Escaping these stereotypes and the strong geographical and historical determinism of Latin America, the writers pursued new answers in the universality of myth and of the human condition. Perkowska, citing Fuentes, describes the main features of this new narrative and fictional historical speech that is consistent almost to the fullest with the structure of *The Harp and the Shadow*:

Los narradores rompen los ejes espacio-temporales, desafían las relaciones de causa y efectos, desdibujan los límites entre lo vivido y lo imaginado o la realidad y la ficción; multiplican las perspectivas y las voces narrativas, recurren a una intertextualidad estridente para construir estructuras en múltiples capas y profundidades, emplean diversos procedimientos metaficcionales mediante los cuales los textos revelan –casi impúdicamente- sus entrañas, texturas y estructuras. Uno de los cauces especialmente violentos del rechazo del realismo es el cuestionamiento del lenguaje heredado de los tiempos de la conquista, la colonización y los proyectos nacionales posindependentistas, “falso y anacrónico” cuyo poder jerárquico y opresor se basa en su supuesta capacidad de reproducir o calcar la realidad extratextual y su presunta objetividad y transparencia.

(Perkowska 24)

To fully establish the connections that bind the new Latin American historical novel and the postmodernists currents of history, there must be a review of the important changes in the bosom of the historiography of the twentieth century. Since the beginning of the 1930s, there has been evidence of a rethinking of history as a discipline. The transformation intensified in the 1970s with the beginning of debates about postmodernism. The traditional historical speech model was attached to the ontological and epistemological issues of the enlightenment era and the nineteenth century academic tradition. The ontological foundations of traditional history rested on its re-constructivist and empiricist character of the existence of a past reality that can be restored and known by a universal subject, focused and autonomous. According to the medullar argument of nineteenth-century history, the analysis and the study of historical evidence must come from documents gathered in the official archives. In short, the role of the historian was to discover the meaning of the deep structures of the past and the historical truth that lies in the correspondence between the facts and these structures. It was assumed for everyone there was objectivity by the historians and that there was separation from the facts of history. It was hypothesized that there was no assessment of the facts by the historians whose work was limited only to discover and describe them impartially. For traditional history, on the other hand, language was only a medium that the historians needed to in order to reflect and copy the reality discovered by them. Through this means of communication, transparency was achieved as well as the access, without intermediation, to the reality of the past and the assumption of the historical narrative as a reflection of that reality (Perkowska 70).

Under the philosophical parameters of traditional history, a parallel can be seen between the development of the historical novel of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. The particular characteristic of nineteenth century historical fiction was its compliance

with history as the ultimate realistic and stable source. In Latin America, the so-called traditional historical novel follows Walter Scott and Victor Hugo's romanticism; this trend was consolidated with the establishment of the independent states. Fiction writers, according to Menton, sought "to contribute to the creation of a national consciousness familiarizing readers with the personages and the events of the past" (Menton, *La nueva* 36). Along these lines, literary creation contributed to the foundation of a national identity. Additionally, it supported the liberal political project in opposition to the ideas of conservatives who favored the maintenance of centralist and royalist structures with the important participation of the Catholic Church in society (Seydel 120).

Although there is no doubt that *The Harp* belongs to the NLHN, the same could not be said of the other historical novels by Carpentier. In *The Kingdom of this World* (1949) and *The Age of Enlightenment* (1962), works that some critics²⁰ have considered pioneers of the genre or sub-genre NHLN, the influence of the traditional historical novel is apparent. Barrientos argues that over time these two novels were discarded as the model of the NHLN while the genre underwent a major renovation with more daring novels (Barrientos 107). The Cuban author Reynaldo Arenas also criticized the rigorous historical attachment Carpentier used in these two works:

En las novelas de Carpentier llega un momento en que los personajes están tan connotados por la historia [...] que no se pueden mover: una vez que se mueven hay que connotar el paso que dan, la época de la alfombra que pisan, el paño con que se cubren el cuerpo, el mueble donde finalmente se sientan; es decir hay que agotar el contexto tan fielmente que llega un momento en que, por ejemplo, el

²⁰ Seymour Menton considers this two works to be the genesis of what would become the NLHN, but in his opinion they do not belong to this group of novels.

personaje *Sofía*, de *El siglo de las luces* casi no puede moverse con toda la utilería con que Carpentier la provee. (Barrientos 108)

Arenas's assertion is certain; it is recognized by Carpentier in the foreword of *The Kingdom of this World*. There Carpentier argues that "the story which is set on an extremely rigorous documentation [...] respects the historical truth of the events" (Barrientos 111). Although rigid, says Barrientos, Carpentier began to take some liberties in these novels with reference to the historical facts (112).

For its part, the classic model of historical certainty passed through a stage of review in the 1970s and 1980s. Its permanent status is challenged by disciplines related to history as the critical and literary theory. The first challenge came from the poststructuralist works by Foucault and Derrida, whose writings aimed to demolish the foundations of the traditional history: "The post-structuralism redefines then history as a discourse that creates or builds the meaning of the past rather than discover it as inscribed in the evidence, putting emphasis on the cultural and ideological processes involved in the creation and organization of knowledge" (Perkowska 71). This new concept affected two of the fundamental assumptions of traditional history: the universal and autonomous subject and the notion of the past directly knowable and accessible by this subject (71).

For the poststructuralist theory, knowledge emanating from that particular subject is not direct nor is it a neutral and objective reflection of the past, but instead it is a construction influenced by relationships of power, ideology and cultural conventions. Munslow points out, "the post-structuralism has exposed the historicity of history, i.e. has re-installed the history in the *episteme* that belongs, showing that it is not possible to think it out its ontological and epistemological premises" (Perkowska 71). With this theory Munslow does not disown the real

existence of the past but instead denies the possibility of recovering those bygone facts in an objective and pure manner, because they are covered by a mantle of conceptual and ideological assumptions, and additionally overshadowed by language (74).

In summary, as expressed it by Ute Seydel in his work *Narrar historia (s)*:

los supuestos de la historiografía de cuño positivista que partían de la posibilidad de representar, con base en el análisis cuidadoso de los documentos encontrados, el pasado de manera objetiva y de conocer una verdad histórica única, son deconstruidos y abandonados en el marco de las teorías posestructuralistas, posmodernas y poscoloniales. La ciencia de la historia actual, sostiene asimismo, que solo existe una pretensión de verdad y que se construye una visión del pasado que depende de la perspectiva asumida por el respectivo observador y del lugar de enunciación desde el que se producen los discursos. Por lo tanto, los historiadores hoy día son conscientes de que no se puede reconstruir el pasado tal como fue, sino que cualquier recuento historiográfico es determinado por diversos factores subjetivos. (Seydel 52)

Other equally important challenges marked the turn of historical studies the second half of the twentieth century. One of them stemmed from the criticism of the macro-narratives, proposed by the French writer Jean François Lyotard. This theory argues that modernity rests on two metanarratives of human progress: the speculative of German idealism and the metanarrative of emancipation whose ultimate goal is universal freedom. The latter, in particular, is considered a philosophy of modern history that proposes a final sense and common end to all individual events. This type of narrative experienced its decline at the end of the twentieth century that had been haunted by historical events, such as world wars and worker uprisings, which placed doubt

upon it (Perkowska 75). Questions similarly important, as Scott states, come from the epistemic changes of post structuralism and postmodernism that created space for new groups, institutions, and cultures that had been excluded from the construction of history. Thus, the possibility of a history democratization that accepts and promotes the advent of new historical subjects and their new, multiple versions of the story opens its doors. This multiplicity of subjects and stories manifests in practice the theoretical argument from the post structuralism that “all history is necessarily partial and it always participates in the struggle for power and knowledge” (77).

A third challenge is presented to the traditional history regarding the disappearance of borders between the disciplines of knowledge, a typical attribute of postmodernity (Perkowska 77). Different branches of history unfolded, separate from the traditional political history that prevailed in the nineteenth century. Economic history, the social, the new cultural and political history, micro-history and the history of the present dynamic the last decades of the twentieth century (78). However, innovation not only impacts the content but it also extends to the narrative forms and methodologies. Very often the historian is positioned ideologically and culturally in the story without any reserve, and on occasions tries to involve the readers in the construction of the historical argument (79).

In historical literature, as in historiography, a change manifests in the narrative of the facts of the past, which has a parallel development to the poststructuralist and postmodernist theories. It is an evident manifestation in the historical novels of the 1970s and subsequent years when the main foundation of its new speech comes from the certainty that it is impossible to objectively recover the past. A separation from the official historic discourse occurs in these novels, which they profane with some confidence and freedom. The authors are assured that their stories of fiction may be as legitimate as the historical ones or vice versa. Even more, they

understand there is space for different interpretations of the historical events, corresponding more with the consequences in the present, and that can be projected within their ideological affinities.

Noé Jitrik affirms that the historical novel can be understood as an oxymoron, because it establishes an agreement between two categories that have been judged as opposite. However, Jitrik also argues that this oxymoron has vanished “since both historiography and fiction are designed like discursive constructions of historical events, and from recognition of the relativity of any knowledge”. Jitrik states that “it has been made aware that the use of the 'lie'²¹ can even lead to a fuller truth” (Seydel 119).

Discussions exist about how authors of fiction have been aware of the transformations happening in the historiography. For critics such as José Leandro Urbina, the novelists of the second half of the twentieth century were entirely cognizant of this paradigmatic shift, and they were based on the assumption that historiography discursively constructs facts and fiction produced the diegetic worlds (Seydel 119). Referring to the new historical novels, Amalia Pulgarín in her book *Metaficción historiográfica* argues that these works are characterized by “self-consciousness of the theories of the new historicism and the recognition of the impossibility of representing reality” (14). Fiction writers are aware that both the historical discourse and fictional world are human products, and this contingency is moved to their texts. This postulated platform of the modern historical theoretical thinking constitutes the basis of the scrutiny process used for fictional writers to explore the forms and contents of the past (14).

²¹ Jitrik uses the term lie to refer to the category of the imaginary.

Authors such as Celia Fernández Prieto have made a great effort to try to reconstruct the linkage of history, historiography, and literature since antiquity. Fernández postulates the existence of a macro-genre (historical novel) that has roots in ancient Greek literature and has evolved to the current historical novel. She considers the new historical novel, which she also referred to as postmodern historical novel, as a micro-genre of the historical novel; she underlines the importance of the postmodern theory to make a distinction between the characteristics of the new historical fiction and its previous model (Seydel 126). Fernández takes a conciliatory stance between those who support the introduction of postmodern theories in Latin American literature and those who oppose it:

La novela histórica postmoderna denuncia la manera en que las versiones históricas se usan como instrumentos de poder. El debate, en fin, sigue abierto y quizás convendría renunciar a una única interpretación de la función de la nueva novela histórica que ofrece, en mi opinión, una enorme diversidad de objetivos, desde el juego paródico irreverente y provocador con la Historia hasta la refutación políticamente comprometida de una determinada versión de los hechos o personajes históricos, como ocurre con las novelas que reelaboran los episodios de la Conquista de América. (Seydel 126)

Critics including Nelly Richard, Alfonso Del Toro and Carlos Rincón note the relevance of postmodern theories represented in the social, cultural, political, and historical realities of Latin America. Authors such as Lyotard discuss the philosophical meaning of the term postmodernity and argue that it should not be understood, in opposition to Fredric Jameson, in a temporary sense of historical succession. Lyotard points out that it should be considered a problem of reading and rereading of vocabularies in crisis of subject/reason/history/progress configuration.

Postmodern rereading, according to Richard, has led to the questioning of the “universal reason-centered hierarchies,” the reproach of “Eurocentric legacy of modernity,” as well as “the cultural authority of the central thought” (Seydel 130) Ultimately, David Herzberger assures that the postmodern serves to take distance with regard to political power and hegemonic discourses of official historiography (130).

The Harp and the Shadow by Carpentier inaugurates a series of critical novels of the “discovery” and conquest of America. It is not risky to state that it was largely the model that inspired and propelled other works that followed on the same subject. This work shows an exponential change in the treatment of the historical theme that approaches the postulates and postmodernist point of view, and makes a difference from his previous novels.

As noted above, in Carpentier’s previous works, *The Kingdom of this World* and *The Age of Enlightenment*, he still maintained the usual structure of the traditional historical novel. However, in them hints of what is to come later in *The Harp* begin to appear. Carpentier acknowledged that in the earlier novels he “respects the historical truth of the events,” but at the same time he began a process of liberation from the official history. As an illustration, Barrientos cites Emma Susana Speratti-Piñeros, who, referring to *The Age of Enlightenment*, by Carpentier, argues that historians agree that

Antes de suicidarse, Henri Christopher pidió agua para lavarse y un traje blanco con el que intentaba simbolizar su inocencia y buenas intenciones, pero Carpentier abandona el simple lavado con agua y la vestimenta blanca en favor de *ropa limpia y perfumes*, para luego presentarnos al monarca vistiendo *su más rico traje de ceremonias*, terciándose *la ancha cinta bicolor*, emblema de su *investidura* y *anudándosela sobre la empuñadura de la espada* con lo cual no

permitió que el tirano se le ablandara y acentuó en él la egolatría y la petulancia del dictador nato. (Barrientos 112)

In *The Harp and the Shadow*, Carpentier breaks with the traditional historical novel and outlines the elements and essential traits²² what literary critics such as Aínsa would designate in 1991 the NHLN. In 1993, Menton reclaimed the term (Seydel 138), and he distinguished it from the traditional historical novel, establishing six particular features.

First, Menton establishes the impossibility of knowing the historical truth or reality and the unpredictable nature of history. With regard to this characteristic in *The Harp and the Shadow*, Carpentier licensed himself, relying on what was said by Aristotle, to narrate the events from the perspective of the poet and count them as "they should or could have happened" (Forgues 89). This warning in the Mexican edition of the novel serves a double purpose. On one hand it give permission to assemble the story without the limitations of the historian. The second objective is that the novelist ventures to give his version because he judges that history has failed to tell the whole truth. Carpentier assures this novel is "to be seen as a variation (in the musical sense of the word) on a big issue that remains, moreover, very mysterious theme..." (89). Categorizing the subject as "very mysterious," (89) Carpentier recognizes that there is neither a genuine, complete history nor at least an objective one, and he appeared to be aware of this at the moment he wrote *The Harp*.

²² Aínsa argues that there is a wide range of possibilities in historical fiction and that for this reason there is no single model of new historical novel, but the separation with the traditional historical novel is evident (Seydel 143).

A second feature that Menton cites is the conscious distortion of history. This element abounds in *The Harp and the Shadow*. It is important to point out that the authors of the NLHN distort a history that they judge fallacious. Their aim is to show its flaws, putting it into question. In *The Harp and the Shadow*, the author makes use of the fable to build a parallel story to show a different vision of the “discovery”. For example, Carpentier rescues the legend of the unknown pilot and introduces it as an element that serves his purposes of portraying Columbus without the merits official history has given him. In addition, Carpentier conceives a hypothetical romance between Columbus and Queen Isabella, which has no historical record. The romance is used to explain the Queen’s support to Columbus’s enterprise.

The anachronisms, especially in the trial against Columbus, complement this distortion of historical facts. Carpentier describes a festive hearing in the Vatican as an extravaganza where dissimilar personages of history participate. The prosecution was attended by protagonists who lived in different times but whose presence in this novel allows the author to achieve his goals. For this reason, Carpentier includes colonial characters such as Father Las Casas, who serves as a witness; he also includes historical figures of more recent times, such as José Baldi, defender of Columbus, Victor Hugo, Julio Verne and the poet Alfonso Lamartine.

Another characteristic Menton discusses that Carpentier widely uses in *The Harp and the Shadow*, is intertextuality. Carpentier uses other texts to develop his work. One of the virtues of *The Harp and the Shadow*, is the construction of a complex network of intertexts throughout the novel. Carpentier demonstrates once again his erudition and knowledge of the art of writing. Although it is a rewrite of the Columbus chronicles, in principle the work was a rewriting of a text by Claudel in which he attributed superhuman virtues to Columbus. Carpentier rewrites them with an ironic tone. There is no doubt that it was initially a

counter discourse of the work *El libro de Cristobal Colón* and the chronicles of the Indies that the author combines with other historical and literary texts.

In the third chapter of *The Harp and the Shadow*, Carpentier uses poetic virtuosity to compose the trial of Columbus as a huge carnival. This other attribute of the NLHN, which Menton defines as the use of humorous exaggeration, parody, and heteroglossia, leaves its mark on the rest of the work. Carpentier seriously critiques the conquest with a comical and paradoxical tone whose poetical climax is reached at the end of the novel.

Menton also calls metafiction an element of these novels, but this quality is not evident in this work by Carpentier. This particular feature grants authors the freedom to make comments about the fictional creation process. Even though some authors, such as Robert Alter, identify this characteristic in works of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, it was the Argentinian Jorge Luis Borges's use of it that made it broadly known (Menton, *La nueva* 43). However, the lack of metafiction, which is widely used in the NHLN, does not disqualify *The Harp and the Shadow*, from membership in this literary group. Carpentier's novel represented a paradigm for other Latin American authors who were responsible for perfecting and polishing all the elements proposed by Menton²³.

Carpentier's *The Harp and the Shadow* serves as a model within the framework of the NLHN to those who dealt with the issue of Columbus and the conquest. In later novels, other authors use all of these elements discussed above, which gave an identity to that group of novels. Carpentier laid the foundation of what would become a critique of "discovery" and conquest

²³ Menton states that the six characteristics mention by him are not totally obligatory to define a novel as a NHLN as long as they have most of the characteristics (274).

facts. His novel established a paradigm that opened analysis of the “discovery” and the conquest to the Latin American authors.

2.3. Rewriting or Reinterpreting Columbus.

In the fictionalization of Columbus by the NLHN a very important element is conveyed that must be underlined. These novels have as a unique feature: their closeness to the events described in the chronicles of the Indies. It has been their purpose to preserve what was already told thru conquest documents, yet making subtle variations to reinforce their agendas. It is ensured that a value is given to what has happened and accounted for by the chroniclers. At the same time, these novels produce a critical assessment of the history produced by the conquerors own hands. The double nature of judges and interested parties of the chroniclers of the conquest may reduce authority to colonial texts, but simultaneously it has been recognized some truth-telling that historical novels do not refute. A paradox exists then in the rewriting of the facts of the conquest, because there is suspicion about them, but concomitantly some authority is accepted as being the only documents that remain from that period. The granting of this authority is transcendental because the contemporary criticism is mainly based upon it.

The search for the truth of the historical facts is not the purpose of the NLHN; its main ambition is to understand what happened and suggest reasons why it happened from the Latin Americans’ perspective. It also seeks to decentralize the discourse that has held the European viewpoint. More than a rewriting of the history of the “discovery” and conquest, these historical novels reinterpret past information. Carpentier thought it was necessary to provide a correct reading of Columbus’s written legacy, as he said on one occasion:

Hay ignorancias que cuestan caro. Cuando León Bloy propuso a la iglesia la canonización de Cristóbal Colón, se engañaba de manera increíble acerca del

personaje del cual, más tarde, Claudel quería darnos una imagen edificante y sulpiciana. León Bloy no había tenido la precaución de leer correctamente las cartas y el testamento de Colón; se conformó con las informaciones brindadas por un mal historiador católico francés: el conde Romilly de Lorgues. (Barrientos 11)

This statement supports the assertion that the NHLN gives veracity to Columbian documents and that its aim is to provide a new reading to what historians have mistaken interpreted.

The analyses are made five centuries after the exploration from the perspective of the present. For these authors, present-day Latin America has an explanation for its past of subordination. However, the present does not coincide with the past that has been told, as there is no connection between the past that speaks of great deeds of virtuous men and the current underdevelopment of Latin America. No coincidence exists between the providential past of the conquest and the present Latin America. Therefore, the novels highlight the links between underdevelopment with the exploitation and domination represented by the conquest.

Carpentier led this rereading of conquest texts and reinterprets them based on the facts recounted by the conquerors. However, *The Harp and the Shadow* follows a different path than a direct rereading of Columbus's archives. Carpentier said that his motivation was born in 1937 by performing a radio adaptation of the play *El libro de Cristóbal Colón*. Carpentier felt irritated by the hagiographic resolution of its author, Claudel, who attributed supernatural powers to Columbus. Subsequently, Carpentier states, a book by Bloy fell into his hands that called for the canonization of Columbus and compared him with Moses and San Pedro.

Carpentier structures the plot of *The Harp and the Shadow* on facts that are considered true or at least historically accepted. For instance, it includes the Catholic Church history of two popes who failed to elevate Columbus to sainthood. As Carpentier said,

Lo cierto es que dos pontífices del siglo pasado, Pio Nono y León XIII, respaldados por 850 obispos, propusieron por tres veces la beatificación de Cristóbal Colón a la Sacra Congregación de Ritos; pero esta, después de un detenido examen del caso, rechazó rotundamente la postulación. (Forgues 89)

The novel's plot revolves around this historically true fact, but it includes a fictional reaction against the Vatican's eagerness to canonize Columbus. Carpentier gives this indisputable fact a political interpretation that moves away from the purely religious and virtuous explanation. In the first chapter of the novel, the Catholic Church is the main object of analysis. In this section readers can find a well-structured critique of European colonialism and the manipulation of faith for political and ideological purposes. Using satire and an ironic tone, Carpentier exposes the political and influential side of this powerful religious institution. He also examines how colonialism does not seem to end with the independence of the Latin American nations, whose destinies are still bound to the European ideas, religions and economy. In the novel, the effects of colonialism have remained over time, and ultimately what has occurred is a change in the strategy of domination and exploitation of the former colonies, in part supported and tolerated by the new leaders of the independent nations.

From a liberal and materialistic point of view, the narrator leads readers to think about the manipulation of the Christian faith for the purposes of power. Carpentier is aware that one of the triumphs of colonization is the establishment of the Catholic religion in the new world. While it is true that the American people gained political independence, the Christian faith is still a

unifying element that at times is used as an instrument to impose or maintain ideologies and political power. The novel wants its readers to ponder the lack of honesty of this religious proposal and invites them to look at the other side of history.

It is evident for Carpentier and his novel that the proposal of canonizing Columbus was not an innocent idea, devoid of all earthly interest. It was the intent of the Catholic Church's hierarchy to diminish the momentum of the new liberal ideas of the nineteenth century and their influence on Latin America nations' independence. These liberal doctrines had already been enthroned in the heart of the local leaders of the independence campaigns in Latin America and threatened to spread to the rest of the population. Although it is not a new idea or hypothesis, Carpentier displays evidence of how religious power is exercised. The novel shows the Vatican filled with intrigue, lies and wrongs, and problematically linked to the large aristocracies in Europe and the emerging bourgeoisie in America.

According to the suggestions in Carpentier's novel, the new world has had more than one colonization. The idea of an unending colonization even after the independence of the Latin-American nations that was facilitated by religion that played a central role in keeping alive the dependable colonial structures. Carpentier denounces in his novel not only the past but also the present and future colonialism in Latin America. For this reason, he also includes in his novel the meddling by United States in the hemispherical affairs and its economic intervention. Colonialism did not end with the wars of independence, but it has been extended in time and even now overwhelms Latin American people.

In the novel is noted how significant the conquest was for the Catholic Church. Pope Pius IX never doubted, in the fictional story, that the “discovery” of America had marked a turning point for Europe and especially for the Catholic Church. To endorse this idea, in the novel he

recalls the words of the Cardinal Primate of Bordeaux: “Christopher Columbus’s discovery of the New World was the greatest event witnessed by man since the world received the Christian faith; thanks to the unparalleled accomplishment, *the extent of the known lands and seas to which the word of the Gospels could be carried had been doubled...*” (Carpentier, *The Harp* 7). The novel illustrates how the conquest not only radically had impact for the Spanish kings but also for the Catholic Church in its desire to expand. The narrative highlights the infinite connotation that the conquest had for the Catholic Church and how its ideological and religious roots were firmly planted in the consciousness and lives of the inhabitants of the new continent. Ever since independence, native leaders themselves have been aware of the fundamental role of religion. Eventually they sought strategic alliances to strengthen their new powers. However, despite all its power, the Church has seen its legacy threatened by the new liberal ideas, coincidentally arriving from Europe.

To illustrate this reality, the novel recounts an actual historical invitation from the liberator of Chile to the representatives of the Roman church. In part, this request was the recognition by the new Chilean Government of the persuasive force of faith, which through centuries of domination appeared stronger and more robust than the political ideas themselves. Carpentier’s book narrates the story of young cleric Mastai, the future Pope Pius IX, in his journey to Chile on a pastoral mission. According to the narrator, the liberator of Chile and its current head of Government, Bernardo O’Higgins, requested that Pope Pius VII send an apostolic mission to their newly liberated country. The invitation seemed inexplicable, since no one could fully understand why the liberator of Chile asked the Vatican for help to reorganize the Chilean Catholic Church.

Carpentier's interpretation of this trip was that regardless of O'Higgins' liberal political ideas, the Chilean leader knew Spain was interested in regaining the former colonies and one of their main instruments would be the faith, which could not be removed suddenly, compared to a colonial Government (Carpentier, *El arpa* 22). To this point the Latin American churches had depended on the Spanish episcopate and not rendered obedience to the Roman clergy, and O'Higgins wanted to protect his country from the religious intrusion of the former colonizers. For this reason, the liberator of Chile wished to place the Chilean clergy under the supreme authority of the Vatican, which at that time was severely politically weakened and apparently could not exert an influence beyond purely religious matters (22).

On this trip, a historically true fact, is when the novel has the future Pope Pius IX conceive the idea of raising Columbus to the category of Holy. This visit to Chile, as the fictional story describes, gave the future Pontiff a more accurate picture of America and the threat that was represented by liberal ideas from Europe. Novel uses true facts of the life of Mastai to deduce the reasons that led him to seek the beatification of Columbus.

The second chapter of the novel, titled "The Hand," also demonstrates the use of historical accounts as a base for the fictional text. In this section, Carpentier gives words to Columbus on his deathbed. The novel describes a hero wearied by multiple battles of his life who patiently awaits the arrival of his confessor, a Franciscan clergyman (Carpentier 43). Columbus's confessor arrives just at the end of the chapter, and by this point the confession has been directed to the reader and not to the priest. This end of life reflection shows Columbus to be sincere and devoid of any inhibition. However, at one point in his confession, Columbus says that some revelations cannot be said to his confessor when he arrives. Consequently, the novel portrays a pure hearted and genuine Columbus facing the reader who becomes reserved when confronting his confessor.

The second chapter of the novel provides well-structured tirade against the life and achievements of Columbus. Carpentier wishes to provide the reader with strong arguments that expose this man who has historically been posed as a hero and a great adventurer. Columbus's legend is tackled from all sides. As a basis of his attack, Carpentier used the Columbus documents themselves, which have also been used by his sycophants. He demonstrates with the novel that historical documents can be subject to multiple readings and different interpretations, depending on the agenda of its producer. Carpentier acknowledges the immense social influence of fiction and uses it to develop an ideological discourse. As previously claimed, he did not write the novel with the purposes of historical correctness but as a discourse of reinterpreting historical documents. Carpentier was devoted to using documents from Columbus's archives to express a different opinion of what happened or why he believes it happened.

Carpentier's primary challenge was to unravel the internal and what he thought were the real motivations of the conquest of America. He tries to achieve this objective by interpreting what was written by Columbus, dusting off legends that no one has been able to prove certain, and at other times adding his own invented facts. Carpentier knows writings of Columbus had been mediated by the hand of Father Las Casas and the Admiral's son Ferdinand Columbus and that it is likely the truth was manipulated by them, as each had had their own agenda, and furthermore, their own vision of Columbus.

Carpentier's book begins this discourse with the demystification of the human being. The Columbus of the novel is a sinner without cure, as opposed to the historical character whom Las Casas and Columbus' son have described as highly religious. Carpentier's Columbus tells us that he has committed all the deadly sins except sloth. The novel puts special emphasis on lust, lies, and greed as his greatest weaknesses, without neglecting his passion for wine. Greed leads him

to don different personas, either in front of the Spanish Kings, his crew, or for his own conscience at times. Additionally, he is described as a sailor without sufficient expertise who is unable to skillfully handle the astrolabe.

Columbus's desires for greatness and material goods are shown as his main concerns. The literary work describes Columbus as a selfish human being, capable of anything to achieve his goals. For instance, Carpentier's book accuses Columbus of marrying Felipa only for his own business benefit, as she was a lady whose social contacts would open the doors of the crown court to him. That is the reason why the novel's narrator also interprets that Columbus did not marry Beatriz, as that marriage did not present any benefit for his business purposes. The novel even conceives a love affair between Columbus and Queen Isabella, an affair that can only exist in the author's fictional rendering, as there is no historical account of anything similar to this affair. However, what the relationship serves to do in the novel is to show how Columbus was manipulated by the Spanish crown in its imperial and expansionist desires. Some American authors, such as William Carlos Williams, painted Columbus from a North American perspective, as an icon exploited by Europeans (Juan-Navarro 227). These voices believe that Columbus was an object of manipulation by the Spanish Empire more than an exploiter himself. Carpentier points toward both views: one part describes the boundless ambition of Columbus, while at the same time reveals Spain's imperialist vision of the so-called Catholic monarchs.

Columbus's endeavor is also under scrutiny in the novel. Carpentier revives the legend of an "unknown pilot" to minimize the greatness of his feat. Though it is a story without confirmation or historical acceptance, Carpentier uses it to reinforce his discourse. A character known in the novel as the Master Jacob reveals to Columbus the secret of the new lands that exist by sailing to the West.

The fictional Columbus reveals one of his fabulous secrets and how he managed to obtain support for his endeavor. Carpentier uses a mythical episode to challenge the conquest documents. Columbus says in the novel he had, as a sailor, the fortune of meeting Master Jacob in Galloway. This character of legend, who has knowledge of many languages, tells Columbus, in the midst of some wine, about journeys made several centuries ago. Master Jacob tells him that a red-haired noble from those distant lands to the North existed; this person led a trip through unusual routes and found a new territory called "Green Land" (Carpentier, *El arpa* 54). In addition, the story says, this man became lost in the midst of the ocean, and continued sailing West to find and discover Islands, "which had been mentioned in a treatise entitled *Inventio fortunata*" (Carpentier, *The Harp* 48). Master Jacob continues: "But there was even more. Sailing ever westward, farther and farther westward, a son of the redheaded mariner, called 'Lief the Lucky,' reached an immense land that he named 'Wood Land' "(48). Fictional Master relates that these men escaped from the new lands where they have been persecuted by the natives, and when they attempted to return, they could not find a crew motivated to go back and explore further.

Once Master Jacob finished his story, Carpentier's Columbus was disturbed by the revelation; from that moment on, his obsession with the new land was born. Columbus decided to keep secret the revelation of his friend in order to take advantage of it: "I was certain that there was a great, populous and rich land to the West; I believed that by sailing west I would be sure to reach it. But even though I was convinced, as a result of the stories I had heard in the Land of Ice, that sailing west would be safe, if I said as much, the merit of my enterprise would be diminished" (Carpentier, *The Harp* 62).

Luis Arranz, in his edition of Columbus's diary, states that the legend of the pre-“discovery” began shortly after the first voyage of Columbus. Various chroniclers of the Indians created it in the form of fable, but until recently had a greater inclination to reject this theory. However, Juan Manzano (*Columbus and his Secret*) and Juan Perez y Bueso (*Mirabilis*) have given it a renewed air and interest to this thesis. Both authors make a complete and exhaustive study of the subject, trying to give historical basis to this renowned legend (Colón, *Diario* 37). Manzano adheres to the thesis that there was an anonymous pilot between the years 1477-78 that communicated to Columbus about new lands to be found by sailing west (38). For his part, Pérez Tudela supports the thesis of the pre-“discovery” as Manzano does, but he disagrees on the channel by which Columbus receives the information. According to his theory, the rumor reached Columbus through an encounter with Amerindian Amazons between 1482 and 1483 (39). One piece of evidence Manzano uses to prove his thesis refers to the much discussed preamble of the capitulations of Santa Fe. In this agreement, signed by the Catholic Kings and Christopher Columbus on April 17, 1492, he highlighted the following contradictory text:

Las cosas suplicadas y que Vuestras Altezas dan e otorgan a don Christoval de Colon en alguna satisfacci3n de lo que ha descubierto en los Mares Oc3anos y del viaje que agora, con la ayuda de Dios ha de fazer por ellas en servicio de Vuestras Altezas, son las que siguen.

... que Vuestras Altezas como Se1ores que son de las dichas Mares Oceanas, fazen dende agora al dicho Christoval Colon su Almirante en todas aquellas islas e tierras firmes que por su mano o industria se descubrir3n o ganar3n en las dichas Mares Oc3anas ... (Col3n, *Diario* 40)

Some colonial chroniclers such as Father Las Casas and Alonso de Santa Cruz considered an error of the copyist the expression “*ha descubierto*”. However, for Manzano this summit document of the “discovery” must have been carefully prepared by the Court, so he discards that there was an error in its writing. Today it is widely accepted, based on preserved copies of the lost original, that the expression that was originally written was “*ha descubierto*” (Colón, *Diario* 40). For those who defend the thesis of the pre-“discovery”, this acceptance is an important indication that Columbus knew the existence of those new lands.

Valuable documentary references of the colonial time, illustrate this historical discussion about a possible pre-“discovery”. A discussion of this event was discussed in the biography of Columbus, written by his son Ferdinand Columbus and first published in 1571. Ferdinand branded the remarks fake as held by Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo in the third chapter of his *History General and Native of the Indies*. According to Ferdinand Columbus, Fernández de Oviedo “appears convinced -chasing a dream- to have fully demonstrated beyond questioning that there was an earlier discover of the western navigational route, and that the Spaniard dominated those lands, citing as proof what Aristotle said of the island of Atlantis, and Sebosus about the Hesperides” (Columbus 50).

Defending his father, Ferdinand states that such assertions are false and irrational, and that he would be willing to ignore them but he is unable to because they were intended to reduce the honor and glory of Columbus. To prove Oviedo’s error²⁴, Ferdinand exposes the reasons that the island that Aristotle refers to is not the same Hispaniola or Cuba. Similarly, he contradicts the other affirmation of Fernández, which is that the Spaniards had possessed the Indies in ancient

²⁴ Ferdinand Columbus in his book refers to Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo as Oviedo.

times. According to this hypothesis, based on the assertion of Statius and Sebosus²⁵, there were a few islands called Hesperides and they were located to forty days at sea west of the Gorgona's islands. Oviedo assumed those islands were the Indies and "were named Hesperides from Hesperus, who once ruled Spain, guessing in this way that they belonged to the Spaniards" (Columbus 55).

Although the novel is not completely clear, it can be deduced that the fictional Columbus keeps or hides the drafts of his diary and writings which contain the truth, that only in the novel, the fictional character is able to share. Carpentier uses the lack of historical originals of Columbus writings to present his view of what happened as being more accurate. The author's point of view is based on the idea that what we know as Columbus archives are documents that could have been manipulated by Father Las Casas and Columbus's son. Some authors, such as Mozejko, particularly considers that the representation of Columbus by Las Casas overemphasizes Columbus's spiritual aspect and portrays him as a human being designated by God to unfold the gospel to the new world natives (Mozejko 11).

In general, the novel is not only a rant against Columbus. It is a tirade against the conquest and its subsequent outcome as well. To accomplish his purpose, Carpentier uses the historical novel format, taking liberties that are only given to fiction authors. There is no eagerness to challenge the veracity of historical facts, but only his motivations. It seems the author does not believe there could have been altruistic motivations in colonizing the new world.

Scholars have broadly accepted that the texts of the historical Columbus are no more than a mediation of the originals written by Bartolomé de las Casas and his son, Ferdinand Columbus. For Carpentier, his fictional Columbus is telling the truth, which is only found in the

²⁵ He was in reality Statius Sebosus, one person, a Greek geography, mentioned by Pliny.

drafts that are lost and that Columbus's character says in the novel are under his pillow. The claim of the novel, with this assertion of fictional Columbus, is to remove authority of the documents that today we believe to be authentic by the navigator, but that we are certain were mediated by others people.

The life and voyages of Columbus have been the subject of a complex history of transcripts, manipulation, and appropriation. According to Molly Metherd, this history of revisionism begins with Columbus himself, who adapted and altered events depending on the audience he was targeting. One of the documents that best exemplifies and demonstrates this point is the "letter of Santangel" announcing the "discovery": there are three versions of the same letter in the Columbus archive (Juan-Navarro 228). The original diary of Columbus and the transcription made by the Crown Court are lost. Initially the only known versions of the Columbus dairy were those rewritten by Ferdinand Columbus and Bartolomé de las Casas. Later, in 1825, Martin Fernández de Navarrete published a transcript of the diary. This new adaptation was transcribed by Las Casas, presumably in preparation for his history of the Indies. In Las Casas's version, he makes more than a thousand marginal notes to the document. Navarrete, who was the first to edit and publish the version of the journal of Las Casas, omitted all marginal notes in the document. This adaptation led to many others, which also omitted any mention of Las Casas and his marginal notes. The revised document has been used for countless academic research and presumably was the one consulted by Carpentier for his literary work (Juan-Navarro 229). It seems that Carpentier is familiar with these alterations from the original version. Therefore, he talks about an original draft of the dairy, which Columbus in the novel hides with suspicion and that supposedly contains the whole truth.

Carpentier emphasized an episode that coincides with the one written in the discoverer's diary, which shows Columbus as singularly selfish. He says through the narration that Rodrigo de Triana went before Columbus to claim what was promised to who saw land first: a silk vest and a life time of income of ten thousand maravedis. Columbus gave him the silk vest, and he assured him the money would be delivered upon their return. At the same time, Columbus in the novel was thinking about not keeping his promise. In those reflections, Columbus believed he had been the first to see land although he had not shouted it, for he felt it was beneath him compared to the glory that awaited him. Columbus therefore decided that that money would be delivered to Beatrice (Carpentier, *El arpa* 82). The diary of Columbus confirms the veracity of this episode registered on 11th of October:

Puesto que el almirante, a las diez de la noche, estando en el castillo de popa, vio lumbre, aunque fue cosa tan cerrada, que no quiso afirmar que fuese tierra...Después que el almirante lo dijo, se vio una vez o dos, y era como una candelilla de cera que se alzaba y levantaba, lo cual a pocos pareciera ser indicios de tierra; pero el almirante tuvo por cierto estar junto a la tierra. Por lo cual cuando dijeron la *Salve*, que la acostumbraban a decir e cantar a su manera todos los marineros y se hallan todos, rogó y amonéstoles el Almirante que hiciera buena guarda al castillo de proa, y mirasen bien por la tierra, y que al que le dijese primero que veía tierra le daría un jubón de seda, sin las otra mercedes que los

reyes habían prometido, que eran diez mil maravedís de juro a quien primero la viese²⁶ (Colón, *Diario* 88, 89).

Carpentier also describes the celebrated landing in the New World as a moment that defined the entire conquest. Columbus and his sailors complied with the formalities of taking possession of the new land for the Kings of Spain and for the establishment of the Catholic faith. Everything happened on a secluded beach, but in the distance, they heard the murmur of voices behind the bushes. At the end, they were surrounded by the inhabitants of the island, who were only wearing loincloths and appeared to be innocent and peaceful human beings. Many of them brought parrots that served as the initial exchange. Columbus did not know where they had reached, but what ultimately mattered to him were the advantages that could be taken from these lands (Carpentier, *El arpa* 86, 87).

The fictional narrative evokes the disembarkation as a similar ritual to the one in the journal of the Admiral aboard. Both texts refer to the appearance of land at two in the morning, the nakedness of the inhabitants of the island, the exchange of items of little value for parrots that the Indians brought to them, and the helplessness of the Indians against a few Spaniards carrying weapons (Colón, *Diario* 91).

The novel also poses the prompt and substantial change in the relationship between the colonizers and the natives of America due to the confrontation of interests just after the first trip. On his second voyage, Columbus is still worried about not finding the long-awaited gold mine,

²⁶ Luis Arranz editor of this version of the diary of Board which we used in this work, explains that this perpetual pension was granted to Columbus, who in turn ceded to Beatriz Enriquez de Arana, mother of Hernando Colon. This fact is highlighted by Carpentier in *The Harp*.

which leads him to begin formulating an apologetic discourse before the Kings saying that Indians are increasingly wary. He had failed to obtain the secret of the large gold mine from them, and they had already begun to hide their women because they believed the Spanish were dishonest and lustful people. At the same time, Columbus abandoned his image of them as innocent and kindly indigenous people and started to call them cannibals, even though he had never seen anyone eating human flesh. Columbus's character conceived the idea of enslaving the Indians because he has not been able to find any gold or valuable spices. To make his intentions presentable to the Crown and clergy, Columbus assures them that the natives could not be indoctrinated in the Catholic faith. While seeking support of the royalty and the clergy to carry out his purpose of slaving the Indians, he says in the novel: "But, since there is obviously no way of indoctrinating these cannibals, because we do not speak their languages, which I am discovering are many and distinct, the solution to this grave problem, which cannot be indifferent to the Church, is to take them to Spain as slaves" (Carpentier, *The Harp* 110). As expressed by Carpentier's Columbus, he had already sold a group of a thousand Indians captured by the Spanish when the order of the Kings came to ban such trade (Carpentier. *El arpa* 119).

There is historical evidence to support the assertion that Columbus proposed and tried to enslave the Indians. This is perhaps one of the more serious accusations Carpentier propels in his novel against Columbus. In the letter by Columbus to Luis de Santangel, announcing the "discovery", the Admiral refers to this possibility:

En conclusión, a fablar desto solamente que se ha fecho este viage, que fue así de corrida, que pueden ver Sus Altezas que yo les dare oro quanto hobieren menester con muy poquita ayuda que sus altezas me darán: agora especeria y algodón quanto sus altezas mandaren cargar, y almástiga quanto mandaran cargar, e de la

cual fasta hoy no se ha fallado salvo en Grecia y en la isla de Xio, y el Señorío la vende como quiere, y lignáloe cuanto mandaran cargar, y esclavos cuanto mandaran cargar, e serán de los idolatras...(Colón, *La carta* 21)

Carpentier deepens his accusation in the novel, quoting the actual Bartolomé de Las Casas. At the time of trial, when the fictional cleric is to be questioned about what proof he had that the postulated Columbus deliberately instituted slavery among the American indigenous, Carpentier puts words in the mouth of the character by quoting the authentic friar:

Bástame con decir que cuando la Reina Isabel, de gloriosa memoria, supo que las gentes de Colon estaban vendiendo esclavos americanos en el mercado de Sevilla, monto en grande enojo y preguntó: ¿QUE PODER TIENE MIO EL ALMIRANTE PARA DAR A NADIE MIS VASALLOS²⁷? (Carpentier, *El arpa* 148).

It is remarkable that Carpentier was seeking in his novel an approach with a new interpretation of the facts of the “discovery” and conquest. Its objective was to reveal the motivations of the past that give meaning to the present Latin America. The author does not challenge what was written by Columbus, but instead he confronts interpretations that historians, such as the Count Roselly de Lorgues and many others defenders such as Claudel, have given to Columbus life and the discovery of America. Carpentier essentially redefines the writings of Columbus. What little rewriting he does is under the umbrella of the poet to reinforce its reinterpretation purposes.

²⁷ Capitalized in the original text.

2.4. Demystifying or Re-mystifying the Admiral.

It is a widely accepted opinion that Carpentier attempted to demystify the figure of Columbus in his novel *The Harp and the Shadow*. We have seen how the Cuban writer acknowledged that he felt outraged by the subjective representation that some writers gave to Columbus. The Vatican's claim of sainthood for Columbus indicates the degree of bias and distortion that could lead up to the enigmatic figure of this historical personage. However, the hagiographic claim of his figure is not new. Father Las Casas was perhaps the first to give a messianic appeal to the figure of Columbus, who he represents as an envoy of providence to spread the Gospel in the newly discovered lands. On the other hand, official history has considered him to be a hero, an adventurer, and a visionary who did change the course of world history. The "discovery" of America served not only to announce a few new territories for the Spanish crown, but it came to give a different dimension to Earth as a whole

However, the question fits very well in which it is the magnitude of that demystification undertaken in the novel by Carpentier. It has been told so far that in *The Harp and the Shadow*, Carpentier demystifies and humanizes Columbus, removes the fantastic and mythical halo which has been surrounded him for centuries, and degrades him to a simple human being. However, Carpentier went beyond that simple representation ranging from myth to the human being. The demystification that Carpentier used in the novel disregards the humanization of the hero and leads it to the other side. Carpentier not only dehumanizes Columbus, but he then mystifies him as a villain and an anti-hero.

Upon taking a look at the approach Carpentier uses in demystifying Columbus, it is easy to recognize that the author was looking for something to lower the hero from his pedestal. Carpentier's Columbus is judged through the eyes of the present, with the illustration of the

twentieth century, where behaviors like promoting slavery are abhorrent. The fictional Columbus is accused of wanting to enslave the natives in the absence of finding gold; he is found guilty of this accusation in the novel and his beatification denied based on a practice that for men of his time was completely legal. In the world and society of that time, slavery was legal and morally accepted, and it continued for more centuries. Yet, presenting Columbus as trying to enslave the natives before the current reader's eyes creates ballast that is hard to remove from their consciences. Carpentier was aware of that and makes his Columbus, on his deathbed, recognize it and feel at least ashamed of it:

He dicho: *de esclavos*. Si, ahora que estoy en los umbrales de la muerte me aterra la palabra, pero en este memorial que releo está bien claramente escrita en letra alta y redonda. Pido licencia para la *mercaduría de esclavos*. (Carpentier, *El arpa* 114)

Carpentier takes liberties with what Columbus had written. As it is recorded in the letter of Santangel, Columbus speaks about enslaving the idolatrous natives that existed in these lands, but not all the indigenous in general. Carpentier's Columbus uses the word cannibals instead of idolatrous, and he makes an ironic use of it. In the novel, Columbus tries to justify his slavery idea by accusing the indigenous as cannibals and savages who would be difficult to accept the gospel. Carpentier generalizes the idea of Columbus and makes it appear as if he wanted to enslave all Indians.

Carpentier's Columbus confesses to readers and pleads guilty to all the deadly sins, with the exception of sloth. He says that he lived in lust and blamed the wine for his strong propensity for the "flesh." Columbus holds that "Noah, who was the ancestor of all navigators, was the first to set bad example, and as wine heats the blood and incites lewd appetites, there was

no brothel in the Mediterranean that didn't know my youthful passion when I took the sea, to my father disgust..." (Carpentier, *The Harp* 39). Carpentier also attacks the purported wisdom and scientific knowledge of Columbus. The novel places him as a man who was only guided by his intuition instead of his scientific expertise: "Although, to tell the truth, I put more faith in my ability to gauge the smell of the winds, decipher the language of the clouds, and interpret the changing colors of the water than in using calculations and instruments as my guide" (Carpentier, *The Harp* 41).

The representation of Columbus as an anti-hero is well structured in the novel. Through the controversial unknown pilot legend and his unsupported romance with Queen Isabella, Carpentier builds a character opposed to the myth we have known. Columbus knew the secret of the new lands in advance and kept it jealously to benefit of his glory. The secret was only told to the Queen on a morning in which, desperate from the indifference of the sovereign about his project, he used it as his last resource for gaining her support. The alleged romance with the Queen is another element that blurs the image of the honest and virtuous Columbus and represents him as willing to use any means in order to achieve his individual purposes.

Precisely reinforcing that negative image, the novel interprets the marriage of Columbus as an interested move in order to pursue entrance to the Court of Portugal and seek support for his discovering endeavor:

Vi a Felipa, la corteje como cumplido caballero que soy. Aunque de joven semblante y lozano cuerpo, era viuda de pocos recursos y con una hija a costas. Pero poco me importo el hecho, recordando que era de buena alcurnia, y la lleve al altar de la iglesia donde nos habíamos conocido en día en que ella cumpliera sus devociones, pensando que, en fin de cuentas, además de ser hembra

placentera, estaba emparentada con los Braganzas y esta era puerta abierta –más de una cosa se me abría en este casamiento- para entrar en la corte de Portugal y armar allí mi tinglado de maravillas. (Carpentier, *The Harp* 65)

Columbus has been an enigmatic historical individual and Carpentier takes advantage of such a condition to mount his demystifying speech. Another example of it is the discussion of the supposed Jew's admiral condition. At first glance, in the letters, journals, and the historical versions of Father Las Casas and Ferdinand Columbus, Columbus appears as a devoted Christian without any discussion. However, in the novel, Columbus does not seem to be a fervent Christian but he insinuates Jewish status:

Fuera de ese día, cuando muy rara vez me acuerdo que soy cristiano, invoco a *Dios y a Nuestro Señor* de un modo que revela el verdadero fondo de una mente más nutrida del Antiguo Testamento que en los Evangelios, más próxima de las iras y perdones del Señor de las Batallas que de las parábolas samaritanas, en un viaje donde, para confesar la verdad, ni Mateo, ni Marcos, ni Lucas, ni Juan, estuvieron con nosotros (Carpentier, *El arpa* 99).

At the same time, Carpentier emphasizes Columbus's lack of spirituality and represents him as a man driven only by earthly goods:

Dejados en España, los Santos Libros no habían cruzado la mar oceánica, no habían arribado a las tierras nuevas, donde no se hizo el intento de bautizar a nadie ni salvar almas tristemente condenadas, por ignorancia, a morir sin conocimiento del significado de una cruz...(Carpentier, *El arpa* 99)

Y aseguro me aseguro a mismo- que muy pronto le veré la cara al Gran Khan. (Eso de Gran Khan suena a oro, oro en polvo, oro en barras, oro en arcas, oro en toneles: dulce música del oro acuñado cayendo, rebrincando, sobre la mesa del banquero: música celestial...). (93)

Carpentier's Columbus is not only an incurable liar, an interested, selfish human being lacking scruples, but he is also represented as a man who was not even successful in the "discovery" enterprise. According to the fictional story, Columbus returned to Spain and tried to convince everyone that his venture was a great triumph for Spain and the monarchy. He achieved this purpose in public, in the middle of the joy for his return. But despite what he describes as the riches in these new lands, he does not bring any important material proof of what he says. The novel's Columbus cannot explain to the Queen, on a romantic night, why the samples of gold he brought to her were so small that it seemed unlikely they came from the large mine that the Admiral said he discovered on his journey. Nor is he able to explain why he did not bring the valuable spices that both Kings had been waiting for. For this reason the Queen expresses her opinion in this respect and describes it in the landscape of his endeavor:

Para ser te franca, se dice, se dice, que para traer siete hombres llorosos, legañosos, enfermos, unas hojas y matas que para nada sirven como no sean para sahumero de leprosos, y un oro que se pierde en el hueco de una muela, no valía la pena gastar dos millones de maravedís... Pero lo tuyo, si prestigio habrá de darnos, será a largo plazo. (Carpentier, *El arpa* 109)

Because of this lack of success the novel refers to, and fully associated with finances, the fictional Columbus conceives the idea of enslaving the indigenous. Carpentier discredits the

discovery and paints Columbus as a man who, in the midst of his feat, was never conscious of it, and was basically a loser.

In the last part of Columbus's confession, Carpentier reinforces the demystification by having Columbus utter phrases of his unfortunate passing through the lives of Native Americans and their legacy of misery and desolation. At this point, Columbus thinks he was a Prince, but "the Prince of Calamities, Prince of Blood, Prince of Tears, Prince of Plagues"(Carpentier, *The Harp* 124) and one of the horsemen of Apocalypse for these lands. He says he was a "discoverer-discovered, uncovered" put in evidence before God and the kings, by his own letters and texts, in which he conceived the "dubious business" he proposed to carry on against theology (Carpentier, *El arpa* 128). With his novel, Carpentier wants Columbus to become the symbol of the desolation that produced the conquest, and to succeed in his purpose, he continues his diatribes:

Pero lo que no habrá de ser olvidado, cuando hayas de rendir cuentas donde no hay recursos de apelación ni de casación, es que con tus armas que tenían treinta siglos de ventaja sobre las que pudieran oponérsete, con tu regalo de enfermedades ignoradas donde arribaste, en tus buques llevaste la codicia y la lujuria, el hambre de riquezas, la espada y la tea, la cadena, el cepo, y la tralla que habría de restallar en la lóbrega noche de las minas, allí donde se te vio llegar como hombre del cielo. (Carpentier, *El arpa* 130)

It is clear that Carpentier did not want to humanize the Admiral. It was his purpose to destroy the myth that had been created around the figure of Columbus as a providential human being. Carpentier attacks the figure of Columbus who has been considered as person who pulled out natives of anonymity and opened the doors of the Gospels to them. However, Carpentier

does not only refute the legend of the Admiral, but he also creates an opposite myth. He uses the same resources of Columbus's defenders and sycophants, and by re-reading the Columbian texts he found keys to build the new legend, which is a new myth of a Columbus of false scruples, greed, and the symbol of a new Holocaust. The Columbus that Carpentier created is as subjective as the one he wants to collapse: he creates a new Columbus who is the prototype of the disaster of conquest.

To achieve the purpose of mystifying Columbus, Carpentier makes use of all instruments of the NLHN. He utilizes the historical counter-discourse, decentralizes the historical vision and uses the fiction to move through the pitfalls that arise along the way. Carpentier created a version of Columbus that is as imbalanced as the one he wanted to combat. Carpentier had no balance between the conquest facts and Columbus's life representation. For Carpentier, Columbus should occupy a special place in the history of the ignominy, and he succeeds in *The Harp and the Shadow*. Columbus could be interpreted in many ways, but Carpentier chose the interpretations that make the Admiral a myth of all the negative things the conquest has signified for the new continent.

2.5. The Author's Ideology in the Representation of Columbus.

Most of the works of what have been called the NLHN have many elements in common to make them belong to this group. The similarities are well demarcated in the structures of the stories, the use of the intertexts, and the intervention of first level historical characters. But these representations of figures such as Columbus, who generally suffer a demystification, are marked by differences, sometimes more subtle than others, making them look dissimilar in each occasion. Carpentier's Columbus representation differs from the Roa Bastos' Columbus in *Vigilia del Almirante*, for instance. Similarly, Columbus is analyzed from a different perspective

by the American author William Carlos Williams in his novel *In American Grain* (1925). Even though the Columbus's representations are all similar in showing him as a "New World narrator" (Juan-Navarro 227), the historic character of these novels is structured in consonance to the ideological vision that each of the authors adheres to. Thus, there is a similarity with what poststructuralist theory of history holds about historical discourse. Resembling what claims to be history, the fictional representation is affected by the particular point of view of who produces the speech.

In particular, in the case of Carpentier, it is known that he was an author who proclaimed and promoted the political commitment of novelists and poets. For Carpentier, art in general had a responsibility to history and politics. At a Yale University colloquium in 1979, Carpentier clearly exposed these concepts. He thought the subject of the artists' engagement with politics is difficult and complex. Nevertheless, he believed changes were approaching and those that were already in progress in Latin America would not allow a writer to contemplate them without taking a political position. For him, history affects our lives too much; it is extremely difficult to be apolitical. In addition, he criticized those who argued that political commitment separates artists from their aesthetic mission (Gonzalez 46). To rebuke them, he mentioned great works of art:

Y la pintura que más enorgullece al Museo de Arte de Nueva York, que tenemos aquí al lado, es el cuadro más político del siglo XX, que es el *Guernica* de Picasso. Y las dos piezas capitales de Goya –además de *Las Brujas*- No son *El dos de mayo*, *El tres de mayo* y el cuadro de *El miedo* que le fue inspirado por el éxodo y los horrores de la guerra? Y no es *El infierno* de Dante un vasto panfleto político, y la mejor poesía imprecatoria, violenta, fuerte, que da Francia no son

Las trágicas de Agrippa d'Aubigne, en los momentos de la guerra de religión? Y algunos de los mejores poemas de Víctor Hugo están en *Los castigos*. Rara es la gran obra que sea apolítica. (González 46)

At the end of his discussion at Yale University, Carpentier posed a question related to the artists' political commitment: Engage with whom? His answer was quite subjective. He stated they should "try to be with those who have the reason." (Gonzalez 45) According to what he expressed, he conceived history as a gigantic struggle between the good people against the bad people. The latter were an oppressive minority and the good an oppressed majority: "The whole life has been so; the history has been so. And our reactions, in addition, against that, is always to be beside the oppressed. It is to say, with the good" (Gonzalez 45). Carpentier managed a Manichaeian discourse which is evident in his artistic work and especially in *The Harp and the Shadow*.

Carpentier's commitment to politics was unchanged toward the Cuban revolution and the Marxist movements. He was firmly convinced that Latin America would revolve irreversibly to the left. Thus, according to his convictions, Latin American history has been nothing more than a class struggle. Unlike other nations that had dynastic and religious wars, such as in Europe and Asia, Carpentier said that in America the fight has always been a struggle between classes that were opposed. Initially the struggle was between the conqueror and the conquered. The latter who were the primitive inhabitants of America. Later the dispute was between the colonizer and the new Creole class. Finally the dispute was between the Creole class that won independence and a middle class that began to exhibit its true dimension at the beginning of the twentieth century (Gonzalez 32). In Carpentier's opinion, this last stage, the same he was living in, was the

decisive phase of these fights that would open the door to socialism, which was already underway in Cuba, since 1959.

In *The Harp and the Shadow*, Carpentier permits readers to see his political thoughts. The work is a rejection to colonization and a tirade against the institutions that represent colonization, such as the European and American governments and the Catholic Church. Carpentier perceived the mystification of Columbus as a means of colonizers and bourgeois to justify their actions, and thus he conceived and projected that idea in his novel. According to the imperial and bourgeois representation, Columbus came to American soil to bring progress and announce the Gospels. The religious factor, attacked crudely in Carpentier's novel, is perhaps the most prevalent influence nowadays. It is true that in current Latin America one can find a clear conscience and opinion about the negative effects of the conquest and its subsequent society and economy, but there is no such unanimity with regard to the Catholic religion reference. Latin America communities are loyal to the Catholic faith; this was seen by the character Mastai in *The Harp*, arriving in Chile, and likewise by Latin Americans, more than a century later.

Carpentier, following a Marxist model, thought the history of America was truncated with the arrival of the Europeans and therefore a class struggle began. According to Carpentier, any kind of colonization is unacceptable, even that which may bring progress, such as economic development, drift in exploitation and oppression of conquered people. Carpentier, at the Yale colloquium, illustrated this idea with the example of Napoleon invading Spain:

¿Quién niega que los oficiales de Napoleón que invadieron a España en 1808 no llevaban ideas más avanzadas que las ideas que prevalecían en España en aquella época? Sin embargo, nos estremecemos de emoción ante *El dos de mayo* de Goya,

y ante *Los fusilamientos de la Moncloa* de Goya, porque Goya mismo, que era afrancesado, y que hubiera estado al lado de los generales de Napoleón, entendió que eso de aceptar ideas progresistas a base de una colonización era una cosa intolerable y reaccionó como reaccionó. (González 45)

Marxist supporters, such as Carpentier, thought Latin America resumed its own history once they installed the Cuban revolution on the Caribbean island. This event somehow ended in the island the struggle of class that had been established since the conquest. The wars of independence did not mark the end of this battle for Latin America since the Creoles came only to supplant the colonizers. Only the Socialist Revolution would mark a new beginning in Latin America.

Therefore the rant of *The Harp and the Shadow* is against what Columbus represents, that it is no more than the colonization and the values of the bourgeois and capitalist society that the author rejects. Carpentier's representation of Columbus is the opposite of the one made for the defenders of colonial society and the bourgeois capitalist. For this reason, *The Harp and the Shadow* attacks the Admiral without giving value to any of his virtues. Carpentier tries to reject the myth of Columbus, which the defenders of those bourgeois values have built, and in passing, demolishes what Columbus has represented for centuries. Carpentier did not believe in the capitalist democracies that were being installed in Latin America in the twentieth century. He viewed them as a continuation of the old scheme that implanted conquest and that had evolved to a new stage with the label of democracy. Carpentier believed in the virtues of a Socialist Government that represents the self-determination of the Latin American peoples; this is why his Columbus, an imperialist character, has no virtues to highlight and his feat is nothing more than the beginning of a cultural, human, and economic Holocaust for Latin

America. The conquest of America was no more than an event that confiscated the people's right to the construction of their own history.

It is interesting then to see how the perspectives of the authors of the NLHN who have written about Columbus differ with respect to their ideological convictions. In the case of Roa Bastos, for example, in *Vigilia del almirante*, he exposes an ambivalent view facing the figure of Columbus. Roa Bastos demystifies Columbus also but considers him from the perspective of the time in which he lived. In other words, Roa Bastos recognizes that the results of the conquest and colonization were not beneficial for Latin America, but Columbus was doing what a man of his time was legally and morally permitted to do.

The demystification of *Vigilia* is slowly measured and balanced. Roa Bastos's Columbus confesses his guilt in the conquest, but at the same time he justified himself as a man of the time in which he lived. This Columbus also recognizes his propensity towards gold and richness, but at the same time justifies the conquest as a sincere endeavor to eradicate Islam, which he believed he was going to find in the new land. Roa Bastos does not remystify Columbus as Carpentier does. He does not convey Columbus from the extreme of being a hero to the extreme of phony. *Vigilia*, as his author announces, attempts to recover "the tasting of a common man" that inadvertently produced the biggest cosmographic and cultural event in the two latest millennia of universal history (Roa 11). Roa Bastos acknowledges that this event changed everything, including the native people who today carry in their blood that "another" who colonized them (11). The story of *Vigilia* is written, as his author says:

con amor-odio filial, con humor, con ironía, con el desenfado cimarrón del criollo, cuyo estigma virtual son la huella del parricidio y del incesto, su idolatría del poder, su heredada vocación etnocida y colonial, su alma dúplice. (Roa 11)

This dual vision Roa Bastos gives the character of Columbus is influenced by his political experiences as well. Roa Bastos lived in exile for many years outside his homeland because of the dictatorships that followed in his country. He abandoned Paraguay in 1947 and was exiled to Argentina, a place that he left when it became a dictatorship in 1976. As he noted, Latin Americans coexist with traces of the colonization and its idolatry of power has made many countries institute creole dictatorships to the detriment of democracy. Roa Bastos, who declared not to be communist or Marxist, defended the role of democracy as a helpful inheritance of the European influence. In his style and vision, there is not a desire to break completely with the past but to reflect upon it in order to reconcile with the past that is already an intrinsic part of Latin America. He does not want, like Carpentier, to fracture all ties with history, he wants a truth that is more consistent to understand the past and the present to think about the future more clearly. *Vigilia* does not intend to impose a vision in the mind of readers as Carpentier attempts to do.

In Carpentier's concept, Latin America must recompose its history. For this reason, the Cuban revolution acted as a vehicle of cultural revival and self-determination of the colonized nations. The re-mystification of Columbus in *The Harp* by Carpentier fully identifies with his Marxist ideology. Columbus and the colonial and bourgeois societies that he represented, must unveil their true intentions and purposes. For Carpentier, socialism was the formula to return self determination to Latin America, and he never opposed the excesses that its application began to show in the Cuban model. In this regard, some voices, such as Caroline Houde, aim to say that in some moments Carpentier shows his political sympathies through the fictional Columbus. In her doctoral thesis, she suggests that when Columbus speaks of his excesses in the conquest, he moves it from a utopian event to its execution. But at the same time

he is sending a message justifying the excesses of the Cuban Revolution. Carpentier's Columbus says he must

Entregarme en palabras y decir mucho más de lo que quisiera decir - porque (y esto no se si lo podrá entender bien un fraile...) a menudo el hacer necesita de impulsos, de arrestos, de excesos (admito la palabra) que mal se avienen, hecho lo hecho, conseguido lo que había de conseguirse, con las palabras que, a la postre, adornadas en el giro, deslastradas de negruras, inscriben un nombre en el mármol de los siglos. (Carpentier, *El arpa* 43)

The disproportionate bias of Carpentier condemns his work to the equal or similar fate of the representation he wanted to derive. Taking the argument of Forgues, who believes Carpentier in *The Harp and the Shadow*, handled himself more like a writer-ideologue, perhaps too aware of the importance of literature in a continent still subjected to foreign domination than as a writer-historian (Forgues 101). This political condition of the author permeates his work, placing Carpentier's representation of Columbus at the same level as the hagiographic hipotexts that served him as inspiration and that he despised. In the work of Carpentier, Columbus is a less than credible figure and unreal as he was represented by his sycophants. However, the excesses that can reprimand Carpentier's novel from the historical and ideological point of view give value and enhancement to the literary work. The irony, sarcastic humor, parody, and other artistic elements Carpentier used in his novel are the expressions of a master of writing who has used his art to express his political positions.

3. Conclusion

Great debates have surrounded historical novels from their beginnings in the eighteenth century. As a hybrid genre that shares elements of both fiction and reality, varying opinions have weighed in on its elements. The validity of these works of art has been challenged since their roots are primarily in another discipline, which seems opposite to its artistic character. The freedom of the novel writers was for years seen as in contradiction to the formalism of historical research methodology.

Although history has been seen as a discipline intended to rigorously reconstruct the past, its materials as well as the subjectivity of some historians have not always allowed it to achieve that goal. Therefore, an internal debate has gone on among the philosophers of history about the discipline's validity. It is clear at this time that we cannot understand historiography as an entirely objective discipline whose function is to reconstruct the past while mediating any kind of prejudice. The classical view of history was rigorously contested; currently, influenced by postmodern theories, the discipline presents a different vision of past, which is a more critical view of its absolute truths. It is noticeable that new historians also seek to analyze and rescue other voices. A current trend among Latin American historians attempts to review and rewrite the past to recover forgotten perspectives.

This analysis has looked at how the Latin American historical novel has evolved in the same direction as historiography. Initially, the classic Latin American historical novel had a romantic and reconstructive view of the past. History was used in these novels primarily to recreate a bygone era that served as a backdrop to a story with fictional characters. But at that time, the intention of the historical novel was distant from rewriting the past. There was no critical gaze of history, but instead only a reconstruction of it for purely artistic purposes.

Contrary to this idea, the NLHN seeks to look at the past from the perspective of the present. Its objective goes far beyond the purely aesthetic. In it, authors challenge official history, looking for its fissures and contradictions. Its purpose is not to reconstruct history; its goal is to amend it, and what is even more relevant, to reinterpret it. With this new approach, Latin American historical novel writers are tasked with finding new meanings for the past. Generally, these writers do not challenge the truth of the historical facts, but instead, they challenge their interpretation. The primary function of this new historical novel is ideological since its purpose is far from the strictly artistic. To make this new interpretation of the past, they use the facts and documents of official history as a starting point and intertwine them with the fictitious. The NLHN seeks to legitimize its speech based on the historical documents. It only alters the historical facts in order to create an effect on the consciousness of the reader.

In the historical novels discussed in this work, this interpretive trend of the historical novel has been noted, as the authors make use of texts that served as the basis for official history. Diaries, letters, the testament of Columbus, the writings of Father Las Casas, and other authorized documents of the time were used by the authors to build the plot and their characters in the novels. In Carpentier's book, *The Harp and the Shadow*, Columbus is depicted as a cynical liar. The author relies on the official accounts, which he provides with a new interpretation. The ideological vision of Carpentier is embodied in the course of the work. He demystifies Columbus to question and deny the value of the "discovery", since he only sees it as a capitalist endeavor. Carpentier's portrayal of Columbus is opposed to the ones made by Columbus's capitalist and Catholics defenders. Carpentier, a recognized supporter of socialism and the Cuban revolution, created his Columbus characterization in order to criticize what capitalism represent. Carpentier's Columbus is a dogmatic representation against the bourgeois values and

mercantilism. It is evident that this novelist considers that the numerous problems of current Latin America are a result of this unfortunate event. For Carpentier, the discovery interrupted the normal course of the history of the indigenous people and condemned them to underdevelopment and slavery.

A more humanized representation of Columbus is found in the novel *Vigilia del almirante* by Roa Bastos. Even though this author also demystified Columbus, the novel's ultimate purpose was to reflect on the past and future of Latin America. Roa Bastos, unlike Carpentier, did not profess radical opposition to capitalism. His vital struggle was against dictatorships in his country and the continent. His political vision, confirming the hypothesis of this investigation, led him to create a Columbus character endowed with sins and virtues at the same time. His balanced characterization of Columbus reflects his more moderate political point of view.

As a last thought, it is important to state that the Latin American historical novel uses fiction to shed a new light on the past. Its cultivators are aware that it is difficult to know with certainty what happened in the past, but it is possible to interpret or reinterpret the documents that serve as a basis for the official history. From this purely ideological standpoint, the NLHN becomes a provocative voice for understanding the past of this part of the world. Its purpose is not to displace history but to complement and reinterpret it from a different perspective, giving voice to those who have never had one.

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