

Conquest 2.0: Rewriting Colonial History in Abel Posse and William Ospina

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*El 12 de octubre de 1492 fue descubierta Europa
y los europeos por los animales y hombres de los reinos selváticos*
Abel Posse

The story of the conquest of America is well-known. Numerous letters, chronicles, and diaries of explorers provide a rich archive of primary source material. Yet, by their very nature, primary sources are highly one-sided accounts. In this case, the primary source material almost exclusively represents the point of view of the conquerors themselves. Despite the possible contributions of other archives from different genres (the so-called “Historical Novel” [Novela Histórica: NH], for example, the works of Sir Walter Scott¹), we end up with a single perspective on colonial history, predominantly skewed towards those

¹ See also Maxwell, “Inundations of time: Scott’s reinvention of the historical novel”, 59-112.

in power. In response to this imbalance, a movement shaped by writers and critics such as Fernando Aínsa and Seymour Menton, and developed over time, offers a more nuanced view of events by highlighting the contributions of the “New Historical Novel” (Nueva Novela Histórica: NNH). The movement integrates previously silenced voices, such as those of indigenous people, African slaves, mestizo (mixed-race) people, women, or even the point of view of plants and nature, presenting alternative versions of the history of conquest through the lens of postcolonial, gender and environmental studies.

This chapter is an attempt to present a concise discussion of the New Historical Novel as a conceptual framework, before analyzing the most significant publications of two authors who have exerted a lasting influence on this subgenre: the first work of the historical fiction trilogy by the Argentinean writer Abel Posse (*Daimón* [1978]) and the Colombian William Ospina’s *Ursúa* (2005)². Through comparative close reading, the chapter offers an innovative perspective on Latin American colonial history by identifying how both authors rewrite and “actualize” America’s colonial past, thus engaging in the creation of an alternative historiography.

Not only are both works firmly rooted in the New Historical Novel subgenre, they also have points of contact while differing in their aesthetic approaches: although both share a similar spatio-temporal geography and cover the same significant historical events and figures (namely, the colonization of the Amazonian region in search of El Dorado and the characters of Pedro de Ursúa, Inés de Atienza or Lope de Aguirre), they do so in different artistic ways. Both trilogies take into account several of the main characteristics of the New Historical Novel proposed by Seymour Menton, but Abel Posse applies the peculiarities

² The editions used in this essay are: Posse, 1993 [1978] & Ospina, 2008a [2005].

proposed by Fernando Aínsa (anachrony, irony and parody) to a greater degree and in a more extreme way. Through analysis of these and other narrative techniques, this article will examine the extent to which both novels succeed (or not) in “amending” history and, in this way, intervene in the construction and dissemination of hegemonic and Eurocentric narratives about the Americas’ colonial past.

Conceptual framework: The New Historical Novel (NNH) and its main characteristics in Abel Posse and William Ospina

This article draws on the main features established by Fernando Aínsa in “La reescritura de la historia en la nueva narrativa latinoamericana” (1991: 13-31), by Seymour Menton in *La Nueva Novela Histórica de la América Latina* (1993) and by Beatriz Aracil Varón in *Abel Posse: de la crónica al mito de América* (2004), as well as considering approaches based on postcolonial, environmental and gender studies.

According to Aracil Varón, the New Historical Novel (NNH) represents the desire to offer “the other side of History” and new interpretations of the “conflictive periods of the past” (2004: 46, the translation is ours). Both Aínsa (1991: 13-31) and Menton (1993: 29-38) agree that the NNH boom can be located primarily in the 1970s with emblematic works such as *Terra nostra* (1975) by Carlos Fuentes or *El arpa y la sombra* (1978) by Alejo Carpentier³.

Regardless, both scholars identify a main series of characteristics for the NNH (while recognizing that such characteristics are malleable). Aínsa (1991: 18-30) refers to eight features; whereas Menton (1993: 42-46) defines six of them. In this respect, we

³ Menton even sees in another earlier novel by the latter author the beginning of the subgenre: *El reino de este mundo* (1949).

also agree on eight main points, summarized below in order to provide a common frame of reference. Each of the features will be illustrated with examples from the novels that serve as this article's objects of investigation.

(1) *The new historical novel is characterized by a re-reading of the official historiographical discourse, whose legitimacy is questioned:* As mentioned above, the official documents of the conquistadors were often one-sided and incomplete, since they primarily represented the view of those in power: that is, a white, male, and Catholic view of the facts in question. Although there are writings that describe and denounce the mistreatment of the indigenous population —as is the case, for example, with the texts of Fray Pedro de Córdoba, Fray Antón de Montesinos or Fray Bartolomé de las Casas (see also Serna 2012 and Ordóñez Díaz 2021: 108)— they are still rather scarce and represent a colonial gaze of events (through the lens of Spanish missionaries). The main intention of the NNH is, therefore, to question, correct and, as far as possible, rectify those official and “incontrovertible” discourses.

Although Ospina's entire trilogy covers the conquest of the Amazon and the search for El Dorado, only Posse's first volume (*Daimón*) deals with the same event. The sequels —*Los perros del paraíso* and *El largo atardecer del caminante*— focus on other conquest stories, specifically those of Christopher Columbus and Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca. Nevertheless, both cases (Posse and Ospina) are not repetitions or even facsimiles of the primary sources and the official historical discourse, but re-readings of them. It could be argued that there is thus a tendency in these NNH to include a multiperspectivism and, above all, marginal and previously silenced narrative voices.

In *Daimón*, for example, Lope de Aguirre is not presented to us as an exclusively triumphant and civilized colonizer, but, on the contrary, as a caricature of a conquistador: “*Lope de Aguirre* (1513?-1561). Denominóse el Tirano, el Traidor, el Peregrino. Antiimperialista, declaró guerra desde la selva amazónica, rodea-

do de monos, a Felipe II, fundando de hecho ‘el primer territorio libre de América’ [...]” (Posse 1993: 9)⁴. Although Aguirre is indeed historically described as both a tyrant and a rebel against the Spanish crown, Posse takes his attributes to an extreme in order to stimulate a dialogue with historiography about this historical figure. Therefore, the exaggeration and parody serve, on the one hand, to demythify the figure of the conquistador and, on the other, to humanize the character despite his brutality, as will be shown later (see Scherman Filer 2003: 41).

In *Ursúa*, Ospina achieves this re-reading of the official discourse by switching the perspective: the character who tells Ursúa’s story is not the conqueror himself, but one of his vassals. Specifically, the narrator, Cristóbal de Aguilar (based on Juan de Castellanos), is a mestizo who recognizes that his own version of history will never be published because it is not the point of view of a pure white conquistador: “Mi vida me da vértigo, y no quisiera ver lo que siguió, lo que tal vez un día, cuando me sienta fuerte y a salvo, intentaré poner en estas páginas hechas contra el olvido, que no cruzarán el mar para pedir licencia en los estrados de la corte, ni pasarán la prueba de los celosos lectores del rey, y que por ello no llegarán jamás a las imprentas de Madrid o Sevilla” (Ospina 2008a: 428)⁵.

(2) *A multiplicity of points of view prevents a single historical truth: There is a strong attempt to give a voice to those who previously had none.* That multiperspectivism (the inclusion of different

⁴ “Lope de Aguirre (1513?-1561). He was known as the Tyrant, the Traitor, the Pilgrim. Anti-imperialist, he declared war from the Amazon jungle, surrounded by monkeys, on Philip II, founding, in fact ‘the first free territory of America’ [...]”, all translations of quotations from this volume are ours.

⁵ “My life gives me vertigo, and I would not like to see what followed, what perhaps one day, when I feel strong and safe, I will try to write on these pages made against oblivion, which will not cross the sea to ask for license in the courts, nor will they pass the test of the King’s jealous readers, and therefore will never reach the printing houses of Madrid or Sevilla”.

voices involved in the conquest but also —or especially— those that were affected by colonization) goes even further. It may include, for example, mestizo (mixed-race) people or African slaves who were involuntarily entangled in the colonizing process and had to conquer and civilize territories against their will, but can also find expression in the voices of the indigenous population or of women who have been abused or otherwise exploited.

Posse's *Daimón*, for example, uses a multiplicity of viewpoints. While we are given the perspective of the conquistador Lope de Aguirre, the general voice of the under-represented is also present, even if this is often an indirect point of view that is not always verbalized by the characters themselves, but arises implicitly from how the conqueror treats the marginal character(s). For example, through Nicéforo the mental and physical mistreatment of black slaves is emphasized (“¡Nicéforo, mierda!, ¡pingajo!, ¿dónde te has metido?” [28])⁶, or from the eyes of the Amazonian women the loss of their own lands becomes evident (“[...] presintió que esos hombrecillos, feroces guardianes de su propia infelicidad, poco a poco se adueñarían de los grandes ríos, de los montes, de la inmensa selva” [82])⁷. Indeed, a key quote from the novel demonstrates how historiography is turned upside down and illuminated from a completely new angle: “El 12 de octubre de 1492 fue descubierta Europa y los europeos por los animales y hombres de los reinos selváticos” (31)⁸. History, according to the novel, is staged in such a way as to suggest that not only did Europeans discover America —on the contrary— indigenous people themselves discovered Europe and, above all, the Europeans. Moreover, the

⁶ “Nicéforo, you rag! Dammit, where have you been?”

⁷ “[...] she sensed that these little men, fierce guardians of their own unhappiness, would gradually take over the great rivers, the mountains and the immense jungle”.

⁸ “On October 12, 1492, Europe and the Europeans were discovered by the animals and men of the jungle kingdoms”.

conquistadors' ignorance of the jungle and the habitat ("¿Por qué no andáis desnudos con estos calores?" [75])⁹, as well as their extractivist, inappropriate and brutal activities ("¿Para qué necesitáis tanto oro?" [74]; "¿Para qué tantas armas y armaduras?" [75])¹⁰, show the indigenous people, and the reader, that the Europeans are the true uncivilized savages.

(3) *The deconstruction of myths and of stereotypical imaginaries*: This multifaceted rewriting should also lead, as a further consequence, to the deconstruction of myths and the dismantling of stereotypes disseminated by official narratives. Aínsa names as an example the novel *José Trigo* (1966) by Fernando del Paso, which deconstructs the myths that nurture and define the "stereotyped" image of a Mexico based on historical data that, although partly true, the passage of time and the multiple points of view have revealed to be false. Fifty years after the Mexican Revolution, its content cannot be the same as it was at its origins. History must be re-read in the simple perspective of elapsed time (Aínsa 1991: 20, the free translation is ours).

But also, both Posse and Ospina succeed (at least in part) in deconstructing myths and stereotypes created over time through partial and incomplete official documents. In addition to the subversion of the dichotomy of "civilization" and "barbarism", they also question the idea that the conquest was carried out solely by white conquistadors:

También por eso los denuncian los clérigos y los escarmientan sus amos. Esas opiniones parecen justificar el tormento, son he-rejías que la Iglesia no sabe perdonar. Pero en mi corazón siempre pude entenderlas, ya que de un modo secreto yo también formo parte de su bando y toda mi vida he vivido la discordia de ser blanco de piel y de costumbres pero indio de condición.

⁹ "Why don't you walk around naked in this heat?"

¹⁰ "What do you need so much gold for?", "Why so many weapons and so much armor?"

Aunque mi padre logró ocultar mi origen, el hecho de que mi madre fuera una nativa de las islas, aunque me educó como a un cristiano desde la infancia y me llevó al estudio de su amigo Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, y nos hizo creer a todos que mi madre había muerto de fiebres, una dama española sepultada con suspiros y campanas en las colinas fúnebres de Curaçao, y que mi madre india era solamente nuestra criada, a partir de cierto momento ya no ignoré que en mi sangre estaban en guerra el dios que sangra en el árbol y el dios que quema el firmamento; que en mi corazón se mezclaban y se confundían la dulce madre blanca, la diosa que es un disco en el cielo y esa otra diosa de caoba que desaparece con la tormenta¹¹. (Ospina 2008a: 313)

The identity conflict exemplified in this passage speaks to the complex racial past of the Americas (see Imoberdorf 2021). It is well known that the conquest of America was mainly masculine and included, as part of that colonization, (overwhelmingly forced) sexual encounters between male conquerors and indigenous women. The resulting population of mestizo (mixed-race)

¹¹ “This is also why they are denounced by the clergy and reprimanded by their masters. These opinions seem to justify torment, they are heresies that the Church does not know how to forgive. But in my heart I could always understand them, since in a secret way I also form part of their side and all my life I have lived the discord of being white in skin and customs but Indian in condition. Although my father managed to hide my origin, the fact that my mother was a native of the islands, although he educated me as a Christian from infancy and took me to the study of his friend Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, and made us all believe that my mother had died of fevers, a Spanish lady buried with sighs and bells in the funeral hills of Curaçao, and that my Indian mother was only our maid, from a certain moment I was no longer unaware that in my blood were at war the God who bleeds in the tree and the God who sets the heavens on fire; that in my heart were mixed and confused the sweet white mother, the goddess who is a disc in the sky and that other mahogany goddess who disappears in the storm”. In order not to distort the translation of the original text, the word ‘Indian’ is retained throughout the article. However, it refers to ‘indigenous people’ in the context of the colonial era.

people suggests that America's conquerors did not always conform to the image of the completely Catholic and white conquistador. In this sense, Ospina at least manages to contemplate the colonization process from an alternative and "mestizo" perspective. There is also only one instance in *El país de la canela* where the mestizo narrator allows the *indio* to speak over several pages (2008b: 241-44). Nevertheless, neither Ospina nor Posse manage to narrate the conquest of the Amazon region from an exclusively indigenous point of view or to lend them a stronger voice, which, according to Ordóñez Díaz (2021: 43), is probably partly due to the fact that, unlike the Catholic chroniclers, the indigenous peoples used orality rather than alphabetic writing to pass on their knowledge and collective memory. The lack of those perspectives would also explain why some myths and stereotypes can't be completely deconstructed.

(4) *The distortion of history through the juxtaposition of different times, anachronisms and exaggerations*: It is precisely this relationship between past and present that plays a significant role for the NNH. Although events are still considered in their context, the NNH differentiates and considers historical facts in the light of the latest knowledge. Thus, texts can be characterized by more or less extreme anachronisms and sometimes even cover several centuries (e.g. *Daimón* by Abel Posse).

Therefore, another feature of the NNH is that the narrative does not follow a chronological and linear narrative time. The authors use a superposition of different tenses (past, present and even future) and of anachronisms (analepsis and prolepsis) in order to complicate the traditional telos of history and narrative. For example, *Ursúa*'s narrator retrospectively tells us in the present the story of the past ("Y es allí donde aparezco yo en esta historia, [...] [409])¹² and where, consequently, there are continuous jumps in time (see Segura Acevedo 2017: 245). Posse's

¹² "And that's where I appear in this story, [...]"

trilogy, and *Daimón* in particular, constitutes an extreme case of anachrony. In this first work, the conquistador Aguirre even remains in the world for half a millennium (“Aguirre se sentía como un niño. Había estado 500 años en tierra, había perdido todo sentido de la realidad” [278])¹³.

This strategy is not gratuitous; rather, the disruption of linear time poses, as a formal device, a conflictive interpretation of the colonial past and its consequences for the present and the future. This is what Fernando Aínsa calls the “contemporaneity of the past” and which, in *Daimón*, constitutes the axis of the novel. While, in principle, this work is part of a series of historical novels, its purpose actually goes much further —Posse imagines Lope de Aguirre dreaming of a vast American empire not only independent of Spain, but in which Spain itself has been conquered. Moreover, Lope de Aguirre crosses the ages and lives through four centuries of American history: “El Viejo Aguirre contempla, condenado a ser espectador, cómo América es saqueada, sabe que ‘detrás de Orellana’ tenían que llegar ‘los casimires’ con el comercio de los ‘gringos’. Manaos es la capital de su perdido ‘Reino de los Marañoses’. La ópera de mármoles italianos importados que se levanta en la capital del estado de Amazonas es el símbolo de la alienación de América adorando un dios ostentoso” (Aínsa 1991: 23-24)¹⁴.

It is precisely this confrontation with the past that forms one of the most emblematic characteristics of the NNH subgenre, since it does not repeat what is written about colonial history

¹³ “Aguirre felt like a child. He had been on earth for 500 years, he had lost all sense of reality”.

¹⁴ “Old Aguirre contemplates, condemned to be a spectator, how America is plundered; he knows that ‘behind Orellana’ the ‘casimires’ had to arrive with the trade of the ‘gringos’. Manaus is the capital of his lost ‘Kingdom of the Marañoses’. The opera house of imported Italian marble that stands in the capital of the state of Amazonas is the symbol of the alienation of an America who worships an ostentatious God”.

but rather questions, reinterprets and, above all, rewrites it in order to provoke, in the best of cases, changes in the present. By taking it to an extreme, Abel Posse expresses a particularly strong critique when he shows that due to colonization, the Amazon has become more of a “gambling zone”, which large multinational companies take advantage of to fill their bags and enrich themselves. In re-writing the past, both authors seek to eliminate historical distance, that is, the distance that exists between historical truth and reality.

(5) *Fictionalization and exaggeration of historical figures*: In the NNH, important historical figures are often portrayed in a fictionalized way and not as they were described in official documents. This is done by, among other things, indirectly describing them from the point of view of an underrepresented voice, or sometimes even exaggerating or parodying them.

The fictionalization of historical characters also troubles the difference between reality and historical truth. In *Ursúa*, the colonizer of the same name is not presented to us as an insurmountable and heroic conqueror, but as one with weaknesses and who, at certain moments, fails. In contrast to the perfect image of the colonizers, as found in certain official documents and primary sources, Ospina characterizes Ursúa as more of an anti-hero, who, towards the end of the first novel of the trilogy, is expelled from the very lands he had previously conquered: “De acuerdo con un bando clavado en la puerta de las iglesias, iba a ser juzgado por violar gravemente las Nuevas Leyes de Indias que era su deber implantar en la Sabana. [...] Y Teresa añadió que ante el tamaño de las acusaciones Ursúa corría el riesgo de ser ejecutado” (Ospina 2008a: 362)¹⁵. This, as previ-

¹⁵ “According to a proclamation nailed to the door of the churches, he was to be tried for gravely violating the New Laws of the Indies, which it was his duty to implement in the Savannah. [...] And Teresa added that in view of the magnitude of the accusations, Ursúa ran the risk of being executed”.

ously in Posse, contributes to a demythification and, to a certain extent, humanization of the conqueror: one who is not an untouchable hero, but must suffer setbacks, exclusion and even fear for his life. However, as shown toward the end of the novel and in the sequels, Ursúa does not let these defeats stop him, but rather is even more spurred on to conquer the Amazon as an expedition leader.

Daimón once again takes this trait to the extreme: in addition to fictionalization, Posse exaggerates the conquistador's traits and plays with the historically widespread image of Aguirre as a dissident figure (instead of a character loyal to the Crown), as a tyrant (and not as a colonizer), as someone without scruples—killing his own people and even his daughter—and as a megalomaniac and demonic character who, on top of dominating Latin America and Spain, tries to conquer the whole world (see Posse 1993: 9). Although, as stated above, it is historically assumed that those attributes were also mostly true (see also Segura Acevedo 2017: 164, Scherman Filer 2003: 25-26), it is precisely this exaggerated portrayal of Aguirre that attempts to challenge historiography and, moreover, partially expresses the human side of the conqueror when he realizes towards the end of the novel (at an already advanced age) what great harm he has caused with the colonization process he has overseen—a representation which contrasts with his often exclusively tyrannical portrayal. By almost caricaturing the figure of Aguirre and giving him repentant traits towards the end, Posse manages, to a certain extent, to rectify the image of the conqueror.

It should not be forgotten that it is clear that Aguirre was seen as an enemy to the Catholic Monarchs: while Ursúa's behavior was characterized by a certain nobility, collaboration and loyalty to the Crown, Aguirre was seen as a rebel, a traitor and a particularly cruel conqueror. But his deeds were no worse than those of others, with the difference being that Aguirre also turned against his own people and carried out murders of white Christians (Heufemann-Barría 2012: 225-27),

even killing Ursúa himself, as the following excerpt from Aguirre's letter to King Philip II shows:

In the year 1559, the marquis of Cañete entrusted the expedition of the river of Amazonas to Pedro de Ursua, a Navarrese, or rather a Frenchman, who delayed the building of his vessels until 1560. These vessels were built in the province of the Motilones, which is a wet country, and, as they were built in the rainy season, they came to pieces, and we therefore made canoes, and descended the river. We navigated the most powerful river in Peru, and it seemed to us that we were in a sea of fresh water. We descended the river for three hundred leagues. This bad governor was capricious, vain, and inefficient, so that we could not suffer it, and we gave him a quick and certain death (Simón 1971: 193).

Ordóñez Díaz (2021: 105) interprets this violence of Aguirre and the Marañones as the inverse reflection of the violence of the conquistadors against the natives. So, in sum, it can be said that the characters of Ursúa and Aguirre should not be seen as having exclusively antagonistic and Manichean traits (good vs. evil), but rather in a more nuanced way, as Julio Caro Baroja recognizes: "Lope de Aguirre was something more than an insane madman and [...] Pedro de Ursúa was a little less of an exemplary gentleman than what is said and repeated" (Caro Baroja 2006: 80, translation is ours).

(6) *Metafiction and the narrator's comments on the creation process*: Metafiction, commonly understood as a narrator's reflections and commentaries on the process of creation and writing itself, can be achieved, for example, with the help of meta-reflexive considerations in parentheses, in glosses or as footnotes, and so on, depending on the work.

In the case of *Ursúa*, Ospina writes:

Faltaba mucho para que Ursúa y yo nos encontráramos pero repito que parecíamos intercambiar nuestros caminos. Él buscando la

selva, yo viajando a los reinos de Europa, con la creencia ingenua de que allí olvidaría las violencias de mi juventud... Y casi tengo que refrenar mi mano para que respete el orden de la narración, para que siga contando la vida de Ursúa y no ceda a la tentación de contar mis propias aventuras¹⁶. (Ospina 2008a: 131)

This quote demonstrates how the author performs an exercise in metadiscourse. Cristóbal de Aguilar's self-reflection on the writing process might at first seem rather naïve, but in fact it shows us the hierarchization and imbalance of colonial powers: the mestizo narrator is still not allowed to tell his own story; quite the opposite, he has to narrate that of the white European colonizer.

This metadiscourse is implemented mostly in the form of comments by the narrator. In Ospina's work, for example, one can find a particularly high number of metareflections in parentheses: "(Y por esta manera desbocada de adelantarme a los hechos podrá advertir quien lea estos cuadernos, si es que alguien llega a leerlos, que difícil es contar las cosas en orden y en secuencia, cuando todo el pasado se acumula simultáneo en la mente)" (Ospina 2008a: 432)¹⁷. In doing so, the narrator comments on his own writing process, as in the quotation above, while also implicitly or explicitly adopting a critical stance on the events in question; for example, by highlighting the inferiority of his ancestry and the unequal power relations that this

¹⁶ "It was a long time before Ursúa and I met, but I repeat that we seemed to exchange our paths. He seeking the jungle, I traveling to the kingdoms of Europe, with the naïve belief that there I would forget the violence of my youth... And I almost have to restrain my hand to respect the order of the narration, so that I continue to tell the life of Ursúa and do not give in to the temptation to tell my own adventures".

¹⁷ "(And by this unbridled way of anticipating the facts, anyone who reads these notes, if anyone reads them at all, will realize how difficult it is to tell things in order and in sequence, when all the past is accumulated simultaneously in the mind)".

implies. In the same way, Posse resorts to parentheses for his meta-reflections, but he also makes use of deliberately inserted footnotes. In the following example, he points out (again ironically), that the “discovery” of Machu Picchu can only be falsely attributed to the American explorer Professor Hiram Bingham (“i. Véase *The Discovery of Machu Picchu*, por el Prof. Hiram Bingham, en el *Harper's Magazine*, número de abril de 1913” [228]). However, at least a century earlier, many other explorers, such as Lope de Aguirre, had already entered the Incan citadel (see Posse 1993: 158), so here Posse suggests a kind of “rectification” of the official history.

(7) *The Bakhtinian concepts of the dialogic, carnivalesque, parody and heteroglossia*¹⁸: The Bakhtinian rhetorical resources are highly significant for the NNH in that they enable a more complex view of events (the dialogic), turn the dominant world order upside down (the carnivalesque), for example by parodying historical figures or incidents and therefore provoking thought and reducing stereotypes (parody), or by incorporating different levels and types of language into the discourse in order to make it diversified and at the same time more authentic (heteroglossia).

Furthermore, Posse and Ospina make use of certain Bakhtinian concepts. Both authors apply “the dialogic” and heteroglossia, but parody and “the carnivalesque” are used primarily in Posse’s novel. We noted the power of the parodic before, in reference to the exaggerated biography of the conquistador Lope de Aguirre (Posse 1993: 9), and, in other moments, the author attempts to suggest a certain absurdity to the European conquest. However, this (to a certain extent) “ridiculing” of colonization does not diminish the magnitude of the criticism but —on the contrary— reinforces it. The reversal of power relations, a hall-

¹⁸ What was perhaps the first Hispanic critical study of Bakhtin did not appear until 1979 in *Revista Iberoamericana*: “Carnaval/Antropofagia/Parodia”, by Emir Rodríguez Monegal.

mark of the carnivalesque, is on full display, for example, when the Amazonian women initiate the conquistadors in the art of love and sexuality:

Desde el anochecer los conquistadores comían echados sobre la arena aún tibia, con las cabezas apoyadas en los fuertes muslos de las vencedoras. Allí, entre tamal y pechuga de mono, eran iniciados en el arte de besar. Aprendían a permanecer boca a boca, compartiendo el aire, cosa que siempre ellos habían considerado mariconería de franceses o reblandecimiento de chulos de burdel.

Se los veía gemir de placer con los cuellos tendidos hacia atrás porque ellas los distraían con la *fellatio*. Cedían a la tentación de la delicia superando el abismo de miedo —ancestral en el hombre blanco— a la antropofagia, el miedo a la traicionera castración de la leyenda o la magnitud pecaminosa del hecho.

Ellas manejaban el *tempo* y la ciencia del amor.¹⁹ (Posse 1993: 72)

Between the Amazonians' thighs, the colonizers lose all control over the indigenous women and thus, in a way, their "manhood". The power relations are reversed and suddenly it is no longer the indigenous woman who has to fear the abuse and exploitation of the white conqueror, rather it is the latter who fears the loss of his masculinity and thus his privileged position of power.

¹⁹ "From nightfall, the conquistadors would eat lying on the still warm sand, with their heads resting on the strong thighs of the victors. There, between tamales and monkey breast, they were initiated in the art of kissing. They learned to remain mouth to mouth, sharing the air, something that they had always considered French effeminacy or the degeneracy of brothel pimps. They could be seen moaning with pleasure with their necks stretched back because the Amazonian women distracted them with *fellatio*. They yielded to the temptation of delight, overcoming the abyss of fear —ancestral in the white man— of anthropophagy, the fear of the treacherous castration of the legend or the sinful magnitude of the act. The Amazonians managed the *tempo* and the science of love".

(8) *The use of intertextuality to document, criticize, rewrite, parody, or to invert points of view*: Intertextuality is often used to the same end in the NNH. Dialogue with official sources, or with older and more recent works, helps not only to document the process of conquest but also to question, rewrite or, in extreme cases, even to parody and play with it. As an extreme variant of that multiperspectivism, an inverted point of view occurs throughout the NNH. Thus, it not only presents several interpretations of historical reality, but also a complete inversion of a historical truth that was previously considered unquestionable (for example, the discourse of official documents).

The partly humorous inversion of point of view can be found in several moments of Posse's work. In addition to the aforementioned introductory quotation to this article, there is also the epigraph to the first part of *Daimón*. Here, the writer makes an intertextual reference to the concepts of "civilization" and "barbarism" (Sarmiento 1845). Although the titles and corresponding passages may give the impression that the European explorers are seen as the "civilized" and the indigenous people as the "barbarians", it becomes clear from reading the quotations that it is actually the other way around. In the fragment of Letter VII to the Kings written by Christopher Columbus it becomes quite evident that the superiority of the European, white and Catholic man over the *indio* (woman) is imposed from the beginning ("Cuando llegué aquí me enviaron dos muchachas muy ataviadas: la más vieja no sería de once años y la otra de siete; ambas con tanta desenvoltura que no la tendrían más unas putas" [11])²⁰, by dressing them like Europeans and, in doing so, "civilizing" them. But precisely this incapacity of the conqueror to understand the reality of "the other" (in this case the indige-

²⁰ "When I arrived here, they sent me two very well-dressed girls: the older one was not more than eleven years old and the other seven; both with so much poise that no whores would have them anymore".

nous person) and the act of adapting the indigenous population to his own Euro- and anthropocentric worldview turns him into the real barbarian (see Nofal 1998: 93). King Nezahualcoyotl's poem, on the other hand, demonstrates civility in the face of suffering as a result of the atrocities of the conquerors ("las almas de mis compañeros muertos" [11])²¹ as well as the respect that the indigenous people have for the land and environment ("No es verdad, no es verdad / que venimos a vivir en la Tierra. / En yerba de primavera / venimos a convertirnos" [11])²².

In Ospina's novel, a reversal of perspectives occurs when the mestizo (mixed-race) narrator turns out to be more European than the conquistador Ursúa. Cristóbal de Aguilar tells us that, by an ironic inversion of the order of the world, he had his heart in the kingdoms of Europe and that Ursúa was hopelessly in the Indies, as if he already knew that this was his final destiny, that he would never again set foot in the land of his elders, that his body had been engendered to become the dust and moss of the New World (Ospina 2008a: 205, the free translation is ours).

Of course, the boundaries of the aforementioned categories are fluid; not all novels have to contain the totality of these criteria in order to be considered "NNH". For example, William Ospina makes less use of Bakhtinian concepts than Abel Posse (with the exception of the dialogic). Furthermore, with regard to our analysis, the existing classification is not totally complete. This study proposes the following update, complete with characteristics that appear to be particularly relevant in current research, which is to examine the works of the NNH through the lens of postcolonial, environmental, and gender studies. It can therefore be asked what impact do postcolonial/environmental studies have on our understanding of the conquest of the Ameri-

²¹ "the souls of my dead companions".

²² "It is not true, it is not true / that we came to live on Earth. / Spring grass / we came to become".

cas? How are the various participants portrayed? Are their voices represented? And what about the role and perspectives of women? The difficulty here is in overcoming the male gaze²³, a particular challenge since our analysis focuses on two male authors.

However, this is an attempt to analyze to which extent male writers are able to challenge gender stereotypes and, thus, declare war on patriarchal and heteronormative imaginaries in order to encourage future studies that deal with complementary gender aspects of American colonization. An excellent contribution in this regard has already been made with Jennifer Reimer Recio's essay on "Forms of Memory. The Aesthetics of Ambivalent Agonism in *También la lluvia* and *Conquistadora*"²⁴, which includes the female gaze of Iciar Bollaín and Esmeralda Santiago on the conquest of the Americas. In the next chapter we will extend our analysis of multiperspectivism to update the "traditional" conception of the NNH, implemented by the critics Fernando Aínsa and Menton Seymour.

Postcolonialism, ecocriticism and gender in Posse and Ospina

This last subchapter broadens Aínsa and Menton's classifications to contribute additional perspectives on the New Historical Novel and on colonial history in general. It is important to state that the portrayal of the conquest as an apocalyptic act for pre-Columbian civilizations and their lands isn't something new; it has appeared in indigenous accounts since the sixteenth century, but such portrayals have received renewed attention in the light

²³ "The fact of showing or watching events or looking at women from a man's point of view" (*Cambridge Dictionary*, <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/male-gaze>>, accessed 14 February 2023).

²⁴ See Jennifer Reimer Recio, "Forms of Memory" (2022a): 1-15; Jennifer Reimer Recio, "Formalizando la memoria" (2022b): 553-83.

of postcolonial studies (see Derrida 1967, Said 1978, Bhabha 1993). Drawing on them, we argue that both Abel Posse's *Daimón* and William Ospina's *Ursúa* depict colonial processes through explicit allusions, symbols, or references to the apocalypse and/or other eschatological myths. Posse, for example, speaks of "cataclysms" (1993: 13-14, the translation is ours) or "eschatological times" (1993: 86, the translation is ours) when describing the submission, the degeneration, and even the murders of indigenous people ("The report on demographics was bleak: of the 91 million locals at the time of the discovery of Europe, only about 11 million purebreds remained without power or glory, the rest having been wiped out with Civilization", 1993: 252, the translation is ours). Neither does he shy away from addressing and criticizing slavery at several moments in the novel. When he sees the establishment of the Republic in the new continent, he goes so far as to describe slavery as a "demonic institution that began by declaring everyone free to end up transforming the majority into slaves" or as an "indisputable sign of *the near end of all things*" (1993: 232, the translation and emphasis are ours).

Ospina, on the other hand, plays with both allusions and explicit symbols of the apocalypse. For example, the "visions" of the prophecy or the "beasts" that come to the world to provoke the "sudden and final stillness" (2008a: 74-75, the translations are ours) are obvious allusions to end-times. In the following fragment, Ospina uses references and symbolism to exemplify the religious syncretism of the mestizo (mixed-blood) narrator:

Un *malestar* reinaba en el mundo, y allí recomenzaron las tensiones con los zaques de la sabana oriental, que tenían sus mansiones cercadas y sinuosas cerca de las piedras de Quiminza, en los valles de Hunza. Los *adivinos* leían *presagios lúgubres* en los astros desde los observatorios de piedra de Ráquira, donde rectos peñascos se empinan sobre los viejísimos bosques de robles. Había guerras entre los astros, la luna se enrojecía de pronto, el sol sangraba sobre los pedregosos desiertos. *Las bocas desdentadas de*

las estrellas estaban anunciando la ruina del mundo y los príncipes creyeron que la *amenaza* estaba en las lanzas de sus vecinos.

Fue por eso que por todas partes en las Indias, antes de la llegada de los *jinetes*, habían arreciado las guerras entre hermanos²⁵. (Ospina 2008a: 137, the emphasis is ours)

Here, it shows how the narrator is influenced by both pre-Columbian eschatological myths (the war between the heavenly bodies —stars, moon and sun) and the biblical apocalypse (prophecy, threat, etc.). It also becomes quite clear that the conquistadors, with their horses, armor, and weapons, are the biblical “horsemen” of the apocalypse who will bring about the end of the (indigenous) world. However, here, too, a more nuanced view is required. As the critic Ordóñez Díaz demands, the colonization process does not necessarily have to be seen as exclusively or wholly barbaric, because the destructive and anthropocentric behaviour often originated from a small circle of conquerors. Even if the leaders of the expedition frequently acted unethically, their soldiers were sometimes critical of such behavior. Nevertheless, they did not dare to openly express their opposition for fear of suffering devastating consequences, including loss of life (2021: 93).

That being said, the two texts (and especially *Daimón*) are unusual in their early expressions of an ecocritical response to the conquest of the Americas. Both acknowledge the conquest as

²⁵ “An *uneasiness* reigned in the world, and there the tensions with the zaques of the Eastern Savannah, who had their fenced and winding mansions near the stones of Quiminza, in the valleys of Hunza, began again. The *soothsayers* read *gloomy omens* in the stars from the stone observatories of Ráquira, where straight crags rise above the ancient oak forests. There were wars among the stars, the moon suddenly reddened, the sun bled on the stony deserts. *The toothless mouths of the stars were announcing the ruin of the world* and the princes believed that the *threat* was in the spears of their neighbors. It was for this reason that everywhere in the Indies, before the arrival of the *horsemen*, wars between brothers had raged”, the translation and emphasis are ours.

a decisive starting point for the anthropocene in Latin America, the entire continent, and perhaps even the whole planet (see also Ordóñez Díaz 2021). The term ‘anthropocene’ originates from atmospheric science, but in recent years it has also become a key concept for the social sciences (Clark 2015: 1-2)²⁶. The historian Dipesh Chakrabarty distinguishes between the Latin term ‘homo’ and the Greek ‘anthropos’: while ‘homo’ can be understood, in a humanist framework, as the rational individual who proceeds purposefully and in a just and social manner, ‘anthropos’ designates the human being through a biological-ecological framework, as a species that acts blindly, out of self-interest, and with an often ruinous cumulative force (2015: 147f.). Succinctly, the anthropocene is characterized by the unprecedented fact that humanity has come to play a decisive, though still largely incalculable, role in the ecology and geology of the planet, where “[h]uman activities have become so pervasive and profound that they rival the great forces of Nature and are pushing the Earth into planetary *terra incognita*” (Steffen, Crutzen & McNeill 2007: 614). And it was precisely this process that was set in motion by the arrival of the Europeans in the New World²⁷.

In the Amazonian context, it is the (neo)colonial exploitation of natural resources which had and still has serious consequences for the present condition of our planet and which signals the arrival of the anthropocene. As Posse demonstrates, 500 years later, Aguirre must recognize that the Amazonian river is “wretchedly polluted by the latrines of *siringueros* and *capangas* and by the industrial waste of rubber processing” which converted the Amazon region into a “hell of exploitation” (Posse 1993: 236-37, the

²⁶ There are several studies from major theorists coming from diverse and interrelated disciplines that contribute to the further development of the notion: Crutzen & Stoermer 2000; Heise 2008; Haraway 2016; Horn & Bergthaller 2020; Parham 2021; etc.

²⁷ This and the following paragraph are based on the article: Sebastian Imoberdorf, “Cuando la naturaleza se vuelve agente” (2025: in press).

translation is ours). In addition to mentioning the exploitation and pollution of ecosystems, Posse also addresses the extinction of species as a consequence of ecological destruction: “[t]he animals are beginning to not endure! [...] *Black signs. Dark times*” (Posse 1993: 201, the translation and emphasis are ours). In this quote, he uses hyperbole to claim that birds are committing suicide rather than attempt to survive the devastation of the natural world brought on by humanity. As the following quote shows, he even goes one step further by overcoming so-called “plant blindness” (Lemm 2022: 843) which was defined by James Wandersee and Elisabeth E. Schussler as “the inability to see or notice plants in our own environment, leading to the inability to see the importance of plants in the biosphere and in human affairs” (cited by Gagliano, Ryan & Vieira 2017: XXIV). In doing so, Posse challenges an exclusively anthropocentric worldview by offering alternative perspectives such as phytocentrism (see Marder 2014), which consists in giving voice to plants. In the excerpt below, Posse recounts a fictitious Amazonian summit meeting at which not only human but also non-human beings (such as the plants) present their concerns and demands:

Las plantas lograron transmitir a través de la delegación campa, un largo y detallado informe sobre su penosa situación. Habían sido brutalmente transculturadas. El más primario espíritu comercial había modificado la vegetación de las costas oceánicas y de las tierras fértiles del interior. Perales, viñedos, olivos, algodón, trigo, verduras exóticas. Las especies tradicionales habían perdido la batalla. Era seguro que las orquídeas subtropicales no resistirían la creciente contaminación del aire. El afán de lucro había alterado sustancialmente la original armonía divina (las plantas manifestaban en su informe su conocida inclinación mística)²⁸. (Posse 1993: 250-51)

²⁸ “The plants were able to transmit a long and detailed report on their plight through the Campanian delegation. They had been brutally transculturated.

This non-human representation, also known as ‘ecological posthumanism’ (Horn & Bergthaller 2020: 70-74), exemplifies how humans fail to recognize the importance of plants, trees, and nature in general as constituent elements of our biosphere. It also shows how the plants themselves try to fight against ‘plant blindness’ and advocate for their own rights. This is an extreme case of showcasing the “giving of voice to minorities”, and is characteristic of Posse’s unique writing style—one that can be seen as influential on various subsequent works that are considered ecocritical: for example *Un viejo que leía novelas de amor* (1989) by Luis Sepúlveda, *Waslala* (1996) by Giconda Belli, *La mirada de las plantas* (2022) or *Área protegida* (2024) by Edmundo Paz Soldán, and so on.

In Ospina, ecocriticism is expressed, *inter alia*, through the device of demythification. For example, he contrasts the mythical El Dorado, a land made of gold, with the rich natural resources of the actual Amazonian region. The New World on offer here is not the city of gold of the legend, but an extended version of it (the Amazon region as a whole) which, in addition to gold, also proffers up other natural treasures such as rubber, wood, and plants. Once again, Ospina expresses his ecocriticism less with the help of irony or the device of posthumanism, and more with the invocation of religious syncretism. In doing so, he describes the mistreatment of the indigenous people and their habitat as both eschatological myth and apocalyptic act:

Oramín, que sentía profunda gratitud hacia Ursúa por haberlo protegido en un momento de peligro, no se hacía ilusiones so-

The most primitive commercial spirit had modified the vegetation of the oceanic coasts and the fertile lands of the interior. Pear trees, vineyards, olive trees, cotton, wheat, exotic vegetables. Traditional species had lost the battle. It was certain that the subtropical orchids would not resist the increasing air pollution. The profit motive had substantially altered the original divine harmony (the plants manifested in their report their well-known mystical inclination)”.

bre el futuro de su pueblo, y mostraba más bien la tendencia de muchos indígenas a mirarlo todo con fatalismo. Los poderosos enemigos habían llegado y ahora triunfaban; crueles dioses estaban con ellos; *un bello mundo estaba declinando; una maldición indescifrable se cumplía contra estos reinos que gozaron por miles de soles y de lunas una felicidad irrepetible*. No encontraba lugar para la esperanza. Podía ver que los invasores no estaban de paso, que habían venido para quedarse, y que en su mundo lejano quedaban todavía incontables guerreros esperando su turno para venir al incendio y a la rapiña, de modo que ya nadie podía, como Tisquesusa y como los primeros testigos en las islas, alimentar la ilusión de que un día se fueran. Al contrario: llegarían más y más. *El mundo de Bachué y de Bochica estaba muriendo para siempre; tiempos de ruina y de esclavitud se cernían sobre las provincias; y no quedaba ya en el agua que corre ni en la tierra que dura ni en el cielo cruzado de pájaros a quién preguntar cuánto duraría la nueva edad del mundo*²⁹. (Ospina 2008a: 282-83, the emphasis is ours)

From the highlighted passages it becomes clear that the peaceful era of the indigenous population is over, that invaders have come to enslave them and to use their lands. Again, the conse-

²⁹ “Oramin, who felt deep gratitude to Ursúa for having protected him in a time of danger, had no illusions about the future of his people, and showed rather the tendency of many Indians to look upon everything with fatalism. The mighty enemies had come and were now triumphant; cruel Gods were with them; *a beautiful world was declining; an undecipherable curse was being fulfilled against these kingdoms that enjoyed for thousands of suns and moons an unrepeatable happiness*. There was no room for hope. He could see that the invaders were not just passing through, that they had come to stay, and that in their distant world there were still countless warriors waiting their turn to come to burn and ravage, so that no one could, like Tisquesusa and the first witnesses in the islands, nourish the illusion that one day they would leave. On the contrary: more and more would arrive. *The world of Bachué and Bochica was dying forever; times of ruin and slavery were looming over the provinces; and there was no longer any one left in the flowing water nor in the hard earth nor in the sky crossed with birds to ask how long the new age of the world would last*”, the translation and emphasis are ours.

quence is the degradation and disappearance of entire tribes and species, highlighting Ospina's ecocritical commitment in *Ursúa*, but also in the other two works of his trilogy. This can be traced back to two factors: the first is the assumption that, for the colonizers, nature is primarily a source for the extraction of resources (gold in *Ursúa*, cinnamon in *El país de la canela*, water in *La serpiente sin ojos*, etc.); the second, that the inhabitants of the colonized regions are only valuable as a source of cheap labor.

A gender studies lens offers an additional perspective that emphasizes the particular exploitation of indigenous women in the anthropocene (see also Spivak 1988, Imoberdorf 2021, Reimer 2022a, 2022b). We draw on such work in order to contextualize the representation of indigenous female bodies in the texts. Ospina, for example, addresses gender violence through the character of Gonzalo Pizarro who, after the death of the last Inca King Atahualpa, tries to rape the sister and wife of Manco Inca Yupanqui. Although she covers her body with her own excrement in order to protect herself from the white men, this does not stop Gonzalo from abusing her. Francisco Pizarro himself holds her hostage, "trying to get Inca Yupanqui to surrender in exchange for rescuing her" (Ospina 2008a: 191, the translation is ours). But when Manco Inca refuses, they murder the beautiful Curi Ocllo and throw her body into the Yuncay River. Here, once again a kind of double colonization can be found: the subjugation of the indigenous population and, more specifically, that of their women. The text emphasizes the patriarchal nature of colonization because the indigenous woman is discarded as "garbage" as soon as she ceases to be useful to the male conquerors.

In addition, the demythification in the meaning of gender as a narrative element in Ospina's novel becomes apparent, especially concerning the legend of the Amazonian women. According to Ordóñez Díaz (2021: 90, italics from original text, free translation ours), Ospina explains the mythification process (and thereby simultaneously demythifies it) through five stages: The first one introduces the *empirical basis*: the Spaniards see a group of

naked and armed women on the river bank who adopt a bellicose attitude before the appearance of the brigantine. The second gives a *legendary explanation* of that facts: Orellana suggests that the women could be the Amazons of the Greek legend; Carvajal explains the legend to the soldiers; the suggestion takes possession of the group and rumors and speculations spread throughout the brigantine. In the third stage, *reality and legend intertwine*: Orellana's translations of local reports seem to confirm the idea that the naked women are Amazons; the soldiers make incursions into the jungle and then return to the brigantine and tell stories that uphold this thesis. The fourth stage is the *fixation of the historical memory*: in his chronicle of the voyage, Carvajal includes the first report on the Amazons; the news is later divulged by Fernández de Oviedo and other chroniclers, who rely on the testimonies of the participants in the adventure. The fifth stage corresponds to the *genesis of the official discourse*: the reports on the jungle and the river do not arouse interest in Europe, but reports about the so-called Amazonian women pique curiosity, leading to the reinforcement and the dissemination of the myth. This mythification is largely due to inherent patriarchal attitudes and the hegemonic powers of the conquering machinery, as the following excerpt of *El país de la canela* illustrates:

Lo que más gobernaba aquellas polémicas era cierto odio por las mujeres en general, pero sobre todo el rechazo ante la idea de unas mujeres acostumbradas a organizar su vida sin hombres, entregadas sin duda a amores entre ellas y sin frenos ante la lujuria, dadas a las tareas sucias y crueles de la guerra y capaces de esclavizar a sus amantes y aun de matarlos cuando les estorbaban. "Si algo está claro", dijeron, "es que la vida pecaminosa de aquella nación de hembras bárbaras es la peor expresión de paganismo de que se haya tenido noticia"³⁰. (Ospina 2008b: 315)

³⁰ "What most governed those polemics was a certain hatred for women in general, but above all the rejection of the idea of women accustomed to

Posse, on the other hand, takes that idea of de/mythification to the extreme: This can be seen in the example of the carnivalesque, where the Amazon women seduce the conquerors and thus reverse the power structures. Posse depicts this scene in such an exaggerated and caricatured way that the Amazons are de-mythified by using Bakhtinian narrative techniques (see feature 7 of the theoretical framework). Towards the end of *Daimón*, Amazonian women are even expelled from their territory and run the risk of disappearing altogether, which points to the reclamation and reconquest of power by the colonizers. The narrator makes clear that when Aguirre gets back to the kingdom of the Amazons (several centuries later), the Amazonian princesses are “barely shadows of the adoratories”. This illustrates, among other things, the successful and conclusive domination of the male conquerors over the indigenous women and other minorities —the patriarchal and heteronormative structures, that already prevailed during the period of the conquest, are here to stay. The inevitability of patriarchal male dominance becomes even more evident when Posse speaks of a marginal group of homosexual indigenous people who are on the verge of extinction and whose members “awaited their *inexorable end*” (1993: 131, the emphasis is ours), suggesting that any gender identities or performances that challenge a patriarchal order are doomed.

Nevertheless, we also notice a reaction and vindication from the Amazonian women in both works. However, that opposition of the Amazons is mostly interpreted as a necessary part of the classical myth. The women *must* first be seen as savage, opposing every form of domestication, in order for the white

organize their lives without men, given to love affairs among themselves and without restraint before lust, given to the dirty and cruel tasks of war and capable of enslaving their lovers and even of killing them when they were in their way. ‘If one thing is clear’, they said, ‘it is that the sinful life of that nation of barbarian females is the worst expression of paganism ever recorded’”.

conquistadors to not only conquer and civilize them but *desire to* conquer and civilize them. Or as Ordóñez Díaz recognizes: if the savage is the inverted mirror through which the civilized define themselves as civilized, then the Amazons, emblems of a natural and savage feminine power, are the mirror that allows cardinals and bishops, emblems of a spiritual and cultured masculine power, to reaffirm their identity and superiority (2021: 88, free translation is ours).

Those power structures are also upheld through formal aspects, such as the multilingualism which, in both novels, contrasts with the use of Spanish as the hegemonic language in official documents. For example, in *Daimón* there appear brief sequences —albeit few— in which Amazonian women sing a ritual song in their own language (Posse 1993: 69, 72). However, the use of indigenous languages and dialects is rather scarce and is mostly attributed to female characters, which formally emphasizes the existing parallel between the underrepresentation of language and that of women: their voice is considered less important. The same is true for Ospina who tries to incorporate poems interspersed between the chapters of the novel, offering a handful of examples that reveal the difficulty of incorporating the natives' voices into any recounting of the conquest. These snapshots are —again— only small glimpses of resistance against hegemonic powers and colonial patriarchy.

Conclusions

Following the analysis of *Daimón* by Abel Posse and *Ursúa* by William Ospina, it appears that the two works can be ascribed to the subgenre of the New Historical Novel according to Fernando Aínsa and Seymour Menton, although not all the characteristics are equally represented in both works and the authors differ greatly in their aesthetics. While Posse's style is distinguished by a more experimental approach, resorts to a greater

extent to Bakhtinian resources and emphasizes the sometimes absurd colonizing operation of the conquistadors through the use of parody and the carnivalesque, Ospina relies more on giving a voice to a mestizo protagonist and, thus, creates a kind of intermediary figure who mediates between the conquistadors and the natives, although he does not entirely succeed in this regard either, as the indigenous voice remains mostly silenced. However, according to Ordóñez Díaz, Aguilar's testimony underscores this absence, making the reader feel the weight of the silence of the indigenous voice and the gravitation of the historical void it has left, concealed for centuries by the colonial discursive structures (2021: 70).

As has been shown, Posse once again goes one step further and integrates non- or posthuman voices into the discourse on the colonization process. Nature taking action and, to some extent, seeking revenge on those who have harmed it, has been a recurring literary motif in Latin American literature since at least the "novela de la selva" and *La vorágine* (1924) by José Eustasio Rivera. In this regard and in contrast to indigenous peoples, the greedy conquerors showed a clear case of "plant blindness", passing through the jungle almost without seeing it. And this is not because of an optical sensory problem, but because of the lack of a network of practices and previous experiences that allow them to understand the horizon that parades before their eyes as part of a fully meaningful reality (Ordóñez Díaz 2021: 54-55). According to the previously analyzed quotation from Posse (1993: 250-251), this is why the plants themselves start to raise their voices to reclaim their own rights and, in doing so, overcome "plant blindness", although it remains unclear what weight their voice carries in the fight for better "interspecies conditions" because the interests of the major powers largely remain economic. Even Lope de Aguirre, one of those responsible for the plight of the jungle's flora and fauna, recognizes that "[t]here is nothing left to do" (Posse 1993: 254, translation is ours) to save the Amazon, since he has already destroyed it.

In any case, both novels are attempts to rewrite colonial history and to underline the apocalyptic impact of conquest for the native civilizations and their habitats. In this sense, both Posse's and Ospina's novels can be interpreted from a postcolonial, environmental and gender perspective. The two writers show the profound consequences that the conquest of America and, in this particular case, of the Amazon had on its indigenous populations and nature: Amazonian women and other indigenous communities were displaced from their territory, several species of animals and plants became extinct, nature was exploited and destroyed, indigenous women were sexualized and abused, and so on.

However, despite Posse and Ospina's earnest efforts to subvert some "facts" of the Amazonian conquest, they do not manage to amend the story completely, because there is still a male gaze on gender issues and, in general, there could be even more diversity of voices. For example, while the mistreatment and abuse of indigenous women by the conquistadors is thematized, the reader is aware of the lack of a stronger indigenous female voice. The facts continue to be told from a male colonizing point of view (albeit mestizo, in Ospina's case), which prevents a full representation of different voices involved in the process of conquest and colonization —victimizers and victims.

Nevertheless, in the two novels studied, the counterpart of history is illuminated —following the purpose of this publication— by describing the apocalyptic situation for the indigenous people, women and also nature. We are also of the opinion that it is imperative that these dark and, above all, hidden parts are told, in order to better understand what is happening in the present (in this regard see Aracil Varón 2004: 66, Segura Acevedo 2017: 165). Thus, contrary to what official history taught us and as the introductory quote to this article visualizes, Europeans did not "discover" America but rather the discovery was mutual, and the supposedly "civilized" often behaved more savagely than those who were considered to be the "barbarians". In the process of conveying this, Posse and Ospina manage to challenge several stereotypes and

(largely) present more nuanced versions of colonial history and its consequences —despite or thanks to recourse to fiction.

Epigraph

El arte —había dicho ya Carlos Fuentes en 1976— da voz a lo que la historia ha negado, silenciado o perseguido. El arte rescata la verdad de las mentiras de la historia³¹.

(In *Cervantes o la crítica de la locura* by Carlos Fuentes)

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³¹ “Art —Carlos Fuentes had already said in 1976— gives voice to what history has denied, silenced or persecuted. Art rescues the truth from the lies of history”.

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