

A postmodern Caribbean Maigret in *The Neruda Case*, by Roberto Ampuero / *Un Maigret caribeño y postmoderno en El Caso Neruda*, de Roberto Ampuero

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ABSTRACT

The Neruda Case is set as an historical novel, since it recreates a character who had a real existence (i.e., the poet Pablo Neruda). In addition to this, it is a detective novel in which the detective Cayetano Brulé undertakes an investigation to discover a mystery of Neruda's past. Thus, this paper aims to study both the characteristics of the novel mentioned above and Brulé's construction as a character in order to situate them in the postmodern period. The analysis is based on texts written by the following theorists and critics: Baudrillard (1993), García-Corales (1999), Marín (2006), García-Llamas (2015), Eagleton (1998), Lyotard (2006), Jameson (2002), Bauman (2003), Eco (1985, 2011), Franken K. (2011), Ramírez (2016), Toro (1998), Vizcaino Mosqueda (2013), etc. Both the novel and its protagonist can be considered postmodern, because a contemporary reality in being faced, in which Brulé needs to build himself as a detective in a daily process so as to succeed in a chaotic and confusing Latin America in crisis.

KEYWORDS: El Caso Neruda; Roberto Ampuero; Detective novel; Postmodernism; Chilean literature.

RESUMEN

La narrativa *El Caso Neruda* se configura como una novela histórica, pues en ella se recrea un personaje que tuvo existencia real, el poeta Pablo Neruda. Además de eso, es una novela detectivesca, en la que el detective Cayetano Brulé emprende una investigación para descubrir un misterio del pasado de Neruda. De ese modo, en este artículo, se busca estudiar algunos rasgos de la novela mencionada y también de la construcción de Brulé que permiten que

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se los ubique en el período de la postmodernidad. El análisis propuesto se basa en los textos de los siguientes críticos y teóricos: Baudrillard (1993), García-Corales (1999), Marín (2006), García-Llamas (2015), Eagleton (1998), Lyotard (2006), Jameson (2002), Bauman (2003), Eco (1985, 2011), Franken K. (2011), Ramírez (2016), Toro (1998), Vizcaino Mosqueda (2013) y otros. Así, tanto la novela cuanto el personaje pueden ser considerados como postmodernos, porque se está delante de una realidad contemporánea, en la que Brulé necesita construirse como detective en un proceso diario, para lograr obtener éxito en una América Latina en crisis, caótica y confusa.

PALABRAS CLAVE: El Caso Neruda; Roberto Ampuero; Narrativa policiaca; Postmodernismo; Literatura chilena.

1. Introduction

Contemporary literature promotes a reflection on existing literary genres, since the revision and the recreation implemented by parody and irony provide the reader with a more active role whilst reading the books that were conceived during the postmodern period, fulfilling analysis objectives, problematisations and discussions of various works. These actions can be evidenced in the Chilean detective novels, a genre that achieved greater acceptance and reception in recent years. Some authors have written books that are recognised as best sellers in the contemporary world, and the detective novel itself has achieved a huge amount of sales in recent decades.

Guillermo García-Corales (1999, p. 81), in his paper “*Nostalgia y melancolía en la novela detectivesca del Chile de los noventa*”, affirms that

The subject’s decentralisation, the ideological fragmentation, the traditional utopias breakdown, the delegitimisation of authority and the hybrid combination of heterogeneous elements represent configurations associated with postmodernity, which shape significant part of the Chilean novels published during the 90’s by writers from the 80’s generation - that is, those born near or after 1950 – as far as their ideological substrate and aesthetics are concerned. Nonetheless, several authors of that period fictionalise these configurations in a problematic way, alluding them with critical distance. On the one hand, they establish certain limits with this postmodern phase that are combined with ethical indeterminacy and the multi signification of language. On the other hand, they trace narrative strategies that include, for example, compensatory targeting of past segments that are welcoming, because they constantly oppose today’s inhospitable and disenchanting horizons. This nostalgic and melancholic character momentum acquires a relevant dynamic in the detective *serie negra*¹ developed in Chile, which transits towards democracy in the 90’s, after 16 years of military dictatorship.

¹ It is as Raymond Chandler defined it in his essay *The Simple Art of murder* (1950): the novel in the professional world of crime. Its name is not only due to the fact that it was originally published in *Black Mask* magazine, in the United States and in the *Série Noire* collection of Gallimard (a French publisher), but also to the dark character of the environments in which these stories are placed, away from the stately homes where detective novels are set. The term is associated with a type of detective novel in which the mystery’s resolution is not the main objective and the arguments are usually very violent; the division between good and bad characters is blurred and most of its

Some of the most important characteristics which mark the Chilean postmodern detective fiction are the return to the past with critical distance, the disenchantment with the present, the nostalgia and the melancholy. All of these characteristics are arranged as very relevant points of this type of narrative.

A trend for “neo-detective narratives” (GARCÍA-CORALES, 1999, p. 81) is verified in Chilean books written by a large number of authors (e.g. Ramón Díaz Eterovic, Poli Délano, Roberto Bolaño, José Ramón, Roberto Ampuero, Marco Antonio de la Parra, Gregory Cohen, Jayme Collier, Gonzalo Contreras and Luis Sepúlveda²). According to Rodrigo Cánovas (*apud* FRANKEN K., 2011, p. 102), such authors rescue the past in a way that allows us to think about the *serie negra*'s process of narration, in which “a private detective carries out a search in a society in crisis”, as noted in *The Neruda Case*, written by Roberto Ampuero.

The central character in *The Neruda Case* shares some features with the detectives created by Chilean novelists from the 1980's and 1990's, i.e., located in the postmodern period. Thus, this paper aims to analyse Roberto Ampuero's novel so as to detail both its postmodern aspects and its protagonist, the detective Cayetano Brulé.

2. Roberto Ampuero and his works

Roberto Ampuero is a writer, columnist and professor, mainly known for his novels starring Cayetano Brulé, a private detective. He was born on February 20, 1953 in Valparaíso, Chile, and, during his early life, was educated at Valparaíso's German School, which, according to him,

[...] was an expensive, elitist school, where we first learned to read and write in German, where everything was in German. My parents sent me there, even though my maternal grandmother was French and my father had worked for the US foreign information service during the Second World War, and I think the main reason was that it was a prestigious college. This school gave me the German language, gave me my first impression of Europe, and a natural approach to Goethe, Schiller, Brecht, and Mann, but it also gave me a way of being that was the direct opposite of being Chilean. I think that school marked

protagonists are defeated and decadent individuals in search for the truth or, at least, some glimpse of it. This information is based on the following website: <https://www.ecured.cu/Novela_negra>. Visited on 31 January 2020.

² This piece of information was taken from LA NOVELA POLICIAL EN LA LITERATURA CHILENA, <<http://www.memoriachilena.cl/602/w3-article-3528.html>>. Visited on 2 February 2017.

me a lot in my subsequent decision to travel the world, in my nomadic soul. (AMPUERO *apud* MARÚN, 2006, p. 9).

The nomadism referred by the Chilean writer in the excerpt above is proven by his itinerant life. After Augusto Pinochet's military coup on September 11, 1973, Ampuero was awarded a scholarship at Karl Marx University in Leipzig, East Germany, where he met his first wife, Margarita Flores. The couple moved to Cuba in 1974. Then, the author returned to East Germany, where he stayed until 1982. In that same year, Ampuero moved to West Germany and lived there until 1993, when he met his second wife, Ana Lucrecia Rivera Schwartz. He currently lives and teaches in Iowa, USA (MARÚN, 2006, p. 9-10).

Ampuero represents a frequent traveller, since he has lived in six different countries over the last 25 years. Due to his constant displacements and experiences, he has enriched his writings and productions, as mentioned in an interview conducted by María Teresa Cárdenas (*apud* MARÚN, 2006, p. 11):

I am a life and literature nomad, and nomads learn fundamentally by displacement, by the comparison they make every day while riding, by their status as foreigners everywhere, by nourishing themselves from daily experiences and nostalgia [...]. One learns the lessons of life and is changing because he is alert and examining his philosophical coherence, and I believe that the loss of certainties, the awareness of your own limitations and the desire to discover what is under the great Iceberg of life are the thing that allow a renewal of myself as a person and writer, improving this job's vision, reflection and art.

Literature and life are connected, since Ampuero's characters are also nomads who experience adventures in different countries. Detective Cayetano Brulé is an example. The displacements through different geographies fill his stories with agility and give the reader the possibility to travel through Latin America and Europe without having to get up from his/her couch.

Roberto Ampuero's narrative path, according to Gioconda Marún (2006, p. 11-12), is divided into two phases: before 1998 and after 1998. In that year, Pinochet was arrested under the orders of Baltasar Garzón, a Spanish judge. This fact marked the rupture of censorship and silence as far as the violation of human rights during the military dictatorship is concerned. His books written in the phase before this event have a less committed attitude to the country's silenced past. After 1998, in his second phase, his works are characterised by the self-referential writing of an intellectual who masks himself under different speeches to denounce the military dictatorship and the globalisation effects.

Ampuero's works include the following typology³: 1) detective novels – or “The Cayetano Brulé saga” –: *Who killed Cristián Kustermann* (1993), *Boleros in Havana* (1994), *The German of Atacama* (1996), *A Date in the Deep Blue* (2001), *Falcons of the Night* (2005), *The Neruda Case* (2008), *Bay of Mysteries* (2013); 2) realistic fiction: *Our years in olive green* (1999), *Behind the wall* (2014); 3) erotic-detective novels: *The Stockholm lovers* (2003), *Greek Passions* (2006), *The other woman* (2010), *Sonata of oblivion* (2016); 4) young-adult literature: *The Peaches War* (2001); 5) political-novel: *Salvador Allende's The last tango* (2012); 5) short-stories: *The swallow man* (1997); 6) essays: *History as a conjecture: the narrative of Jorge Edwards* (2006), *Dialogue of converts* (co-written with Mauricio Rojas) (2015); and 7) a police television series: *Brigada Scorpión* (1997).

The main features of Ampuero's productions can be expressed in the following terms:

[...] all of the novels are hybrid texts with multiple references, much of them verifiable. The presence of evincible facts not only gives his texts a testimonial, documentary value, but also arouses confidence in the reader, who can identify oneself in the narrative. The new modality of detective novel that experiments with “Bakhtinian” strategies not only open the discourse to the other, to despicable or relegated voices, but also denounces what has not been denounced yet.

[...] Plural writings that transcend the local detective story's boundaries and are linked to a global narrative with multiple and verifiable references. Plurality of speeches and voices that insert the local into the global and that make the detective novel a central part of the current narrative. (MARÚN, 2006, p. 12-13).

The literary critic José Promis (2006) emphasises additional points regarding Roberto Ampuero's fictions:

Building characters and narrative conflicts through the integration of different national spaces is a characteristic that is outlined since the first novel published by Roberto Ampuero, in 1993. [...]

Ampuero's cosmopolitan reality unfolds from a narrative discourse wherewith the author undoubtedly delights by putting into practice two traits that, according to the judgment of some critics and theorists of culture, constitute the so-called postmodern narrative's fundamental characteristics: paradoxical as it may seem, the elimination of the imaginary distance between the reader and the author puts into question the phenomenological thesis of the work of art's autonomy; and, at the same time, the final reaffirmation of the text's fictional nature. Ampuero creates a suspected but simulated identity between him and his character, and he achieves the latter by activating an explicit game of transtextuality that affirm that this story's meaning is only configured when dialoging with his previous stories.

³ This typology is detailed on the website <https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roberto_Ampuero>. Visited on 14 January 2017.

Ampuero is an excellent architect and narrator of stories that intrigue, to the point of making certain readers confuse their imagination with autobiographies. [...]

Therefore, *hybridisation, the plurality of voices/speeches, self-referentiality, metanarratives, transtextuality and the mixture of fiction and history* are aspects that place Ampuero's productions in postmodernity.

3. Two novels in one

The Neruda Case consists of 66 chapters. Two parallel stories are told in the novel: the first and longer one is an investigative work carried out by Cayetano Brulé and has an omniscient narrator; the second one has a first-person narrator and is written in italics as it follows the poet Pablo Neruda, who talks about his lovers – in Chapters 9 (Josie Bliss), 2 (María Antonieta Hagenaar Vogelzang), 32 (Delia del Carril) and 47 (Matilde) – and confesses his flaws, such as the abandonment of his daughter Malva Marina, who was born with severe hydrocephalus. Furthermore, it can be noticed that Neruda leaves Josie Bliss because she is chasing him and, in addition to that, he falls in love with María Antonieta and others, until the moment he stays with Matilde, the last of his lovers. The poet/narrator synthesises this in Chapter 47:

[...] No matter where I go, I always end up in that cool, dim dream space, where I sense that the woman and daughter I abandoned are crouched, waiting for me. Their eyes scrutinise me with the same inclemency in which the crab digs corridors through my body. [...]

*I ask the victims of my happiness for forgiveness. I ask it of Josie Bliss and María Antonieta, of Delia and Beatriz, and also of Matilde: all the women who were shipwrecked in an ocean of hopes nourished by my verses. They didn't know that words cobbled together by a poet are simulacra, artifices, not the actual truth. When was my behavior most despicable? When I left María Antonieta and Malva Marina in Holland? Or when I anonymously published *The Captain's Verses*, inspired by Matilde, even though I was still married to Delia? [...]. (AMPUERO, 2012, p. 231-233).*

Neruda's figure is humanised because a first-person narrator is used. His weaknesses and his negligence are pointed out as streaks: even though he is someone endowed with humanity, capable of great gestures, he is also a stingy, selfish person who is directed only by his own interests and by the realisation of his own projects.

In the other chapters, a detective novel is presented. It has, among its characters, Cayetano Brulé, a Cuban-Chilean detective who was born in Havana and decided to settle in

Valparaíso after arriving in Chile, in 1971, with his wife, María Paz Ángela Undurruga Cox. In this way, during a *curanto*⁴ held at the residence of the mayor of Valparaíso, the character meets Ricardo Reyes, Pablo Neruda's real name, who asks Brulé to call him at his residence, in La Sebastiana. However, the poet is the one who calls the detective so they can talk.

At the poet's house, he instructs Cayetano Brulé to find a person. As Brulé tells him that he was not that kind of detective, Neruda tells him to read novels by the Belgian writer Georges Simenon (1903-1989) to learn about his occupation. The person that Neruda wants Brulé to find is Dr. Ángel Bracamonte, allegedly an oncologist who was studying the healing properties of herbs that the *Chiapas* (indigenous) used to cure cancer. The detective deduced that the poet needed to find the doctor because he suffered from a disease and wanted to be cured.

Through his investigations, Brulé discovers that Bracamonte is dead and, when he tells Neruda, the poet confesses that who he really wanted to find is the deceased doctor's wife, Beatriz Bracamonte. They were lovers and he abandoned her when she was pregnant. Thus, Neruda suspects that he might be the father of her child.

After investigations in Mexico, Cuba, East Germany and Bolivia, Brulé discovers that Beatriz is in Chile. He talks to her and manages to discover that her daughter, Tina, is Pablo Neruda's daughter, but when he tries to inform the poet, the coup of 1973 explodes and Brulé is arrested by the military. When he is released, Brulé searches for the poet in Santiago and finds him at the Santa María Clinic. However, as he is already dead, the detective fails to tell him that his suspicion was correct and he was indeed Tina's father. Along the novel, Beatriz Bracamonte uses false names, making the detective's first investigation enormously difficult.

The Neruda Case is a novel that is characterised as being a postmodern story and, throughout this article, we will analyse and comment on the main features that allow us to reach such a conclusion.

4. From modernity to postmodernity

⁴ Curanto "is a typical food from Chile and Argentina, from Chiloé, and has now been spread throughout southern Chile and Argentine Patagonia. Depending on the place, there may be relevant differences in the ingredients and only the cooking method in common. Traditionally in the gastronomy of Chiloé it is prepared outdoors and receives called "pit curanto", since it is made in a well dug in the ground, approximately half a meter deep; the bottom is covered with stones that are heated in a campfire. When they are red hot, the blights are removed and the ingredients begin to be placed. Chapaleles in a curanto to the newly uncovered hole. The violet color is due to pangues. The preparation of curanto in a hole takes a long time, which can constitute a social event in itself, especially if one takes into account that the work that requires doing so requires the participation of about five or more people. In addition to the hole that must have been previously made, the seafood that will be used, and the potato products: the milcao and the chapalele are selected and cleaned. "<<http://lexicoon.org/en/curanto>>. Visited on 22 January 2017.

In her study *Roberto Ampuero's Narrative in Cultural Globalisation*, Gioconda Marún (2006, p. 19) points out that Ampuero achieved national and international recognition. His works are plurivalent and resound not only within Chile: they reflect the complicated process of economic, political and cultural globalisation which occurs within postmodernism. Furthermore, Ampuero's novels present a new approach towards the detective fiction, being characterised as a hybrid phenomenon that combines *detective fiction*, *testimony* and *globalisation*.

Thus, before we deal with the postmodern characteristics of *The Neruda Case*, it is important to discuss the transition from modernity to postmodernity. In this way, Marún (2006, p. 19-20) affirms that modernity presents a series of particularities that are intensified both in the 19th and in the 20th centuries:

Since the second half of the twentieth century, modernity dominated the western world and the imaginary of the institutions. It is during modernity that history is understood by answering the following questions: where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going? Only these modern people know what the future will bring, they create history, they plan it. It was science that allowed them to visualise the future, as well as the constant improvement of technology, economy and human life. For them, the present was a transitory state that allowed to project themselves into the future: the territory of freedom, creation, experimentation [...]. Faith in progress, in scientific knowledge allowed us to visualise a world qualitatively better. This modernity lived towards the future; the present did not count.

According to Gioconda Marún (2006, p. 20), whilst modernists live in the future, postmodernists live in an absolute present that is historical, including the past of the present and the future of the present, since the new historical consciousness is a reflexive consciousness on modernity. The certainties that science promised and the power of rationality became uncertainties/doubts, because postmodernists believe that they do not know the future and also that science, aware of its fragility, does not lead to the future.

Furthermore, Marún (2006, p. 21) affirms that, if modernity replaces the old order with a new and non-traditional one, postmodernity acts against everything that interferes in the individual destiny, supporting deregulation and privatisation. Thus, modernists created an advanced art (*avant garde*), criticised the current state of art in society and proposed a new art with a critical spirit, causing reflections on the creation process and on the theories about the means to achieve it through manifests and programs. Moreover, postmodernist art is a plural and ruleless body of art that reflects the uncertainty, the agonies of contemporary man and the anguish of never being satisfied.

María Belén García Llamas, in her PhD thesis entitled *Behind the apparent reality: character and environment in Clara Sánchez's novels* (2015, p. 19), set the main aspects of the period that theorists and critics call *postmodern*:

This current period of history, recognised as postmodernity, has a universe of changing beliefs and diffuse shapes; that is why it is impossible to find a single definition that can explain it completely. [...]

From the last decades of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first century, the western world encounters an unexpected scenario. The citizen today has the feeling of being part of a social and economic order in which the pacts that guaranteed peace and stability have been broken. The present has been transformed into an indefinable reality with more shadows than lights, whose inaccuracy leaves the future doubts unanswered, if future can even be imagined. We know that we live in individualist times that widespread consumption and exerts an ominous power over the human being; the alleged freedom of choice has been subordinated to the market pressure. History, understood as a linear succession of foreseeable events - in an optimistic view of progress - is not credible today.

The considerations of García Llamas can be combined with the reflections written by Terry Eagleton (1998, p. 11-12, his italics and highlights):

The word postmodernism generally refers to some forms of contemporary culture, while the term postmodernity refers to a specific historical period. Postmodernity is a style of thinking that distrusts the classical notions of truth, reason, identity and objectivity, of the idea of universal progress or emancipation, isolated structures, great stories or definitive systems of explanation. Against these illuministic norms, it considers the world as contingent, unexplained, diverse, unstable, indeterminate, a set of disjointed cultures or interpretations that engenders a degree of scepticism about the objectivity of truth, history and norms, the given of natures and coherence of identities. That way of seeing, some might say, has effective material reasons: it arises from a historical shift in the west towards a new form of capitalism, towards the ephemeral, decentralised world of technology, consumerism and the cultural industry, in which industries of services, finances and information triumph over traditional manufactures, and classical class-based policies give way to a diffuse series of 'identity policies'. Postmodernism is a style of culture that reflects something of this change of era, in an off-center [...] art, without foundation, self-reflective, playful, derivative, eclectic, pluralist that breaks the boundaries between 'high' culture and 'popular' culture as much as between art and everyday experience. [...]

Therefore, it is possible to say that postmodernity is situated in the distrust of the notions of truth, reason, identity and progress. As a consequence, a self-reflective, eclectic and plural art is produced, but such art does not offer safe answers, only questions. Furthermore, past notions and certainties are problematised, reviewing them as

[...] the time comes when the vanguard (the modern) cannot go further, because it has already produced a metalanguage that speaks of its impossible texts (conceptual art). The postmodern response to the modern is to recognise that, since the past cannot be destroyed - its destruction leads to silence - what must be done is to visit it again; with irony, without naivety. (ECO, 1985, p. 29).

In this way, the great innovation of postmodernism, according to Umberto Eco, is turning back with a total lack of ingenuity. As García Llamas (2015, p. 35) points out, artists and writers use irony, mischief, and parody as weapons to express the contemporary world's incongruities and doubts. Taking into account these considerations, in order to understand postmodernism, it is necessary to mention some critics who developed contributions about it, so we will specifically comment on some of the studies developed by Jean-François Lyotard, Fredric Jameson, Jean Baudrillard, Umberto Eco and Zygmunt Bauman.

The French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard (2006), in his study *The Postmodern Condition*, observes that postmodernity is interpreted as the result of a crisis of unifying stories or "meta-relations". Stories are not believed anymore, a characteristic that is made real and evidenced in the endings of contemporaneous narratives, since they are "ironic, open, subject to the reader's interpretation", and "in postmodernism there are no absolute endings", thus they do not reflect the supremacy of a unique-truth discourse, "but offer solutions on the way, relative arrival points" (GARCÍA LLAMAS, 2015, p. 27).

Fredric Jameson (2002) considers the review of the past, the presence of pastiche and schizophrenia as cultural marks of postmodernity. According to García Llamas (2015, p. 30-31), the concepts of pastiche and schizophrenia studied by Jameson are the two most important postmodern distinctions, since pastiche is a crisis of representation that is in correlation with mercantilism, preventing the fight against the capitalist system, and, "in his story, postmodernism does not possess a language that can express the future, because it lacks reality or criteria that allow analysing the present, hence the postmodern character's schizophrenia" (GARCÍA LLAMAS, 2015, p. 30-31). According to Jameson (2002, p. 37),

[...] the emergence of postmodernism is closely related to a moment of a consumer or multinational capitalism. [...] its formal features in many ways express the deeper logic of that particular social system. [...] [So it shows] the disappearance of a sense of history, the way in which our entire contemporary social system has little by little begun to lose its capacity to retain its own past, has begun to live in a perpetual present and in a perpetual change that obliterates traditions of the kind which all earlier social formations have had in one way or another to preserve. [...].

From the Jamesonian conceptions that emphasise pastiche as a way to review the past and schizophrenia as the fact that the individual loses his ability to project into the future – living, in other words, in a perpetual present –, we now come to Jean Baudrillard's considerations. In *Culture and simulacra* (1993), he defends that "falsification dominates the postmodern world" (GARCÍA LLAMAS, 2015, p. 42), because linear history no longer exists and we can only understand reality "in temporal terms to multiple presents", an idea that can be associated to the concept of Jameson's schizophrenic subject. For Baudrillard, reality does not exist, only its simulation.

Zygmunt Bauman develops the concept of liquid modernity in his homonymous study (2003) and, with this metaphor, synthesises the fragility of today's society and human ties, which are based on transient and volatile bases (GARCÍA LLAMAS, 2015, p. 45).

Umberto Eco, an Italian writer, philosopher and professor, in *Apocalyptic and integrated* (2011), reflects that, in postmodernity there is a break between the borders that isolated "high" culture and "popular" culture. It is possible to exemplify it with Eco himself, whose novel *The Name of the Rose* became a best-seller and contains a great conflict burden involving religiosity, literature (intertextuality) and laughter (the lost book of Aristotle), as well as a genre junction (*i.e.*, historical and detective novel at once). These actions did not prevent this work from becoming a success among the great masses and it continues to be recognised as "strict/demanding literature" (GARCÍA LLAMAS, 2015, p. 65).

Because of that, postmodernism can be considered as based on a reflection on the impossibility of a world-view based on the existence of absolute truths. The distrust of progress and history is permanent as a linear sequence of events no longer exists, resulting in "presents that occur in parallel, simultaneously, multiplying on electronic screens or in a defective and distorting memory" (GARCÍA LLAMAS, 2015, p. 48).

The individual is immersed in a liquid modernity, as Bauman emphasised, revealing how fragile society and the links established in it are. As Baudrillard points out, simulation, diversity and heterogeneity lead to the loss of a referent, the "death of the subject" – according to Jameson – and the end of personal identity. Therefore, the boundaries between "high" and "low" culture are annulled in Umberto Eco's conception, the genres are mixed and the past/future are superimposed, leading to a space/time pastiche according to the research conducted by Fredric Jameson.

Proceeding with our research, we will now establish connections between the theoretical contents of postmodernism discussed in this section and its relationship with the novel *The Neruda Case*.

5. Postmodern aspects in *The Neruda Case*

As we read *The Neruda Case*, our attention was drawn to the mix between real and fictitious data. Ampuero investigated the life of Pablo Neruda (1904-1973) – whose real name was Ricardo Eliécer Neftalí Basoalto – very carefully, adding fictitious events to the real ones (e.g.: the existence of Beatriz Brancamonte and her daughter, Tina, whose father is the poet). Because of that, we considered that such work belongs to the subgenre known as a *historical novel*, since, in addition to having a real character (i.e., Pablo Neruda), it also recreates a troubled period in the history of Chile, when the government of Salvador Allende (1908-1973) came to an end due to the military coup taken place on September 11, 1973. After the suicide of Salvador Allende, a dictatorship began as Augusto Pinochet (1915-2006) rose to power.

In postmodernism, writers revisit history and take it as a passive discourse of infinite versions, since “[...] the mark that truly differentiates the postmodern narrative is the certainty that history is not a ‘fact’, but a ‘report’ of inaccessible episodes in itself, which only reach us through conceptual and fictional constructions” (HERNANDES, 2017, p. 103-104). Thus, an assessment of historical facts is observed, as noted by Fernando de Toro (1997, p. 154):

[...] postmodernism reintegrates history, the past, not to present it as a given and concluded fact, but to question it, to rethink it, to re-interpret it. We realise that history is not something concrete, but a form of textualisation of ordering raw facts and transforming them into significant events. Thus, once history is suspicious so is all textualisation, because it consists of a series of textualisations and, therefore, re-interpretations. So, both fictional and real events are similarly elaborated, eliminating the traditional and transparent reality/fiction barrier: reality and fiction are nothing but deliberate textualisations and constructs.

[...] the so-called marginal, minority, eccentric, feminist, ethnic discourses become part of the postmodern ‘plurality’, in which discursive imperialism, hegemonic positions, Manichean ideologies, from which we have nourished, lose its centrality, leaving a fragmented, shared, problematised discursive space.

It is in this way that history, or rather, postmodern historicism, manifests itself as a recovery from the past, as an acknowledgment that we are a ‘product’ and not a beginning, and hence the complicity/criticism and double postmodern codification.

The re-evaluation of the historical past – as we notice in *The Neruda Case* – remarks that postmodernist authors want to rethink history, subvert it, question it. This return to the past may clarify and guide the present, in a way that one sheds light on the other. Therefore, in opposition to the fiction/invention and history/reality dualities that distinguish history and literature, these two fields of study are regarded without any kind of superiority in postmodernity, since

[...] one of the most outstanding aspects of postmodern culture [...] is the consideration of history and reality as discursive products, or as any other construct. It is not a question of denying that the external material world does not exist, but rather, that it is always mediated by discourse. In summary, everything is a construct: identity, gender, culture, science, etc. What characterises postmodern writing with respect to historicity and reality is undecidability and fracticity. In this way, what is produced is a kind of equalisation where no type of knowledge has the centre, but, on the other hand, there is a “rewriting” of history. [...] This scriptural practice is deconstructivist in the sense that it not only exposes the past, but also shows its construction mechanisms and offers an alternative reading of history (TORO, 1997, p. 196-197).

In postmodernism, emphasis is placed on the premise that history, reality, gender, culture and science are constructed by means of discourse; fiction, on the other hand, retakes those discourses in order to rewrite them. This is as an essential concept for postmodernism, as it may eliminate the boundaries between historical and fictional discourses, present and past, since it proposes the retake, reassessment and reinterpretation of the past from the present perspective.

The existence of the narrators – one first-person narrator and one third-person narrator in *The Neruda Case* — is also a feature shared by postmodern productions, in which all the data are partial and we only have versions of them. Thus, it is possible for the reader to observe an external perception of a narrative voice that does not penetrate the conscience of the character and, in contrast, another narrative voice that, parodying autobiographical stories, puts itself in direct contact with the protagonist's experiences and emotions.

Although there is an omniscient narrator, Neruda's visions and perceptions are provided by Cayetano Brulé, who becomes the focus:

[...] in doing so, he realised that the man was not at his back, but standing almost next to him. And, to his astonishment, he recognised him. During the party he hadn't dared to approach him, inhibited not only by the tight circle of admirers surrounding him but also by the authority he attributed to that thick-figured man, with his slow movements, and whose languid, saurian gaze had roved from the sea to him and then back to the sea during that conversation in which he, Cayetano, had not even deigned to look his way. And now the

great poet and distinguished ambassador to France for Salvador Allende was moving away from him, confused by that woman. He had never been alone with a Nobel laureate before. Emotion suddenly shook his body, and blood rushed to his head. [...]

Cayetano wouldn't have dared to make the call. But it was the poet who reached out first, who called to his house and asked him to come for a visit. And that was why he found himself here, on Collado Way, and now someone was finally opening that door with its creaking, rusty hinges and its slats of knotted wood (AMPUERO, 2012, p. 16-17).

Unlike the third-person narrator – who was a fictional god and knew everything –, the narrator who appears in *The Neruda Case* has limited knowledge. That makes Cayetano Brulé wrong throughout the story: at first he believes that Neruda wants him to locate Dr. Ángel Bracamonte to help him heal from his cancer, but the story takes a new direction, as discussed and explained above.

The first-person narrative reveals a poet (*i.e.*, Neruda) who is too much human, with qualities and flaws, without idealisations:

I wish I could have had a daughter with Delia, a healthy and joyful girl who could have helped me forget the melancholic smile that would glimmer on Malva Marina's monstrous face. But Delia was already barren when I met her, and could not give me what I longed for. Perhaps I'm confused by my own memories. The fact is, I couldn't have endured another disaster, another Malva Marina. Which is exactly why I escaped from Beatriz when, years late, at Xochimilco Lagoon, she told me she was bearing my child. I refused to believe it. I lacked the courage to cast aside my literary career with Delia and face the new fatherhood's uncertainty [...] (AMPUERO, 2012, p.168-169).

Neruda himself is known for his weaknesses, intimate desires and coward attitudes. While reading the novel, the reader is in front of ambiguous focuses that allow them to have access to the events in a partial and varied way. Such aspect is connected with postmodernist stories as one is not sure of anything, once there is no single truth or single centralising discourse that can guarantee or reflect the reality surrounding the character:

Along with the conviction that the truth is only reached through the multiplication of approaches, there is another, much more sceptical, that there is no truth, but truths, or, in any case, that the knowledge of the truth, in the sphere of the human, is unreachable. (TACCA, 1983, p. 92).

For these reasons, it is possible to verify that there is no single reality or hegemonic version, but a kaleidoscopic game of visions in which the story, constituted by two narrators, becomes a game of mirrors, whose fragments sometimes contradict each other (and sometimes complement each other). The readers' horizon of perspectives is destabilised and various

possible truths are presented, providing them with a more active role regarding the historical figure of the Chilean poet.

Baudrillard's concept of simulacrum, which states that falsification dominates the postmodern world, can be observed in *The Neruda Case* throughout the story of Cayetano Brulé. He is a fictional character who uses another fictional character (*i.e.*, Georges Simenon's Detective Maigret):

The poet's hands picked up some books covered in red plastic from a nearby table.

"Have you ever read any Georges Simenon?" The look he gave tautened his cheeks and creased his forehead. "He's a terrific Belgian writer of crime novels."

"No, never, Don Pablo." He felt embarrassed of his paltry literary knowledge, and apologized, as though that ignorance could offend his host. "I'm sorry. I've only read a few novels by Agatha Christie and Raymond Chandler, and, of course, some Sherlock Holmes..."

"In that case, it's time for you to read the Belgian," the poet continued forcefully. "Because if poetry transports us to the heavens, crime novels plunge you into life the way it really is; they get your hands dirty and blacken your face the way coal stains engine stokers on trains in the south, where I was born. I'll lend you these volumes so you can learn something from Inspector Maigret. I don't recommend that you read Poe, who invented the crime story and was a great poet. Neither do recommend Conan Doyle, Sherlock Holmes's literary father. You know why? Because their detectives are too eccentric and cerebral. They couldn't solve even the simplest case here, in our chaotic Latin America. In Valparaíso, the pickpockets would steal their wallets on the trolley, the kids from hills would bombard them with stones, and the dogs would chase them down alleys." (AMPUERO, 2012, p. 21-22).

Thus, we have a simulation of a simulation, because a fictional entity uses another fictional entity to perform the role of detective and achieve the goals of looking for a person about whom little is known, Dr. Ángel Bracamonte. In addition to learning how to be a detective, reading novels allows Cayetano Brulé to critically reflect on his own situation and also on the situation of Latin American countries:

[...] Maigret sometimes took days to start his investigations. But he shouldn't place too much trust in the fictional detective. Even if he braved the underworld and greased his relationships with informants, Maigret could never accomplish anything in a region as chaotic, improvised, and unpredictable as Latin America. Just like the gentleman Dupin and Sherlock Holmes, Maigret could investigate his heart out in stable and organized nations like the United States and France, where a rational philosophy reigned over people, rules and clear laws prevailed, logic shaped daily life, and solid, prestigious institutions and an efficient police force worked to ensure respect for the law. However, in Latin America – where improvisation,

randomness, corruption, and venality were the order of the day – everything was possible. In a place where a communist nation coexisted with modern capitalist cities, feudally exploitative if not enslaving plantations, and jungles from the Stone Age, European detectives weren't worth a thing. It was that brutally simple. In those Amazonian, Andean, or Caribbean worlds, detectives such as Dupin, Holmes, or Poirot would find their dazzling deductive powers failing to solve cases. The problem was that the North's logic simply didn't apply in Latin America. Miss Marple, Marlowe, or Sam Spade would not succeed. (AMPUERO, 2012, p. 82).

In the excerpt mentioned above, not only two types of nations oppose (*i.e.*, the European and the Latin American nations), but also two types of detectives (*i.e.*, the European detective – which represents a modern type who acts in a world with logic, precise laws and rationalist philosophy – and the Latin American detective – a postmodern detective, surrounded by the contradictions of convulsive, disparate countries, with scenarios that cover from the Stone Age to the great metropolises, the chaos, the confusion, the crime and the absurd).

Based on this perspective, both the narrator and the reader infer that the modern detectives would fail in the Latin American scenario:

Detectives are like wine, Cayetano thought, like wine, rum, tequila or beer, children of their own land and climate, and anyone who forgot this would inevitably fail. Could anyone imagine Philip Marlowe in front of the cathedral in Havana? The two-o'clock sun would burn his skin, and he'd be stripped of his hat and raincoat without realizing it. Or Miss Marple, walking slowly as an elderly lady through downtown Lima? She'd get intoxicated by the first ceviche she tried, and sinister cabdrivers would stray from their route to the airport to a hovel where delinquents crouched in wait. They couldn't even find her well-crafted dentures. And how about the affected Hercule Poirot crossing Cardonal Market in Valparaíso with his tight rump and white-gloved hands? They'd steal his walking-stick, his pocket-watch with its gold chain, and even his bowler hat. People would mock them to their face, dogs would chase them, and street kids would mercilessly throw rocks at them. He now began to suspect that Simenon's novels, while pleasant and entertaining, would not serve him to graduate as a detective in the south of Rio Grande. The poet was wrong. Maigret was incapable of taming the bursting, copious reality of Latin America. It would be like telling Bienvenido Granda to sing Franz Schubert's *Lieder* instead of boleros at the bars in Managua or Tegucigalpa, or Celia Cruz imitating Maria Callas on Calle Ocho. The entangled Mexican Medical Association files alone would seem an insurmountable, maddening challenge to the structured brains of Holmes, Maigret, and Marlowe, accustomed as they were to scrupulously perusing organized files in the silent amplitude of rooms in prestigious institutions, ensconced in stately buildings with parquet floors, chandeliers, and sumptuous drapes. (AMPUERO, 2012, p. 82-83).

Through an antithetical process, the narrator is not only opposing Europe and Latin America, but also European detectives and Cayetano Brulé. He confronts regularity, established

models, norms and rationality with insecurity, crime and underdevelopment. The modern detective model does not fit Cayetano Brulé, since Europe and America are very different and it is not possible to apply European models to the American reality. Throughout the excerpt mentioned above, the humour contrasts the modernity of European detectives and the postmodern detective (whose sharpest example is Cayetano Brulé) immersed in an investigation that, at various points, seems to lead him to a dead end. In a postmodern reality, Cayetano Brulé needs to build himself as a detective during the course of his adventures. It is a daily task in which implementing European models does not guarantee satisfactory results.

One of the most prominent features in fiction today is “the recurrence to metafiction in literature” (VIZCAÍNO MOSQUEDA, 2013, p. 87), which is considered an act of self-reflection that occurs within the same text (on language, writing, literature, etc.) and its central interest, as Lauro Zavala affirms (*apud* VIZCAÍNO MOSQUEDA, 2013, p. 87), “consists in revealing, in a playful way, the language and literature conventions”.

Therefore, we can identify, in *The Neruda Case*, various passages in which this “self-reflective character” is observed:

He felt depressed, not only because of the bitter tea that tasted like lemonade, but also because he recalled Maigret and envied the faith he had in his own talent, experience, and skill. Reality, he thought, was much harder than any fictional world ever was on its characters. The fate that reigned universe was crueler than the flesh-and-blood writers who composed novels. It was easier to be an excellent detective in a crime novel than a mediocre detective in implacable reality [...] (AMPUERO, 2012, p. 172).

In the excerpt above, Cayetano Brulé considers concepts such as reality vs. fiction, the role of the detective as a novelistic character, the presence of the detective in the Latin American space, the fiction authors, etc. Furthermore, in the final chapters of his adventures, the character himself summarises such factors:

[...] although were-equipped, the Belgian plots belonged to a ground which is alien to him; they were literature, fictitious worlds tacked together through the skill and imagination of a famous writer. But he currently faced the cruel, implacable, chaotic reality of Latin America, a world whose plot had no known author or preestablished script that could make all things possible. (AMPUERO, 2012, p. 316-317).

According to Cayetano Brulé’s point of view, reality surpasses fiction, but it may not be forgotten that he, as a subject of the enunciation, is also a fictional character. The narrative, therefore, doubles itself and returns to itself, as we can see in Chapter 39:

[...] yet again he tried to recall a remotely similar situation in Simenon's novels to help him figure out what to do, but his efforts were in vain, which proved that things happened differently in fiction, according to a different set of rules, at the hands of that god who was never indifferent to the fate of his characters: the writer. At least he knew why authors protected their protagonists, especially if they were protagonists of a series. Authors wanted advance royalties for their future novels and became magnanimous gods and, twisting the hand of reality, threw lifejackets to their characters at the last minute, lifejackets that do not exist in real life, but that the reader was willing to accept as authentic. However, he was not a fictional character -though at that moment he wished he were - but a humble investigator working for a dying poet who was far away and unable to help. At least he, Cayetano Brulé, was made of flesh and blood and did not live in a novel, but in reality, an implacable reality that had no gods or, if they did exist, gods that were indifferent and insensitive to human fates. (AMPUERO, 2012, p. 202).

It is important to emphasise the presence of humour in the excerpt mentioned above, because everything that the narrator denies, in summary, is part of the construction of a detective for the *The Neruda Case*. Although it is denied that Cayetano Brulé is a fictional character, constituted as a fictional entity of a saga, he is, in fact, part of a fictional plot, a fictional being who was invented/created by an author, the protagonist of a saga called "Cayetano Brulé Saga", composed of seven detective novels.⁵ This is how it is proven that the use of metafiction in the novel is one of the most striking features of postmodern fiction, revealing the reflection and the criticism of the elements of fiction (e.g.: author, character, reader, reality, invention and genre) and stressing the fact that literature not only discusses itself, but puts itself as a problem, becoming a fictional plot material.

The novel written by Ampuero is also an example of breaking the low/high culture borders, as Umberto Eco pointed out. On the one hand, *The Neruda Case* is a demanding book, which needs a critical reader so that it can be interpreted and analysed; on the other hand, since it has become a best-seller novel, which has been translated into several languages, a "break" is verified as it turned out to be a worldwide success in terms of sales and public acceptance, compared to the Chilean writer's production.

In summary, we can affirm that Roberto Ampuero has managed to write a detective novel that became popular and easy to consume. He also built a credible version of the poet Pablo Neruda, mixing historical and fictitious data, as well as paid tribute to Miguel de Cervantes with a character named Luis Cervantes, introducing quotes written by poets like Dante Alighieri: - "*Ne/ mezzo del cammin di nostra vita / mi ritrovai per una selva oscura ...*" / -What did you say? / - It's

⁵ For more information, please refer to Section 1 of this paper.

Italian. The words of Dante Alighieri. When you're old, you'll understand me. [...]”, or mentioning a character from Gabriel García Márquez's novel: “*In that darkness I also see Prudencio Aguilar, my old Caribbean friend who was killed with a spear in the Colombian tropics*”⁶ (AMPUERO, 2012, p. 85, 114, 285). In this way, the novel presents excerpts of Neruda's poems, in addition to poets of different nationalities (e.g.: Walt Whitman and Nicolás Guillén), Hispanic and European singers, etc. Despite the complex references, the common reader is not prevented from understanding Cayetano Brulé's first detective adventure.

As a detective, Cayetano Brulé proves the fragility of human beings in today's society, in which contacts are established in transient and volatile bases, according to Bauman. Therefore,

Cayetano Brulé is a character that survives and overcomes his circumstances by adapting himself to an intricate continent, a discordant history and a series of situations in which he feels he belong to, given his status as an outsider. Brulé is a detective who knows that, as a foreigner, he is part of the world, but he chooses to take distance of it in order to survive in the reality he inhabits. (RAMÍREZ, 2016, p. 46).

Cayetano Brulé synthesises both postmodern detective features and postmodern male features, living in the chaos of a large metropolis. Isolated and immersed in a violent and unjust reality, the character lives as a permanent stranger, who travels regularly and is unable to settle in countries whose reality is marked by a constant process of boiling and effervescence due to corruption, fraud and all kinds of crimes.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper, it was possible to verify that *The Neruda Case* is a novel that integrates the productions classified by critics as “postmodern”. This conclusion was intermediated by the study of certain topics, such as intertextuality, the mix of speeches/genres, the modernity of Europe vs. the postmodernity of Latin America, the situation of the characters in a chaotic/confusing and the superficiality/inconstancy of relationships, in which there is no glimpse of a secure and certain future.

The nomadic situation of Ampuero is reflected in Cayetano Brulé, a character who travels through a geography that is similar to the one in which his creator used to live. Both Ampuero and

⁶ The fragment is in italics in Ampuero's text. It is Pablo Neruda's first-person narration.

Cayetano Brulé share the condition of being outsiders and, therefore, it is possible to observe the postmodern self-referentiality which unites the *fictional entity* and the *author* who conceived it.

As Ampuero mixes fiction with the past reality – and, moreover, as he transfers Pablo Neruda to the domains of literature –, it becomes clear that history and literature are discourses which present versions of historical facts and personalities. Thus, it is possible to recreate such and facts and personalities, bringing them to reality so that they can be revisited, discussed and humanised, offering new possibilities of interpretation from the present perspective.

One last thought: Cayetano Brulé is gradually characterised as he faces a confusing, chaotic and violent Latin American reality. Thus, he may be perceived as an empirical subject, inspired by European modern detectives (e.g.: Maigret, Poirot, Miss Marple, Marlowe and Holmes), who is astute and able to camouflage and disguise himself in a convulsive, diffuse and contradictory Latin America. Because of that, he manages to solve intricate cases, and, as he lead through an ambiguous and messy geography – full of adventures and dangers –, the narrative fascinates readers from all over the world as they can reconstruct and experience a variety of condensed situations without leaving their couches.

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