

1492, Mars: Reverberations of the American Continent's Conquest in *Crónicas Marcianas*.

1492, Marte: Reverberación de la Conquista del Continente Americano en *Crónicas Marcianas*.



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Abstract.

This article will review Bradbury's work in order to investigate its connection with an important historical event of our continent: the conquest by Spain. For several aspects that will be examined in more depth later, several researchers have already been interested in delving into this comparative reading, such as Juan Durán Luzio with his article "*Crónicas Marcianas: De la conquista de América a la conquista de Marte*", or Tatiana Herrera Ávila with "*Crónicas Marcianas: El Triple Sistema*"; both important sources for this text that will be frequently cited. In addition to reviewing specific events that link the text with history, we will seek to answer: where does the human desire to emigrate that gives meaning to colonization in both stories come from, and what does "pacification" refer to, in which the colonizers seem to enjoy shielding themselves as a way of justifying their actions?

Keywords: Ray Bradbury. Conquest. Colonization. Pacification.

Resumen.

En este artículo se hará una revisión a la obra de Bradbury para indagar su conexión con un importante suceso histórico de nuestro continente: la conquista por parte de España. Por varios aspectos que se examinarán más a fondo en lo posterior, ya varios investigadores se han interesado por ahondar en esta lectura comparativa, como lo son Juan Durán Luzio con su artículo "*Crónicas Marcianas: De la conquista de América a la conquista de Marte*", o Tatiana Herrera Ávila con "*Crónicas Marcianas:*

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El Triple Sistema"; ambas importantes fuentes para este texto que serán citadas con frecuencia. Además de revisar acontecimientos puntuales que unen al texto con la historia, se buscará responder: ¿de dónde nace el deseo humano de emigrar que da sentido a la colonización en ambas historias?, y ¿a qué se refiere la "pacificación", en la que los colonizadores parecen disfrutar escudarse como una forma de justificar sus acciones?.

Palabras clave: Ray Bradbury. Conquista. Colonización. Pacificación.

Introduction

Crónicas Marcianas (2022), published by Ray Bradbury in 1950, is a work that challenges the boundaries between past and future. In this book we see the story of Earthman conquering Mars and, as he is good at doing, destroying it. Bradbury allows us to see a glimpse of the culture and knowledge of the Martian civilization, which - like a shooting star - we quickly see extinguishing before our eyes.

This story explores the colonization of the red planet from a historical perspective. The stories told in this book do not claim to be tales, but in the index we find a chronology that compiles the most important events of a phenomenon as large and extensive as the conquest of a new world.

In this article we will review Bradbury's work to investigate its connection with an important historical event of our continent: the conquest by Spain. For several aspects that will be examined in more depth later, several researchers have already been interested in delving into this comparative reading, such as Juan Durán Luzio with his article "*Crónicas Marcianas: De la conquista de América a la conquista de Marte*", or Tatiana Herrera Ávila with "*Crónicas Marcianas: El Triple Sistema*"; both important sources for this text that will be frequently cited. In addition to reviewing specific events that link the text with history, we will seek to answer: where does the human desire to emigrate that gives meaning to colonization in both stories come from, and what does "pacification" refer to, in which the colonizers seem to enjoy shielding themselves as a way of justifying their actions?

Why "chronicles"?

Durán Luzio (1992) points out that from the title we can find a clue as to what Bradbury was possibly trying to do with this book: to explore the conquest of a fictitious people based on the conquest of a real people. *Chronicles* was the term that Indian historians -that is, those who wrote about the conquest of the American continent as it was happening- used to name their writings, which were characterized by having a great ideological charge. Proof of this can be found in the *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*, written by the conquistador and chronicler Bernal Díaz de Castillo; in this same book Díaz de Castillo denounces the lack of truth present in the writings of his contemporaries who had undertaken the same task as him:

While writing this chronicle, perhaps I saw what Gómara and Illescas and Jovio wrote on the conquests of Mexico and New Spain, (...) and with this thought I went back to read and look very carefully at the talks and reasons they say in their histories, and from the beginning and middle and end they do not talk about what happened in New Spain, and since they began to talk about the great cities they say that there were so many inhabitants in them, that it does not matter if they say eighty thousand or eight thousand. (1632).

It is curious and almost paradoxical that a chronicler discredits the very genre in which he writes. In this regard, we can take Herrera Avila's definition of what a chronicle is:

The chronicle is constructed, then, as a subjective testimony to the extent that the vision of the chronicler is imposed at the time of narrating the facts, and consequently, there is an intertwining of imagination and memory. In this sense, it constitutes a verbal art to reconstruct an era and generates an interpretation of an unknown world; more than true, it is plausible (2011).

Taking this into account, it is not so far-fetched that Bradbury decides to call the writings that make up this book *chronicles*, since -just like the chronicles of the Indies- they are based on a fictitious part and something that our history has made very clear to us: the instinct of

extermination and superiority that man feels when he encounters a being different from himself.

In the following, we will review point by point some of the specific historical aspects that link *Crónicas Marcianas* with the conquest of the American continent by the Spaniards.

Preparation for the voyage: means of transportation and premonitions

Crónicas Marcianas opens with a story set in January 1999, entitled *Summer of the Rocket*. In it, Ohio undergoes a sudden change of season in mid-winter: the station's rocket sends out heat waves that transform the fierce winter into an unexpected summer.

We see in this first story the means of transportation that will take the earthlings to the new world, in what seems an enormous and unusual undertaking. Moreover, this means of transportation defies the impossible: to modify the weather. This could be a reflection of the caravels used by Columbus which, so advanced, managed to modify the geography that had been in force for twenty centuries (Durán, 1992, p. 5). Dr. José María García Redondo (2019), an expert in the history of cartography in Mexican territory, mentions that Columbus' "stumble" with America was a revolution for those who drew the maps, since they had to distribute the lands that seemed to have appeared by magic among the kingdoms by means of the Treaty of Tordesillas.

The second and third stories (set in February and August 1999, respectively) are about *premonitions*. In *Ylla* we learn the story of a Martian woman trapped in an unhappy marriage, who dreams of a man very different from her coming down from the sky in a "metal thing that glittered in the sunlight," only to be told that he comes from the third planet and his name is Nathaniel York; later in the story we discover that Ylla's dream is actually a premonition.

On the other hand, in *Midsummer Night* we are presented with the story of a Martian singer who, in the middle of her performance, involuntarily expels strange words from an unknown language that send all the listeners into a panic. These strange words are actually Shakespeare's verses.

In America, premonitions were also present. The natives had a legend that spoke of Quetzalcoatl, a man of fair complexion, blond hair and thick beard who came to Tula to share the *Toltecayótl* (knowledge) with the native people there, who was chaste and who did not accept human sacrifices (Cisneros, 2019). The friars took advantage of the appearance of this divinity to make the conquered people believe that Quetzalcoatl had been an apostle sent by God before the arrival of the Spaniards, and now they were arriving to evangelize (Xiu, 2017).

Unsuccessful expeditions

In the first expedition to Mars, told from the Martian perspective (already referenced above) we see how Ylla longs for the arrival of Nathaniel York. This attempted occupation ends abruptly when Ylla's husband kills the Earth crewmen in a fit of jealousy. Francisco Giordano says in this regard:

For Bradbury, at times, the Martians are incredibly similar to the terrestrials, and at times completely different. The exploration of the first astronaut fails not because of a technological failure or a complex clash with the local culture, but for a vulgar reason that sounds close to us: the anger of Ylla's jealous husband, turned on the explorer whose arrival his wife was anxiously awaiting. (2022)

This image of the conquistadors taking the native woman almost as a bargaining chip or reward is equally present in the history of the conquest of our continent. Díaz de Castillo refers in his chronicles:

All this present was nothing in comparison to twenty women, and among them a very excellent woman, who was called Doña Marina, who was so called after her Christian return. Cortés received that gift with joy, and went aside with all the caciques and Aguilar, the interpreter, to talk, and told them that for what they brought he had it in his favor; but he begged them for one thing, that they would immediately send them to populate that town with all their people, women and children (1632, p. 18).

Gifting women as a way of "giving a welcome" or "forming bonds of friendship" was common in the conquest. Invaders came to the continent not only to take precious metals, but also to show off their power by raping and robbing women. Narrations of this kind of acts abound, such as the Letter of Savona (1495) that Dr. Miriam Lopez reproduces in her book (2023):

While I was in the boat I made captive a very beautiful Caribbean woman, that the aforementioned Admiral gave me, and after I had taken her to my cabin, and she being naked according to her custom, I felt the desire to have fun with her. I wanted to fulfill my desire, but she did not consent, and gave me such a treat with her nails that I would have preferred never to have begun. But seeing this (and to tell you all about it to the end), I took a rope and whipped her, after which she uttered great cries, such as your ears could not have believed. Finally we came to agree so much that I can tell you that she seemed to have been brought up in a school for whores.

The conquest of America and the conquest of Mars are steeped in a misogyny that makes the invader believe that it is the men who will give him the power of his lands and the women who inhabit them. And, if this power is not given to him, he will take it. López Hernández says that these "constructed the image that the new lands were like virgin women to be seduced and abused" (2023, p. 76).

On the other hand, we have the second expedition to the red planet, presented in a story entitled *Los hombres de la tierra*. In this one the Earthmen arrive on Mars and, feeling deserving of a dignified reception for their great feat, call at a woman's house to tell her of their great achievement. The woman could not be less interested, so she quickly sends them away and closes the door. Thus, the men go from one side of Mars to the other, desperate for a pat on the back.

We observe here a clash between two different value systems: the Earthlings can't stand that the Martians are not happy with their "accomplishments," and don't understand why they are not throwing a party. In America, the conquistadors did not conceive that the natives did not want to be "pacified" or dragged into a religion they did not profess, since

they could only judge them under their own conception of life (Durán, 1992, p. 8). We will explore this aspect in more detail later on.

Utopia: third expedition to Mars

Before entering the third expedition to Mars, it is important to define the motivations that lead human beings to search for a new world, which seems to be perfect.

Herrera Avila (2011) mentions that since the beginning of our times the human race has been in search of a perfect place: the Elysian Fields, the Edens, the New Atlantis and -in the case of Columbus- the Earthly Paradise, which was believed to be in the East:

In conclusion, the Admiral says that the sacred theologians and wise philosophers said that the Earthly Paradise is at the end of the East, because it is a very temperate place. So now those lands that he had discovered are, he says, the end of the Orient (Columbus, *The Admiral's Four Voyages and his Testament*).

However, to understand this utopian perspective it is not necessary to go that far. Just think of the people of the cities, who, because of the hectic life of urbanity, with its noise and traffic, long to be able to go and live in the countryside. Let us also think of the image we have of "first world" cities, considered safe places, without crime and with a stable economy, which we see as a model or - the most hopeless - as a destination to escape to.

It is not strange, then, that Ray Bradbury presents *Martian Chronicles* as a hypothesis of what would happen if human beings reach the *Extraterrestrial* Paradise they have dreamed of. Especially, if we take into account the historical context in which this work was written: in a United States devastated by two world wars, a strong economic downturn and the marginality of some groups. The need for a utopia to cling to, an escape route, is characteristic of the human spirit. Says Herrera Avila:

This is relevant because in a world in crisis, despite negativity and disenchantment, despite the loss of faith, paradoxically the need for utopia increases, since precisely in the face of the criticism of reality, we seek to transform everything and change evil for goodness. It is in the face of discontent that new doors

are sought, and it is in the face of closed doors that we discover open windows, as the old saying goes, or new paths that lead us to a better world (2011).

Let us return to the third attempt to conquer the red planet. In the story *The Third Expedition* the astronauts land on a Mars that hides behind a disguise: thanks to the aliens, Mars is a mirage of a small town in Illinois in 1926. And, what makes it even more incredible, is that it is inhabited by all the loved ones the conquerors believed to be dead:

-[...] we never imagined we'd find such a thing on Mars.

-Well, they have found it. I would venture to tell you that there are many things on all the planets that would reveal to you the infinite designs of God.

-Is this from heaven? -Hinkston asked.

-Nonsense, no. It's a world and we have a second chance here. No one told us why. But no one told us why we were on Earth either (Bradbury, 2022, p. 70).

Similarly, when the Spaniards arrived in America they were strongly attracted by the legends that the Caribbean natives told them about a land further north in whose bodies of water gushed a revitalizing liquid that allowed them to live many years (*But That's Another Story*, 2021, 1:34-1:51). The invaders related this place to the Myth of the Fountain of Eternal Youth, popular in Europe, and it is believed that Ponce de León was eager to find it.

Furthermore, it was also in the third expedition that Christopher Columbus believed he had found the place where the Scriptures located Paradise: a Garden near the mouth of the Orinoco (Durán, 1992, p. 9).

The conquistadors reach their destination: "pacification".

The Mexican Spanish Dictionary defines *pacification* as the "act of pacifying a region or a population that was at war" (RAE, n.d.). The RAE says that *pacification* means "to establish peace where there was war or discord". An intrinsic part of pacification is -or should be- not to bring more conflict, however, sometimes human beings hide behind "pacification" to hide their true intentions.

The invader arrives to the new territory with the objective of stealing: he takes all the goods, destroys everything the native built and names rivers, mountains, lakes after him. The invader cannot accept that the natives live under a different value system and that they do not want to change it; therefore, he imposes his thoughts by force and calls it pacification. Benedetti said in his *Ode to pacification* (2020) that "there are those who demand the punishment of the garrote for those who do not want to be pacified (...) it is clear that there is always some fool who refuses to be pacified by the back".

Regarding the conquest of the American continent, Bernal Díaz del Castillo says at the beginning of his chronicles: "As far as I and all the true conquerors are concerned, my companions who have served His Majesty in discovering and conquering and pacifying all the provinces of New Spain" (1632, p. 2).

This initial declaration of intentions does not take even a quarto to be clouded by an ambition: a need to possess, which no longer sees the natives as a people to be saved or "pacified", but as an object to be used:

For as soon as we had the license we embarked on a good ship, and in good weather we arrived at the island of Cuba and went to make acato to the governor; and he was pleased with us and promised us that he would give us Indians, en vacando.

Since three years had already passed (...) and we had not done anything worth mentioning, we agreed to get together one hundred and ten companions of those who had come from Tierra Firme and those who had no Indians on the island of Cuba, and we arranged with a nobleman named Francisco Hernández de Córdoba, who was a rich man and had a village of Indians on that island, so that he would be new to employ our people in them.

The Spaniards were impressed when they saw the great and beautiful towns of the lands they had arrived (Del Castillo, 1632, p. 27), however, this did not stop them from destroying their architecture and enslaving their people. Bradbury presents a similar situation in his book, for when the Earthlings of the fourth expedition are asked how they would feel in the

position of the Martians ("How would you feel if you were Martians and someone came and set about devastating the planet?") they remain silent, in what is interpreted as, "Grab what you can, what you find is yours; if the contrary offers you the other cheek, slap him without fear" (Bradbury, 2022, p. 95).

In this fourth expedition to Mars, contained in the chronicle, *Though the Moon Still Shines* (Bradbury, 2022, pp. 80-111), the Earthlings encounter a beautiful planet with great cities, towers, canals and amphitheaters; however, some cities have been extinct for hundreds of years, and others for only a few days. The reason? Chickenpox brought back by astronauts from past expeditions wiped out much of the Martian population, whose immune systems were not accustomed to the disease. Spender - an extremely important figure for the story, which we will discuss in more depth in a moment - is outraged and enraged that a common and harmless disease like chickenpox "which on Earth does not even kill children" has wiped out such a majestic civilization as the Martian one. This is reminiscent of the diseases brought by the Castilians to New Spain, which had the same effect as in Bradbury's story. Said the soldier and chronicler Francisco de Aguilar in this regard that "God saw fit to send smallpox to the Indians and there was a great pestilence in the city" (News Mundo, 2020).

In addition, this account presents the baptism of the lands that already had a name to adapt them to what was known to the conquistadors. In a drunken night the soldier Biggs drinks six bottles greedily, to later throw them in a canal at the time that says "I baptize you, I baptize you, I baptize you, I baptize you (...), I baptize you Biggs, Biggs, Biggs canal". This is reminiscent of Columbus, who after disembarking decided to rename the island Guanahaní as "San Salvador" (Durán, 1992, p. 12).

The rebellious colonizer

In *Aunque siga brillando la luna* we meet Spender, an archaeologist from Earth who is part of the fourth expedition and who, upon seeing the cultural and topographical wonders of Mars, is enraptured. Throughout this story, Spender tries to make his fellow colonists aware

of the importance of taking care of a place as beautiful even in its ruins as Mars is; however, when Spender understands that the rest of the astronauts will not hesitate for a second before destroying that beauty, he decides to declare himself a Martian and annihilate the rest of the crew.

We can see in the attempt to lavish respect on the natives several figures of the conquest of America. Take, for example, St. Bartholomew de Las Casas, who argued in favor of mutual respect as a postulate of universal Christianity (Durán, 1992, p. 12). Furthermore, Spender's interest in Martian philosophy books is reminiscent of Fray Bernardino de Sahagún and Father Francisco Ximénez, who sought to understand cultures before destroying them (Durán, 1992, p. 13).

It is of utmost importance to understand the motivation of this article, in addition, to quote the words that Spender mentions in his argument: "Do you remember what happened in Mexico when Cortés and his magnificent friends arrived from Spain? A whole civilization destroyed by voracious and virtuous fanatics. History will never forgive Cortés" (Bradbury, 2022, pp. 102). This explicitly brings to the table the issue of the conquest of the American continent: Spender is aware of the cycle that is repeating itself.

Conclusion

Crónicas Marcianas, already a classic of science fiction, proves what Aristotle already said in his Poetics: that History tells what has happened and Poetry (now called literature) what could happen. Therefore, knowing history will allow us to approach literature in a more familiar way in which we will see in the fictitious an echo of what is not.

Crónicas Marcianas is not just a beautiful painting of the utopian life on Mars, with its culture, its people and its customs. It is not, much less, a story of the coexistence of Earthlings and Martians on the red planet, the union of two civilizations that see in the Other an opportunity for improvement. *Martian Chronicles* is, instead, the narration of the Conquest of a people, at the hands of men who commit the same atrocities that their ancestors had already done in America. Consider Buzón:

More than about Martians this book is about terrestrials. Influenced by the pessimism of the time in which it is written, the book contains a negative view of human beings. We may succeed in defeating the Martians and colonizing Mars, but we will not succeed in defeating ourselves. Not even on Mars will we be able to escape our miseries, for we will carry them with us (2003).

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