IDEOLOGY AS SMOKESCREEN IN ALFREDO BRYCE ECHENIQUE'S *DOS SEÑORAS CONVERSAN*

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Alfredo Bryce Echenique is a contemporary Peruvian novelist and essayist who was born into '*el seno de una vieja familia aristocrática del Perú*' (the bosom of an old aristocratic family of Peru) (Ferreira, 11) in 1939. He counts a former president, José Rufino Echenique (1808-1879), and a viceroy amongst his ancestors. He has published a number of novels including his most critically acclaimed *Un mundo para Julius* (A world for Julius, 1970) and *No me esperen en abril* (Don't expect me in April, 1995). His works bear witness to the social, political and economic changes that Peru (a country that he finds himself unable to live in and regularly flees) has undergone in the last fifty years and the effects of these changes in the national imagination. His characters, who are, for the most part, members of Lima's so-called 'oligarchy,' also take flight from their everyday realities into the realms of fantasy. In fact, the common denominator linking many of Bryce's works of fiction is the unwillingness of his protagonists to come to terms with the world in which they live. Alienated from realities that they are unable to accept, they usually take refuge in the world of their past in order to combat their feelings of nostalgia and frustration.

The aim of this paper is to assess to what extent the creation of an imaginary world is predicated on a particular ideology in Bryce's *Dos señoras conversan* (Two old ladies chat). In other words, the questions I will be asking are: do the fantasies of Bryce's characters speak out against the society that produced them, or do they confirm its ideology? What do the end of the novel and the patterning of events tell the reader about the ideology of the novel? To what extent does fantasy have an ideology or strategy in Bryce's narrative fiction (in particular, how fantasy uses particular strategies to voice an

ideology)? And, how does Bryce use fantasy as a tool to subtly criticise Peruvian socio-political reality and the lives that the oligarchs lead?

The definition of the term 'ideology', as given in the dictionary, is 'the manner of thinking characteristic of a class or individual' (Oxford Reference Dictionary, 1996). Yet, if (as Terry Eagleton suggests in the introduction to his work on ideology) the study of ideology, 'claims to show how ideas are related to real material conditions' (Eagleton 1994: 6), and if these ideas are granted 'an active political force' (Eagleton 1994: 6), then the argument of my paper, which considers the ideology of fantasy in Bryce Echenique's *Dos señoras conversan*, may seem a contradiction in terms. Would it not be true to say that to live one's life according to an illusory set of ideals or through the indulgence of fantasy and dream palpably suggests an 'opting out' of society, as opposed to an 'opting in'; passivity, as opposed to the positive engagement of a person or social group in the narratives of history?

However, at a further point in his introductory chapter Eagleton claims that 'many theories of ideology regard it as a kind of screen or blockage which intervenes between us and the real world' (Eagleton 1994: 11). In other words, a given ideology can also be intentionally deceptive or predicated on a false consciousness. 'If only we could nip around this screen', he writes, 'we could see reality aright. But there is, of course, no way of viewing reality except from a particular perspective, within the frame of specific interests or assumptions' (Eagleton 1994: 11). This 'blockage' or 'screen' is

> one thrown up, perhaps by social interests or by 'false consciousnesses.' The model depends on the distinction between appearance and reality: there is a real state of affairs out there, but we represent it to ourselves or others in distorting or obscuring ways' (Eagleton 1994: 11).

Then he goes on to posit a psychological analogy, according to which

> out there is reality, and over here the fantasies we entertain about it. But it is part of Freud's enterprise to deconstruct this duality:

> for him, what we term 'reality' is itself shot through with psychological fantasy, as much a construct of our unconscious desires as of our conscious perception. There is some sense in which appearances are here actually part of reality, not a mere screen which we could slide aside to see things as they really are (Eagleton: 11).

To support this point, we may look to Adorno, who, as Eagleton affirms, termed ideology a 'socially necessary illusion' (Eagleton 1994: 7) or to later Marxist thinkers who, to quote Eagleton, see ideology as being: 'an attempt to mask the very conflicts from which it springs, either by denying that they exist, or by asserting their unimportance' (Eagleton 1994: 8). So it seems that the term 'ideology' may encompass not only a positivist framing of socio-political or historical materialist realities, but also quite the opposite; that an ideology can quite simply aim to suppress or mask reality, serving as an illusion for the benefits of a particular, usually upper-class or hegemonic (in Gramsci's sense) social group.

In the narrative fiction of Bryce only the oligarchs have time to dream. Indeed, we could say that Bryce's fiction avoids reality, as only oligarchs have time to write and think in a very radicalised society such as twentieth-century Lima, where one is either a *cholo*[1] struggling to survive in the shanty town areas that lie on the periphery of the city, or a member of the upper and upper middle classes: what I'll be calling the 'oligarchy' for the purposes of this paper, and what actually corresponds to Bryce's notion of Peru's 'mythical' oligarchy. Drawing on Marxist criticism, Eagleton also points out in his *Ideology and Criticism* that there is a close relationship between class and culture, due in part to the 'material and ideological forces which dictate the exclusion of the masses from art' (Eagleton 1976: 20). Literary production and consumption presuppose certain levels of literacy, leisure time and material affluence and that is why the social and historical majority have had (and in

[1] A derogatory term for a person of mixed raced in Peru, usually of white (European) and Indian origins.

Peru still have) little access to the 'civilising discipline of literature' (Eagleton 1976: 16).

The majority of Bryce's characters refuse to accept the social and political day-to-day reality of the world in which they live. They dream away their lives, creating fantastical modes of existence that function as survival mechanisms and retreat into imaginary worlds that often belong to their past. It is almost fair to say that they refuse to accept that history has taken place. The ideology of the oligarchy, after all, is one of retrenchment. An oligarch living in Peru during the second half of the twentieth century, since the military coup staged by General Velasco (1910-1977) in 1968 and the ensuing wide-spread Agrarian Reform movement, which shook the oligarchy at its roots, would probably not have wanted history to happen. History is thus seen by the oligarchy as a 'nightmare' which they wish had never happened.

The paper will also aim to assess the extent to which the socio-economic position of an author (and its readers) conditions his own ideological stance. As Bryce is a very public member of the Peruvian oligarchy we need to question to what extent authorial ideology differs from the aesthetic ideologies of the novel and its characters. Bryce is critical of the behaviour of the oligarchs in his novels and gently mocks the follies of his characters but does he actually condemn their actions and thus reject their ideology? Is his ideology in conflict with his social group, his society? As Eagleton stipulates: 'The literary text is not the expression of ideology, nor is ideology the expression of social class. The text, rather, is a certain production of ideology, for which the analogy of dramatic production is in some ways appropriate' (Eagleton 1976: 64). In an interview given to a Lima newspaper at the time of the publication of *Dos señoras conversan*, when asked if writing literature was a manner of creating links with his country, Bryce replied: 'I believe so, yes', (La República: 30). It appears that the act of writing is for Bryce a way of affirming and defining his identity as a Peruvian and of establishing a discourse with his country.

In order to discover whether Bryce's novels express an oligarchic vision and to consider his understanding of Lima's elitist classes, we need to examine the Lima aristocracy that he portrays in his novels from a socio-historic perspective. Despite varying opinions on whether an 'oligarchy', in the true sense of the word, exists in Lima, most studies written around the time that the main body of Bryce's Peruvian novels are set (1950-1980) agree that an upper class of elite Peruvian families did exist and that they held a monopoly over political and economic power. *Dos señoras conversan* (1990) is set during the 1980s by which time the aristocracy in Peru had virtually faded into oblivion and had been replaced by an upper middle class of capitalist entrepreneurs.

According to the studies included in José Matos Mar's *La oligarquía en el Perú* (The oligarchy in Peru, 1969), after the defeat of the Spanish at Ayacucho in 1824 that led to them leaving Peru, the country was left without an elite, with no one successfully regaining the control that the Spanish Crown had maintained until its departure. The French sociologist Henri Favre explains that the reason for the *criollo's*[2] inability to create national cohesion was that there were simply 'no qualified persons left capable of governing' (Favre 1969: 73): all posts had previously gone to the *peninsulares*[3]. National unity disintegrated and 'vaguely confederated regional societies' (*sociedades regionales vagamente confederadas*) were formed (Favre 1969: 73). True power was assumed by the appropriation of lands and exercised by the aristocratic landlords who dominated these regional societies (Favre 1969: 73). By 1852, new legislation introduced into the civil code did away with all forms of census: national properties were free to be purchased, new haciendas were created from collective lands belonging to the Indian communities and wealthy families saw their properties and personal wealth grow in size. What is clear now, however, is that power in Peru is centralised in the coastal region, particularly Lima.

[2] *Criollo*: a person of European (usually Spanish) origin, born in the New World.
[3] *Peninsular*: a person born in Spain, who later went to live in the New World.

One change that permitted the recovery of the oligarchy in Lima took place in 1850 and involved the exportation of *guano*, or bird faeces. The profits were invested in coastal haciendas and plantations, and this, coupled with the mechanisation of the coastal industries of sugar cane and cotton meant that the coastal aristocracies took the lead. Subsequently a 'constellation' of economic empires grew up through which finance, banking, imports and exports were gradually controlled (Favre 1969: 78-79). During the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries the traditional upper classes underwent a dramatic metamorphosis from a uniquely landowning elite to an elite that comprised wealthy landowners and a new self-imposed aristocracy who achieved their goal through economic and political control. The formation of the new elite was completed with the arrival and absorption into this group of the capitalist classes who looked to the US for their points of reference. These groups have been described as a 'counter-elite' composed of architects, engineers, doctors, lawyers and businessmen. There has been a shift in power and the oligarchy is no longer homogenous.

The fact that the names featuring on the director's lists of the main financial enterprises and commercial societies are for the most part the same as those of the principal land-owning families of the coast, and the same as those on the membership lists of social clubs, bears witness to the extent of this group's power during the twentieth-century. In addition, a significant finding coming out of biographic data on cabinet ministers shows that a large proportion of high-ranking politicians emanate from the families of upper class land-owners and that a high proportion of cabinet ministers bear the names of families identified with the landed elite. In the cabinet of Belaunde Terry (1912-2002) forty-two of the sixty-eight cabinet ministers were among the nation's leading landowners (Stephens 1971: 107); furthermore they held the important positions in the Ministries of Finance and the Home Office. This indicates the existence of a close relationship between land and power in Peru and suggests that the landed elite have always been grossly over-represented.

For Henri Favre and for another French sociologist, François Bourricauld, the oligarchy consists of 44 families (Jorge Bresani calls it 'the "myth" of the forty-four families') (Mar 1969: 8) who held the monopoly over political and economic power and whose fortune was derived from the sugar and cotton industries (Favre 1969, Bourricauld 1969). After Velasco these industries were all but lost. The oligarchy's position has become increasingly unstable due to the Agrarian Reform programme, because the boundaries that separate them from other groups are increasingly difficult to define and because of the control exercised by foreign investors, mainly from the US, after the influx of foreign investment following the First World War.

Bryce's novella *Dos señoras conversan* (1990) is the story of two widowed septuagenarian sisters who live together in the Lima of yesteryear, amidst memories, daily nightcaps of a rapidly diminishing stock of Bristol Cream sherry and accompanied by painful utterances like *Qué linda era Lima entonces* (Lima was once so beautiful) (Bryce 1990, 12)[4]. To put it simply, for the aristocratic siblings Peru is not what it used to be. Thus Doñas Carmela and Estela weave around themselves a web of fantasy which resembles very much the glorious Lima of their younger years. A major part of the work is told through a retrospective strategy which narratologists have called 'analepsis'[5] and the remaining part via reminiscences in the form of dialogue that we as readers are privy to. These analepses focus upon the history of the de Foncuberta family and in particular the curious destiny of the patriarch of the family, the sister's beloved *papacito* (dearest daddy). The general mood of the novella is one of nostalgia. However, in the above mentioned interview Bryce declares 'I am more of a rebellious writer than a nostalgic one' (*Soy un escritor más rebelde que nostálgico*) (República: 31), and offers an alternative title for the novella, *En busca de la olgarquía perdida* (In search of the lost oligarchy). Interestingly, the work didn't appear in Peruvian bookshops until three years

[4] All English translations from the novella are mine.

after its international publication, leaving one to wonder if this unusual delay could have been a response to its subject matter.

Imprisoned in a world of memories, Carmela and Estela wake up and return to bed, complaining between glasses of a discontinued liquor, about how horrible Lima has become and how inefficient the servants of today are compared to those of yesterday. They sit in the make-believe remnants of an imagined but idyllic feudal paradise and refuse to accept the changes that history has imposed upon their world and their lives. Their lives are enslaved to the same daily routine, which actually mimics their late father's habits of three Bristol Cream sherries at seven o'clock and a glass of Hennessey cognac after supper. They repetitiously reinact the past in the present before bidding each other 'goodnight' in '*la Lima horrible de hoy*' (the horrible Lima of today) (Bryce 1990: 15).

This notion of the self-delusional character of the *limeño*[6] and the way in which they idealise the past is a recurring theme in Peruvian literature. In an essay published in 1964 (in Mexico, unsurprisingly, as the title is *Lima la horrible* (Lima the Horrible)) Sebastián Salazar Bondy criticises *limeños* for living their lives as if they were still in the colonial epoch, which he claims they perceive as an '*arcadia colonial*' (colonial arcadia), an '*edén perdido*' (lost Eden) (Salazar Bondy 1964: 15-17). In his analysis of Peruvian society he argues that *limeños*' vision of their city and its social hierarchies has been distorted by a set of reassuring illusions whose origin lies in the memories of the viceregal age. He writes that Lima and the *limeños* live saturated in the past as if the future and even the present are of no importance. He goes on to suggest that this attitude has left *limeños* in a state of perpetual alienation from reality, life and history. Bondy quotes the words (which he critically refers to as

[5] Gérard Genette defines analepsis as 'any evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment' (Genette 1980: 40)
[6] Castilian word for an inhabitant of the city of Lima.

a hoax), *cualquiera tiempo pasado fue mejor* which translates roughly as 'any time in the past was better than the present' (Salazar Bondy 1964: 16).

A good example of the sisters' reluctance to accept their circumstances is their unwillingness to believe that supplies of Bristol Cream Sherry do, in fact, run out one day in Peru. They sit amidst a pair of antique grandfather clocks, purchased during their childhood voyages to Paris and London, which do not tell the correct time. These clocks are of great significance in the text for two reasons: firstly, obtained during trips to Europe, they symbolise the primacy given to all things European over all things Peruvian (throughout Bryce's narrative the superiority of the European over the national is a major theme). This in turn recalls the grand old days when a European-based aristocracy ruled Peru. Secondly, they fail to keep good time: they are slow; although the notion of time is ubiquitous in the novella, these clocks represent the fact that the sisters live in the static, stagnant and sterile world of their past, as a means of escaping a post-Velascean reality that they find hard to come to terms with. This idea is encapsulated by Bryce's alternative title for the novella, 'In search of the lost oligarchy'. This homage to Proust gives us a clue that the work might be, in some ways, Bryce's Peruvian version of *Á la recherche du temps perdu*.

Every night after drinks, the sisters furiously scrub away at their sets of false teeth before counting the ten steps it takes each to arrive at her respective bedroom. It is apparent that their lives are governed by routine (sherry followed by cognac followed by brushing their teeth and counting the steps to bed) and *this* particular routine, barmy and pointless as it is, has a psychological function for the sisters: allowing them to step aside from real life (like all their routines), it represents an escape from reality. Adopting a typically oligarchic stance (history is a mistake best forgotten), they often reminisce as they scrub their dentures: 'and to think that there was once a time in Lima when you could do absolutely everything with products imported from France, sold in the English apothecary') (Bryce 1990: 13). Now, they must resort to North American

imports. The contempt in which the sisters hold the transition in importation tendencies from the European to the North American, reflects the snobbery of the old elite of Lima, who insist on drawing upon their (often no longer existent) connections to the Old continent. Bryce is poking fun at the sister's snobbish attitudes by emphasising their grotesque vanity (they are, after all, cleaning their dentures). The sisters choose to pass their time drinking sherry and scrubbing teeth, thereby masking the material conditions in which they live. Their existence follows a circular route, in contradiction to the advancement of progressive, linear time and history. Bryce's criticism is directed at the idleness of the upper-class *limeños* and their denial of everyday, historical reality in their refusal to let go of the past.

The character who goes furthest in denying the world in which he lives and indeed historical progress itself, is the sisters' father, the grand old aristocratic patriarch, Don Jacinto de Foncuberta López Aldana. Contrary to his laments that he has produced only daughters and the 'illustrious' family name of de Foncuberta would disappear with him, Don Jacinto is actually conscious that the world in which he lived could not last for eternity. Still, one day in 1953, he solemnly announces:

> *Abandonaba los banquetes de palacio y la historia del Perú, toda, haciendo hincapié en toda, absolutamente disgustado por los apoyos políticos que estaba recibiendo el General Manuel Apolinario Odría, desde su elección a la presidencia en 1950, o casi desde entonces, porque él ni siquiera había querido darse por enterado en un primer momento pero ahora no sólo se daba por enterado de todo sino que quería que el Perú enteroenterara de que él, por su parte, abandonaba la historia del Perú, y toda, y que se me entienda, por favour.* (Bryce 1990: 21)
>
> He was going to abandon the banquets in the palace and the history of Peru, on account of being utterly disgusted by the political support that general Manuel Apolinario Odría had been receiving, since his election to the presidency in 1950 (or thereabouts), because initially, he hadn't even cared to be aware of what was going on, but now, not only was he conscious of

> everything that was going on, but he also wanted the whole of Peru to know that he, for his part, was abandoning the history of Peru, and try to understand me, please.

It follows that as soon as he gains an understanding of his circumstances within the national political framework and his resulting diminishing wealth, de Foncuberta decides to turn his back on the world. Yet to abandon history and the world is a painfully impossible task and even a rather ridiculous one: ultimately, he merely retreats into his own little fantasy world, where he leaves the house once a week on Thursdays to meet with an old friend at the élitist old Club Nacional (the very epicentre of political and high society activity in Lima!) and on Fridays to visit his daughters and sons-in-law.

Foncuberta, then, opts for the impossible: to live outside the parameters of history, time and real life. He is trying to escape the social, political and historical realities of his country and the changes they bring to his life, through the creation of an alternative existence that turns its back upon the realities of his world. Unhappy with his life and times, he chooses to deny their existence, and erects a screen between himself and the world. Redressing his life through fantasy is for Don Jacinto an ideological strategy that allows him to mask from himself the real historical and material conditions in which he lives. The illusion of living outside historical reality is his way of dealing with a world whose changes destabilise his position in the social (i.e. colonial) hierarchies by decentralising the until then all-powerful oligarchy. His ideology is clearly one of retrenchment and therefore intentionally deceptive or predicated on a false consciousness. Clues to Bryce's critical attitude toward his character's ideology are the words in parenthetical asides '(or thereabouts)' and his apathetical admission that initially he hadn't cared to be aware of what was going on his country. This demonstrates that there is no consistency or coherence to his reasoning and that his knowledge of his country's political affairs was always at best unsound. Much like the other oligarchic figures of the novella, Don

Jacinto attempts the impossible task of trying to pretend that history hasn't happened, by burying his head in the sand like an ostrich.

His wife and the sisters' mother, on the other hand, is set up as a foil against both father and daughters. No sooner has her husband decided to retreat from the real world than she begins to 'think aloud,' pointing out false hairpieces and arses 'the size of the hydro-electricity station' (Bryce 1990: 23) at the important social functions that they attend together. Deemed by all to have become utterly insane, she is, in fact, the only lucid member of the family or the only one who sees (and speaks) the truth. Even the family doctor Dr La Torre blames her husband for her 'madness', with the words 'you shouldn't have abandoned the history of Peru so quickly…your wife so loved to interact with the world around her' (*No debió abandonar usted la historía del Perú […] le gustaba tanto ese gran teatro del mundo*' (Bryce 1990; 24). She herself will repeat these words to her husband on his death-bed. She acts as an indicator to the fact that her husband's deceptive ideology of fantasy is misguided. Her words become a kind of general warning to the Peruvian upper classes in their denial of real life and are all the more relevant for being pronounced at the death-bed of the grand old aristocratic patriarch.

The novella is, after all, about the decline of the Peruvian oligarchy, a historical fact that the characters refuse to accept. It is a theme that Bryce, amongst others, has referred to in several newspaper interviews, positing the somewhat rhetorical question: '*En qué momento el Perú se jodió?'* (At what point did Peru fuck up?). The exact moment, according to the novel, is 1968, the year in which General Velasco of the Revolutionary Government of the Armed Forces successfully staged the military coup that led to a dramatic change in the fortunes of the oligarchy, through the wide-spread Agrarian Reform Programme that he subsequently implemented. This event, whose consequences were of immense proportions, is related by the old ladies in a conversation that highly undermines the extent of its economic and political implications. This cornerstone in Peruvian political history and the economic

and social shockwaves that it produced, are not only misinterpreted by the two ladies, but pass entirely over their heads, as seen in an amusing conversation they have one night:

> […]The false newspapers of Lima were those of the military of 68. How stupid they were, those military people of 68, don't you agree? The most stupid of all, woman. You really have to reach the height of stupidity to take a newspaper away from its and give it to the peasants and the workers… and God knows who else. I think they had newspapers for everyone, except for people like us. How dreadful, if I remember correctly, you'd open up a paper without ever seeing anyone you knew!
>
> *[…] Los falsos periódicos limeños fueron los de los militares del 68. Qué torpes los militares del 68, ¿no?Los más torpes de todos, mujer. Hay que ser realmente el de la torpeza para quitarle su periódico a la gente y dárselo los campesinos, a los obreros, a... a... a no sé quién más. Pues creo que había periódicos para todos menos para la como nosotras.¡Qué horror!, sí lo recuerdo. Abrías un periódico y nunca lograbas a ver a nadie conocido!* (Bryce 1990: 53)

Obviously, this is a satirical remark at the expense of the glossy Lima society magazines, but it also draws the reader's attention to the way in which the ladies conceive of such an important national affair, negating its magnitude by shunting it to the realms of the trivial and elitist fashionable glossies. In other words, the ladies are totally alienated by the realities of Peru, averting their eyes from historic truths and indulging in the mundane trivialities of everyday aristocratic Lima which includes magazines laden with photos of high-society events. This links in with the fantasy they entertain about belonging to another world, that of Europe. They spend so much time buried in the alternative universe of Europe that it ends up taking precedence over the world in which they live. The ladies are living in the make-believe paradise of their own little society world, as if untouched by the reality of events that take place outside their front door.

Like their father before them, the sisters attempt to re-create the world of their idyllic past, either by ignoring the present or simply complaining about it. The good-old days were those when '*Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, que no era pariente ni por Adán del doctor de la Torre, siempre estaba preso y su partido aprista y del pueblo también siempre estaba en preso o algo así*' (Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre and the members of his Popular Alliance Revolutionary Party were in prison, and the popular classes were always in prison too) (Bryce 1990: 15). The ideology expressed by the sisters is clearly one of retrenchment as they voice their distaste for the entrance of the popular classes onto the political scene. Yet their thinking is all confused: they interweave fantasy and reality, past and present, as every time they mention the revolutionary leader, they recall the long-dead family doctor Dr La Torre, '*que ni por Adán era pariente de Victor Raúl de la Torre*' (who was in no way related to Victor Raúl de la Torre) (Bryce 1990: 15), as if he were still around. Their sons, on the other hand, illuminate the real effects of time to their mothers when they tell them that the haciendas are irretrievable and that Agrarian Reform is now a thing of the past, suggesting that they do accept that history has taken place. This is why they leave the country and emigrate to Miami.

One subject close to the hearts of the sisters is the poor quality of the serving staff of today compared to those of past times. Doña Carmela almost spits out her views on the subject as she accuses:

> *A los borricos de la servidumbre de haber tenido la culpa todo, porque tenían la culpa de todo, y por qué no iban a la culpa de todo si en los tres o cuatro años que llevaban con ellas en el departamento ni siquiera habían aprendido servirlas como era debido y todo el tiempo andaban pidiendo aumento y permiso para salir un rato y no eran ni honrados ni limpios ni eternos ni agradecidos ni hasta blancones y educadísimos y de Cajamarca que de ahí venían los mejores sirvientes, como eran los que tuvimos en casa de nuestropapacito y que él había heredado del suyo porque eran tan fieles que ni se morían siquiera para que no hubiera que buscarles reemplazo y causarnos problemas.* (Bryce 1990: 17)

> Those donkeys who serve us… they're to blame for everything. In the three or four years that they'd been with us in the apartment they hadn't even learned how to serve them as they ought to, always asking for a rise in wages or permission to go out, and they weren't honest, or clean, or eternal, or grateful. Not even white-looking and educated in Cajamarca, ah, that's where the best servants came from, like the ones we used to have, and the ones we had before that, in Daddy's house… and he'd inherited them from his father, because they were so faithful that they didn't even die so that you wouldn't have to go through all the bother of finding replacements for them.

Quite aside from sounding ridiculous, Carmela's complaints serve merely to highlight her prejudices and specifically her immoral ways as she expresses her disgust for her serving staff immediately after they foil her plans to murder her sister.

The sisters' desire to claim back the past is so strong that they end up becoming stuck in it. In this desire to cling to the past, fantasy has become a socially necessary illusion for the sisters, a strategy for survival. Here we may note that fantasy, as an ideology, is not necessarily a negative ideology for the sisters, for its apparent aimlessness can be related to serendipity, and, thereby, to the imaginative faculty of the human mind, which helps them through life's vicissitudes. Yet Bryce exposes their wrong-headedness in trying to deny reality through his mocking criticism of their racist ideals.

Their attempts to hang on to their illustrious past culminate in the altering of their son's names from Luis Pedro and Juan Bautista, to Foncuberta and Carriquiri, the surnames of their grand-father and father respectively, in an attempt to carry on the grand aristocratic-family name. Once again, Bryce gently points a mocking finger at the sisters, simply by entering into their confused thoughts and presenting them to us. So, for the sisters, naming the second son Foncuberta: 'was also a way of keeping the great family name alive in Peru, when in reality all hope of this had been extinguished by their father's

skinniness' (*era también mantener vivo en el Perú aquel gran apellido que realmente había empezado a extinguirse con lo flaco que era su papacito*) (Bryce 1990: 37) (i.e. his consistency was not ample enough to produce male heirs!). Their decision to create for themselves the aristocratic-sounding surname of Foncuberta de Carriquiri is a fantasy of pretence: they create for themselves the delusion that they still belong to an aristocratic family and that the aristocracy is still omnipotent in current-day Peru. Although it sounds ludicrous, the fantasy of calling themselves by non-existent aristocratic names allows them to create the illusion that they are still grand figures on Lima's upper-class social circuit. This is ridiculed by their sons, who tell them:

> *[…] por más ilustre que sea, ya no lo es, mama ylarguísimo y totalmente incomprensible más allá de la de la casa, mama, y además imagínate lo que sería tener que explicar tremendo apellidón en el aeropuerto de Nueva York o Miami, te registran mucho más el equipaje, mamá. (*Bryce 1990: 37)
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> […] as illustrious as the name Foncuberta de Carriquirri may seem, it really isn't anymore, Mother and its awfully long and utterly comprehensible when used away from home, mother, and more to the point, imagine what it would be like having to explain such a tremendously great surname in the airports of Miami and New York, they'd charge you much more for excess baggage, Mother.

The author is almost using bathos here, as he descends from the reminder of the family's sublime aristocratic roots, to the triviality of excess baggage in the airports of the U.S. Bryce is making a jibe at the expense of the Peruvian elite by showing how out of date they are compared to their northern neighbours. It is interesting to note that although Bryce criticises the recent primacy given to the U.S. over Peru by Peruvians, and indeed their preference for emigrating to foreign climes, he himself claims to be unable to live and write in a city as 'filthy' as Lima, and has indeed spent the majority of his adult life living outside of Peru, in European cities such as Paris, Montpellier,

Barcelona and Madrid. So, whilst he mocks both mothers and sons, his life mimics the actions and attitudes of his characters. This points to the fact that there is perhaps a difference in the value-systems or ideologies held by the real and implied authors of the text.

The elder, less likable and more confused sister always made it her policy to prolong the continuation of the oligarchy against the odds, as if trying to take on reality. The younger and gentler sister, Estela suffered years of unhappy marriage because her sister forced her into marrying a young aristocratic philanderer who never loved her. Her reasons for doing this are shown in a snippet of a conversation she had years ago with her husband: '*ya veremos cómo casamos a Estela con Luis Pedro, Juan Bautista, claro, eso es lo que tenemos que hacer, en los días maravillosos y felices en que dos apellidos ilustres se unieron y crearon un mundo que nunca se iba a acabar*' (You'll see why we are marrying Estela off to Luis Pedro. That's what we have to do, as in those happy days when two illustrious surnames would unite to create a world that would never end.) (Bryce 1990: 38). The disastrous nature of the marriage serves as a reminder to the couple that they shouldn't try to go against history and force the oligarchy to stay standing up in all its former glory. The same goes for the double-barrelled surnames. The message is that the oligarchs can't take on history and win or prevent it from happening, but, to the contrary, must accept the changing times.

The end of the novella sees the sisters' final and alarming descent into fantasy and their total detachment from reality. The event that triggers off this downward spiral is the burglary of their home by their cousin, Guillermito. Ironically, upon discovering that their telephone lines have also been cut, the sisters cry '*¡Nos han aislado del mundo!*' (They've isolated us from the world!) (Bryce 1990: 56), although amusingly add 'and Miami', which is where their sons live. Suddenly, Doña Carmela begins to call the dead figures from their past: their parents, their husbands, Dr La Torre and indeed, the whole of the Lima of past times. When asked later by her sister, amidst tears and

lamentations, what she would liked to have been, Carmela replies, bizarrely, that she would like to be a lap dog in Paris: *cuando las cosas cambian hasta saltar a la vista, lo mejor que le puede ocurrir a una mujer como nosotras es ser perro fino en París*. (when things change to the point where these changes jump out at you and bite you on the nose, the best thing that can occur to a woman like ourselves is to be a lap-dog in Paris) (Bryce 1990: 40). In the aftermath of the burglary Doña Carmela not only decides that the now long-dead Dr la Torre is the best doctor in Lima, a truly wise man, but also the best doctor in the world and at the same time, the most famous vet of lapdogs in Paris! In the minds of the two elderly ladies, past and present, fact and fantasy finally merge into one when Doña Carmela cries out to all who will listen to her: *'ni una sola palabra de esto a nuestros hijos […] Ni siquiera al doctor La Torre'* (Not a word about this to our sons […] Not even to Dr La Torre') (Bryce 1990: 70). The doctor has been dead for decades. The present has slipped away from their home and the past is now the order of the day.

The serving staff, all implicated in the staging of the robbery, are immediately sacked, although cousin Guillermito is forgiven: what else was he supposed to do to make ends meet in the horrible Lima of today with its decline in living standards? An ensuing attempt is made to 'Cajamarcanise' the new serving staff and the ladies set about training the newcomers. Indeed, even the loyal chauffer, Jesús Comunion Junior, will soon be made a resident of Cajamarca, although the text makes plain that he is actually from the largely black *limeño* district of La Victoria.

And so we return to the final night of the story and the first day of Cajamarca for the sisters. We find them sitting in their armchairs awaiting the hour of their Bristol Cream Sherry:

> *–¡Jesús! ¿Qué pasa? Acaba de sonar la octava campanada reloj de la sala y usted no entra con el Bristol Cream.*
> *–Señoras… ¿Otra cosita no les apetece? El Bristol Cream se ha terminado.*

> *–¿Y a usted no se le ha occurido salir a comprar más?*
> *–Llevo días intentándolo, señoras, pero el Bristol Cream se terminado en el Perú.*
> *–Y a mí eso qué me importa, Jesús [...] Usted haga lo que se dice, Jesús, y tráiganos el Bristol Cream.* (Bryce 1990: 72)

> –Jesús, what's going on? The clock has just struck eight and you still haven't brought us in the Bristol Cream.
> –My Ladies… Don't you fancy anything else? The Bristol Cream has run out.
> –And didn't it occur to you to go out and buy more?
> –I've been trying for days, my Ladies, but Bristol Cream Sherry is out of stock in Peru.
> –What do I care, Jesús… You do what you're told, Jesús, and bring us the Bristol Cream.
> –Exactly, well said, Estela.
> –Very well, my Ladies- cried Jesús Comunion Junior, and he went off to fetch the Bristol Cream Sherries.

At the end of the novella, then, the sisters' fantasy has assumed its full proportions. The reality of their world has disappeared in their attempts to construct a new reality and the fantasy world of their past has consumed normality.

The patterning of events and specifically the ending of the novella demonstrate that fantasy is adopted by the two old ladies as a strategy of survival, allowing them to combat the difficult reality of the Lima of the end of their days. Bryce, who constantly sets the sisters up to mock and pulls them down is quite clearly critical of the ways in which they deal with reality. He achieves this by relating their farcical actions and conversations to the reader in such a way that both reader and author share many a joke at the sisters' expense, showing that humour is a tool that is used to criticise the way in which the sisters live their lives.

The sisters' ideology of fantasy allows them to resolve the conflicts and contradictions of their situation, thereby permitting them to convert these into a manageable set of circumstances. Their strategy of re-creating the Lima of their

past, albeit futile and wrong-headed, allows them to cope with the destabilisation of their once eminent position in society. If make-believe softens the blows that history has dealt the sisters, then it is possible to say that behind their fantasies lies a strategy of survival; to put it otherwise, behind their fantasies lies an ideology.

However, the ladies' ideology of fantasy is in conflict with the society in which they live as it negates the importance of the political and social changes that have taken place in Peru since the times of their childhood. Refusing to engage in life, the sisters choose to look at reality through a sort of obscuring or distorting lens, simply because they wish that history had not happened. Lonely fantasists living an alternative existence, they seem to be as much victims of the socio-economic conditions in which they live as they are of their own unrealistic illusions and pretensions. In this sense, it is true to say that 'ideology may indeed contain certain important truths, but ones deformed by the impact of social interests' (Eagleton 1990: 15).

The aim of this paper has been to establish whether or not Bryce's position as a member of the elite social group has conditioned his view of the oligarchy. While not a vehement critic of Peru's ruling elite like other Peruvian writers such as Ciro Alegría or José María Argueda, Bryce, a decidedly apolitical writer, nevertheless shows up the follies, foibles and pretensions of an oligarchy whose ideology amounts to the deliberate self-masking of reality. Indeed, his works have been interpreted as a swansong for Lima's élitist classes. Unlike the ideology behind the works of the magical realist writers, whose characters step outside of everyday reality into magical realms in order to bring interpretations of Latin American realities into the light of day, Bryce's work is an example of how fantasy can be associated with a determined blindness with regard to history. His works portray an oligarchy that is turning away from history and truth and opting for a comfortable make-believe existence, alienating itself from the realities of a changing nation. It is ideology that 'determines the historically real' (Eagleton 1976: 72) in the text. History

does enter the text, but it enters it, 'precisely as *ideology*, as a presence determined and distorted by its measurable absences' (Eagleton 1976: 72).

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