

ABSTRACT

The Defeated Protagonist: A Study of Characterization in the Novels of Pedro Juan Soto

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This thesis examines the subject of characterization in the novels of the Puerto Rican novelist Pedro Juan Soto up to 1982, against the background of colonialism in Puerto Rico. Five novels will be studied, each highlighting a different aspect of Puerto Rican colonial reality. This reality varies from the impact of the presence of the American military on Vieques to the problem of identity associated with the phenomenon of emigration. It comprehends, also, the problem of the adoption of foreign values by the middle class, as well as the conduct of expatriates in the colonial territory.

After a presentation of the socio-historical context in which the novels were produced, the study traces the history of the novel in Puerto Rico from the nineteenth century to the present in order to demonstrate that its development has been influenced significantly by the reality of the island's colonial experience. This survey provides a literary context within which the novels are examined. In establishing a theoretical framework within which the novels can be analyzed, the study discusses certain elements of Post-colonial theory which seem most relevant to the focus of Soto's writing in the Puerto Rican context. It also examines the subject of characterization, focussing

mainly on the realist novel, while acknowledging that Pedro Juan Soto's approach to characterization in these novels is one that subordinates the analysis of character to his intent to use his characters as instruments in representing his vision of the world he explores.

Each of the five novels is then discussed with a focus on the author's portrayal of the protagonists, demonstrating the effect of the colonial experience on their outlook and behaviour. The study argues that the protagonists of these novels are incapable of coping successfully with the social, political and cultural reality that confronts them. Two reasons are suggested. First, those who are Puerto Rican live in a socio-political environment, spawned by the island's colonial domination by the United States, which is alienating and frustrating and which influences their behaviour, directly or indirectly. The other protagonists function against a background of a colonial Puerto Rico and this, inevitably, influences their conduct, even though they cannot be considered victims of these circumstances in the same way that their Puerto Rican counterparts are. Secondly, all the protagonists exhibit their own internal shortcomings - weaknesses of personality and character - which prevent them from making a success of their lives.

Keywords: Victor Simpson; Puerto Rican Novel; Pedro Juan Soto; Colonialism; Characterization