

DICTATORIAL RULE, POLITICAL REPRESSION, AND THE THIRD WORLD: AN ANALYSIS OF GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ'S THE AUTUMN OF THE PATRIARCH

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ABSTRACT

Dictatorial rule has been a serious threat to the progress of most of the under-developed part of the world. Since Latin America constitutes a substantial part of the Third World and is mostly governed by either civil or military dictators, the causes and effects of dictatorial rule have been a favourite subject of the fiction writers of this region. The magical-realist fiction writers have been most eloquent in highlighting flaws inherent in such type of governments, whether in Chile, Colombia, Argentina, or Venezuela. García Márquez's novel The Autumn of the Patriarch (1975/2007) is a protest against the dictatorial system in Latin America. The present study deals with the way García Márquez used the technique of magical realism to establish that autocrats and despotic rulers are a challenge to the development of a place and prosperity of its people. The close-reading approach/technique has been adopted to determine the causes and effects of dictatorial rule in the miniature world of the selected novel and the way it can be generalized vis-à-vis the contemporary circumstances of the Third World countries.

Keywords: Third world, dictatorial rule, magical realism, close-reading, Latin America

INTRODUCTION

An evaluation and analysis of the postcolonial fiction on the level of criticism of the process of colonization and its effects on the indigenous land and people makes it interesting and yet useful in terms of a positive contribution to the society; particularly, when the Latin American [and South Asian] region constitutes a major as well as representative part of the Third World (Jameson, 1986). Various devices (e.g., magical realism, hallucinatory realism, etc.) allow metafictional self-reflexivity work in an equilibrium with literature and history. It is this state of equilibrium that brings forth “ironic inversions of parody” (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 140) that lead to establish the crucial and fundamental relation between art and the world of discourse, ultimately reaching the point where society and politics intermingle and affect each other. According to Hutcheon (1989, p. 3), postmodernism in fiction describes “fiction that is at once metafictional and historical in its echoes of the texts and contexts of the past”. She held that historiographic metafiction is a body of the popular novels which are “both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages” (1988, p. 5). In other words, the work of postcolonial novelists is a quintessentially postmodern art form, with a reliance upon textual play, parody, and historical re-conceptualization.

The interpretation of Latin America has always been shaped either by modernization or dependency theory (Kirby, 2003). The leaders of the region are optimistic and find their resort in describing Latin America as modern by patronizing the Western institutions, whereas the rest take it as a place having definite third world pockets (Wiarda & Kline, 2006). However, the economy of the region kept on developing and in 1975, Latin American corporations constituted 30 per cent of all Third World corporations (Sklair & Robins, 2002). Latin American countries constitute a considerable part

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of the Third World and have suffered from an unstable socio-political as well as economic history due to the constant intervention of military dictators in political affairs. The fate of this part of the world has been in the hands of either civil or military dictators like Hugo Chavez, Raul Castro, Fulgencio Batista, Gabriel García Moreno, Alberto Fujimori, Anastasio Somoza García, William Walker, Augusto Pinochet, etc. Superpowers have been constantly intervening in the political systems of these countries. This has resulted in the promotion of dictatorial system, which safeguarded the vested interests of the superpowers. These interests could either be of a political or an economic nature. As fiction is the reflection of reality, this situation has been of prime significance and need a focus of researchers exploring the phenomena behind the fiction produced in this region.

Since the early years of independence, the Latin American nations constantly struggled to become independent of the foreign (in this case, European) influence. This, however, proved to be a much longer struggle to liberate themselves from the political and cultural traditions they had inherited from the foreign rule (Vanden & Prevost, 2002). Sometimes, the dictatorial rule was promoted in the name of organizing the scattering regional forces and the assertion of the need of autonomy by different leaders in the republic of Gran Colombia. Bolivar, known as the great liberator, is an early example of such rulers. Some other examples of the extended dictatorial/military rule are Gerardo Machado (1924-1933) and Sergeant Fulgencio Batista (1934-1940 and again in 1952-1959) of Cuba, various emperors from the Portuguese royal family (1821-1889) in Brazil, General Augusto Pinochet of Chile (1973-1990), Diaz dictatorship in Mexico, Juan Vicente Gomez of Venezuela (1908-1935), Juan Manuel de Rosas of Argentina, Augusto Leguia (1919-1930) and Manuel Prado (1949 and 1956-1962) of Peru, etc. Latin American dictatorships are spread over an extended time period, for example, Paraguay, where Dr. Jose Gaspar Rodriguez de Francia established a strong dictatorial rule, soon after the country gained independence, from 1816 to 1840. According to Vanden and Prevost (2002, p. 48), his rule set a pattern of extended dictatorial rule that continued to plague Paraguay until 1989. This, in fact, has been the dilemma not only of the Latin American countries, but of almost all the Third World, where both civil as well as military dictators/autocrats are by design installed by the First World, so that the benefits of the latter could be protected (Schmitz, 2006).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Swanson (2010), García Márquez, by presenting the bizarre as normal and vice versa, was allowed for “a political reading in which a ‘developing world’ perspective is privileged from within the implicitly ‘First World’ form of the novel and in which the reader is being invited to exercise his or her imagination to invent an alternate and more just reality for the continent” (p. 58). It is this newly invented/reached alternate and just reality that helps the reader to attempt a politically motivated interpretation of a magical realist text. In other words, a magical realist text is able to hold a political debate from the perspective of the Third World. The Marxist critic, Jameson (1986) presented a theory about the Third World and the narrative representation – based on Latin American magical realism – according to which all Third World literature would necessarily function as a national allegory that works as resistance to a system of global postmodernism. National allegory, according to him, is “the Third World’s literary correlative to the First World’s postmodern cultural logic”. He further opined that the “third world national allegories are conscious and overt: they imply a radically different and objective relationship of politics to libidinal dynamics (p. 80). Ahmad (1987) responded to Jameson’s national allegory construct and refuted his theory on several grounds. He objected the way Jameson declared “[a]ll third world texts” to be necessarily as allegorical as to be called ‘national allegories’ on the basis of the linguistic variation found in all such texts and thus most of the texts from Asia and Africa are unavailable in the metropolitan countries. Furthermore, he highlights that when Jameson talks about the division of a First World and a Third World, his own text conforms to the system of binary oppositions. However, Campa (1999, p. 10) argued that Jameson’s “[t]heorizing the entire Third World with one totalizing stroke . . . fails to account for a historically and culturally more complex third world”. Spivak’s (1990, p. 228) proposed model of postcolonial mode of criticism and textuality in which “you take positions in terms not of the discovery of historical or philosophical grounds, but in terms of reversing, displacing, and seizing the apparatus of value-coding”. Another Marxist critic, Michael Bell (2010) states that the obvious literariness of a work of fiction exhibits literalistic oppositions to which it could be susceptible on various historical grounds, especially when the highly concentrated foci of national experience is put into imaginative orbit. However, I agree with the basic Jamesonian notion of national allegory, as the technique of magical realism has been exercised in García

Márquez's works to highlight predicaments of the Third World, especially when the English translations of these works are widely accepted in the First World as equivalent to their original versions in Spanish language.

Having established that magical realism provides significant support to the periphery in registering protest against the metropolis, it would be appropriate to discuss the technique as a tool used in making a nation vocalize its feelings in the form of re-construction of history from their stance. Sommer (1990, p. 78) maintained that, "literature has the capacity to intervene in history, to help construct it [. . . from a] nation-building" view-point.

METHODOLOGY

By developing a theoretical framework from readings in Postcolonial Studies and the particular conditions of the region in which García Márquez produced fiction, I have taken into account the findings/stances of the intellectual world towards the degree of potency of the technique of magical realism and how it is connected to the postcolonial debate. The framework was thus used to foreground the element of social protest in the selected piece of fiction, especially when Márquez is considered to be one of the most influential fiction writers who employed the technique of magical realism to highlight the way postcolonial condition affected the entire Third World.

Although the earlier form of close reading placed all critical emphasis on the text itself and the historical context and authorial intent were not taken into account, post/modern literary theory got the idea of reading back towards the investigation of the text within its context with approaches drawing on Marxist Criticism and post-colonialism (Tanenbaum, 2008). The close reading of a written text is writing an essay that responds to or builds upon the ideas in the original text and takes both historical and textual context into account (Brummet, 2010). Rather than merely extracting facts from the text, a close reading of the selected text initiated a critical analysis/response through writing. It is "the mindful, disciplined reading of an object with a view to deeper understanding of its meanings" (p. 3). All four stages of close reading (i.e. Pre-reading, Interpretation, Critical Reading, and Writing) of the material isolated for the study made possible the latter's in-depth analysis.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The dictators govern their people not on the basis of the latter's will, but by an iron fist. Spread over decades, these dictatorships suppress people's rights to reject their governments. The extraordinarily lengthy sentences in the novel are magical realist in nature, as they evoke dreamlike and magical feelings in the reader, making the latter accept whatever magical or dreamlike as something common and ordinary. Written in long paragraphs, the novel's suffocating atmosphere corresponds to the despotic rule that leaves no space for the public to breathe freely. The invaded and occupied presidential palace in the world of the novel is metaphorical of the decaying despotic presidential system. The "stagnant time" (p. 1) referred to at the very first page denotes the stagnancy in all the governmental affairs during the decades-long rules of the autocrats. In order to prolong their rule, the dictators suppressed the public and worked against the interests of the latter. So weak the system would become that,

. . . all that was needed was for someone to give a push and the great armoured doors that had resisted the lombards of William Dampier during the building's heroic days gave way. (Márquez, 1975/2007, p. 1)

Prolonged dictatorial or military rule has been the root cause of social, political and economic upheavals in Latin America in particular and the Third World in general. Colonial powers choose military heads that are inclined to rule the country, install them as presidents in uniform, and use them for their own vested interests that cannot be fulfilled by a democratically elected leader. García Márquez's work can be interpreted as political struggle against military rule. Whether it is his *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967/1970) or his short stories "Big Mama's Funeral" or "Innocent Eréndira" included in his *Collected Stories* (1992/1994), *The Autumn of the Patriarch* (1975/2007) (1972/1996), García Márquez's pen writes with the ink of a desire for democracy. *Patriarch*, in particular, tells the story of a fictional dictator, whose character has been derived from a number of real autocrats, like Gustavo Rojas Pinilla of Colombia, Generalissimo Francisco Franco of Spain, Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic, Venezuela's Juan Vicente Gómez, and Joseph Stalin of USSR. The most striking feature of the novel is its unique presentation of the protagonist, who enjoys god-like status and respect. It is amazing that despite the worst internal political divisions, Stalin, Franco, and

Trujillo, and many other dictators managed in a significant measure to control the hearts and minds of their respective nations, because of the mythical aura which surrounded their persons. The same has been very effectively symbolized here. But, when the wheel of fortune turns, the ‘patriot becomes the traitor’ and his last time becomes extremely pathetic. The pitiable situation has been exhibited in the novel through the discovery of the General’s corpse in his own palace. His most loyal subjects are now unable to even identify the dead body of a man whose presence in the federation is symbolic for [the so-called] fact that God is with them. His perception as god is so strong in their lives that they cannot perceive him as a human being, a person of flesh and blood.

Magical realism is once again fully utilised in the novel to protest against the military rule, not only in the very form of the novel, but the substance itself. The six chapters of the novel denote the six major dictators of the region. The extraordinary length of these sections is a symbol of the long and unending rule of these autocrats. Not unlike the uniformity of the style and objective of the rule of many Latin American dictators, all these sections begin and end in the same way. Quite contrary to *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967/1970) which is full of so many characters that the reader at once feels confused and has to depend on the genealogy tree given just before the novel commences, *Patriarch* (1975/2007) has just one character around whom the whole novel revolves. According to Kulin (1988, p. 147) the novel talks about the life of “an unimaginably old dictator, who remained alone in his palace, in which cows were wandering about”. Dictatorial rule does not allow the public to even breathe freely, and the reader of *Patriarch* is left with no space to breathe. The stagnant atmosphere of the fictional world of the novel is so suffocating that it is difficult for even an ordinary reader to easily go through two or three pages in a sitting.

The author uses postcolonial silences to develop the serious undertone of the novel, i.e. protest against dictatorial rule. Throughout the novel, the autocrat has been described as an individual who enjoys the heights of popularity, one that has never been reached or thought by any other human being. The over-emphasis on his popularity tells the reader a great deal about the irony lying between the lines. The “six assassination attempts” (Márquez, 1975/2007, p. 9) on the dictator are in fact an indication that he is not that much liked. The device of hyperbole –a contributory factor to magical realism – has been employed by the author as a tool to develop the character of the dictator. The extraordinary description of his authority in the country, the way he hires imposters to appear at different places at the same time and to secure himself from any possible attempt on life, all work towards the theme of the work. In his specific humorous manner, García Márquez reveals all the tactics of the despotic rulers to strengthen their rule;

. . . [The dictator] made some officers believe that they were being watched by others, he shuffled their assignments to prevent their plotting, every army post received a ration of eight blank cartridges for every ten live rounds and he sent them gunpowder mixed with beach sand while he kept the good ammunition within reach in an arsenal in the presidential palace the keys to which hung on a ring with other keys that had no duplicates . . . (p. 11)

At times, the dictator has been ridiculed by the novelist in a degradingly humorous manner in order to show his disgust with the former’s character and way of government. For example, the way the despot “would become reconciled with himself when his personal physician the minister of health would examine his retina with a magnifying glass every time he invited him to lunch” (p. 170). But, unfortunately, the most neglected segment of the country is its people, who, at any level, are given no importance at all. Their needs and problems are of no value in the eye of the godlike ruler who has been ruling the country with an iron fist for ages. He is rather concerned about how to save his government, increase his financial assets, and suppress his enemies. A fear of rebellion among the people is always in his mind. Ironically, the patriarch

. . . paid no attention to what people were saying about him but scrutinized the shadows of their eyes to guess what they were not saying to him, and he never asked a question without first asking in turn what do you think . . . (p. 9)

He is so interested in looting and plundering the money of the nation that he does not let go of any opportunity to do so. Never bothered to attend the meetings of the cabinet (p. 159), he even manipulates the results of the draw of lottery tickets to increase his wealth.

In the course of the novel, the narrator directly addresses the dictator and mentions the seriousness of the situation regarding his ever decreasing popularity. The nation has become so sick of his long and unending rule. The disgust is so intense that the narrator had to prepare him for the bad

news. It is the news that he already knows within his heart that only the imposter general dares to articulate in front of him. He says that he is

... the only one honourable enough to sing out to you what everyone says that you're president of nobody and that you're not on the throne because of your big guns but because the English sat you there and the gringos kept you there with the pair of balls of their battleship ... (pp. 21-22)

The mentioning of the fact that the government of the dictator is solely dependent upon the way the English and the gringos safeguarded his rule – and by doing so safeguarded their own self-interests – in fact symbolises a propensity of autocrat rulers throughout the Third World to look towards the 'centre' for gaining power to make their regimes survive for a longer time. Although the general derives all his power to rule from the English and the gringos, the former feels so entrapped in the latter's clutches that he cannot do anything about it and is often seen "scurrying like a cockroach this way and that, back and forth when the gringos shouted to [him] we're leaving you here with your nigger whorehouse so let's see if you can put it all together without us" (p. 22). Apparently, the general is a strong dictator who rules the people of his country with an iron hand, but as a matter of fact, all his strength is due to the English and foreign support. He is so afraid of the situation that he cannot face the general public and never gets out of his chair, lest his weaknesses become marked and visible in the eyes of people. If compared to the situation of the Third World countries ruled by military dictators, the 'Centre' literally makes the rulers hostage to make them do as they are told by the latter. Through these dictators, the 'Centre' manages to control the economic resources and impose their ideology.

The very fact that he was worshiped like a demigod had become the Patriarch's greatest fear, as he knew very well that he will have to reap what he had sown. He is warned by the narrator that when he got out of his chair, shed his military uniform, and went into the public, he shall be dealt with as a traitor. As a matter of fact, the President has been so barbarous to his people that there was no chance that he is spared from the erupting wrath of people. Not unlike his long rule, there is a long list of his crimes against his own people. Sanches (2006, p. 178) observed that violence has been a prominent social response to the applications of structural adjustment policies throughout Latin America". The dictator too, for almost the same reasons, suppressed the voice of the people by every possible means.

The moment they see you on the street dressed as a mortal they're going to fall on you like a pack of dogs to collect from you in one case for the killings at Santa *María* del Alter, in another for the prisoners thrown into the moat of the harbor fort to be eaten by crocodiles, in another for the people you skin alive and send their hides to their families as a lesson. (García Márquez, 1975/2007, p. 22)

Throughout the novel, the general public is constantly trying to escape the so-called truths imposed by the dictator. The way the government rejects and suppresses people's right to be spontaneous in their conversation and acts is an example of how fearful it is regarding the latter's emerging identity. So violent are the ways of suppressing the rebellions (or any possible rebellion) that it is very difficult to even think of denying the authority of the regime. After a rebellion against the dictator, a young soldier is skinned alive to teach the people a lesson and to make rest of the rebels confess what he wanted them to. The General ...

... chose one of the main group and had him skinned alive in the presence of all and they saw his flesh tender and yellow like a newborn placenta and they felt the soaking of the warm blood broth of the body that had been laid bare as it went through its throes thrashing about on the courtyard, and then they confessed what he wanted ... (p. 30)

There are times, for example, in the abovementioned part of the text, when the author explains the events in an extraordinary detail. On the one hand, an extended explanation of such kind adds to the overall dreamlike effect of the text, and on the other, foregrounds the realistic-fantastic relationship within the text. According to Newell (1997, p. 42), the "people have been exiled from language and meaning, forced to be no-where and no-one by the dictator's supreme 'I'".

The motive behind these atrocities was to suppress the general public so much that they could not think about a revolt against the tyrannical rule. The presence of a foreign hand has been obvious in all the dictatorial rules throughout Latin America in particular and Third World in general. Vela (2006) contended that the CIA and the Defence Department and the office holders of the highest rank, e.g. Vice President of America, have vigorously defended methods of torturing people. She held that the "Colombian military, aided by the United States in logistics, training, and financial aid, has been repeatedly accused of atrocities against civilians" (p. 9).

García Márquez achieves the effect of magical realism by weaving the mythological beliefs of past into the advancing reality of the present. The people of the republic have already accepted the presence of the dictator as a myth for various reasons. There is an air of suspicion about the character of the despot that contributed towards wrapping his personality in a kind of confusingly heightened voluntary doubt to make him a mythological figure, a godlike entity.

. . . during his times of greatest glory there had been reasons to doubt his existence and his own henchmen had no exact notion of his age, for there were periods of confusion in which he seemed to be eighty years old at charity raffles, sixty at civil receptions and even under forty during the celebration of national holidays. (p. 72)

The extraordinarily long life and rule of the despot are the primary factors behind the development of his personality as a myth. So mythical a character he was that even after seeing his dead body in the presidential palace, the president's fear does not let people believe that he is dead. The long sentence that explains the discovery of the dead body speaks volumes about how the dictator was believed to be invincible and eternal.

. . . and then we pushed open a side door that connected with an office hidden in the wall, and there we saw him, in his denim uniform without insignia, boots, the gold spur on his left heel, older than all old men and all old animals on land or sea, and he was stretched out on the floor, face down, his right arm bent under his head as a pillow, as he had slept night after night every night of his ever so long life of a solitary despot. (p. 3)

Quite interestingly, even then, nobody was ready to believe in his death, "because it was the second time he had been found in that office, alone and dressed and dead" (p. 5).

The novelist informs the reader, in a rather light manner, regarding the undemocratic happenings and results of the unending rule of the dictator. Banning the information provided by Ambassador Palmerston, one of the last diplomats to present his credentials, in his memoirs is one example of such undemocratic practices (pp. 72-73). The lyrical language along with the rich narrative detail renders a magical effect to the novel. Corresponding to the lengthy reign of the dictator, the lengthy sentences throughout the text initially cause boredom in the readers, and eventually make them abhor the institution of dictatorship. The complex sentence structure may also be taken as the complexities of the autocratic government. If the novel is taken as a symbol of the whole region, this can also be interpreted as an effort to demonstrate the existence of dictators in many countries of the region. The long sentences of the novel sometimes resemble those of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (Márquez, 1967/1970) and create the effect of magical realism in the projected circular/jumbled movement of time. For example,

That was how they found him on the even of his autumn, when the corpse was really that of Patricio Aragones, and that was how we found him again many years later during a moment of such uncertainty that no one could give in to the evidence that the senile body there gouged by vultures and infested by parasites from the depths of the sea was his. (Márquez, 1975/2007, p. 72)

CONCLUSION

The author successfully raises a voice of protest against the presidential tyranny and highlights that the dictatorial rule is what contributes towards the underdevelopment of the Third World countries. The effect of magical realism is achieved by mingling the ordinary with extraordinary. There were surprisingly large reception rooms in the presidential palace, for instance, "where hens were pecking at the illusory wheat fields on the tapestries and a cow was pulling down the canvas with the portrait of an archbishop so she could eat it" (p. 73). The reception rooms were once the focus of all (a)political activities, the emblem of control and discipline, a symbol of art and beauty. But, now they are but the ruins that are only of interest because they have been of great importance in the past. The way García Márquez is able to make the reader feel the difference in the past and the present is remarkable. The extraordinary and lengthy detail of the destroyed palace works, which sometimes seems to be extremely unnecessary, creates a contrast with the passages telling about the glory of the Patriarch. Ultimately, these helps the reader to imagine the hatred for the Patriarch in the hearts of people. The interesting juxtaposition of "a barefoot Guajiro Indian . . . with a small entourage of congressmen and senators whom the dictator had appointed himself with his finger according to the whims of his digestion" (p. 73) to escort him simultaneously reveal how Guajiro Indians were subjected to inhumane ways and how governmental affairs were run not by the will of the people, but by the pointing figure of the autocrat.

And the whole affair was staged and set according to the whims of his digestion. There is also a lot of protest against the dictator's sense of immediate governance, as on the way "he ordered a butcher to cut off the hands of a cheating treasurer in a public spectacle" (p. 74). It is the same sense of immediate governance and sole authority that makes one of the chief characteristics of any dictator. Through the 'cut-off-the-hands incident', the authority and the ways of dictatorial rule in some Arab countries has also been criticized. The incidents of repression, barbarity, despotism and tyranny have been highlighted in the text with the help of the technique of magical realism. The murder of Dionisio Iguaran is not the result of an action against the state, but because his cock won in a cockfight, which was supposed and planned to be won by the despot's grey cock. This is an example of the barbarism of the despot (p. 75). The humorous description of the cockfight blended with the terrible reality of the tyrannical rule of the despot is magical real in nature and serves as an ironic comment upon the suppression of the masses in the autocratic governmental/political system. Though the present findings are significant in the context of the problem in question, however, analyzing multiple texts from both Latin American and South Asian region are recommended for future researchers.

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