

Deconstructing the myth of eternity: power , time and decay in Gabriel Garcia Márquez's *The Autumn of the patriarch*

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INTRODUCTION

Twentieth-century Latin American literature arose in reaction to colonial history, political brutality, and cultural hybridity. In order to confront national pain, writers from the Latin American Boom of the 1960s and 1970s employed novel narrative strategies. The Nobel laureate and key player in this movement, Gabriel García Márquez, is most recognised for his use of magic realism, a style that combines the extraordinary with the real to depict political realities. Márquez's most avant-garde book about authoritarianism is *The Autumn of the Patriarch* (1975). It depicts an unnamed tyrant who reigns for more than a century before becoming both myth and corpse, in contrast to a linear political fiction. In order to illustrate the enduring, circular nature of power, the book eschews chronology and employs a single, flowing phrase pattern. In order to examine how the Patriarch's power functions not just through laws but also through control over bodies, time, and historical narrative, this essay utilizes Michel Foucault's theory of biopower. The goal of the study is to demonstrate how Márquez challenges the idea of perpetual power in postcolonial countries through the use of myth.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF LATIN AMERICAN DICTATORSHIPS

We must read *The Autumn of the Patriarch* in light of Latin American history in the 20th century in order to comprehend it. The region saw periods of caudillism, or strongman government based on military force and personality cults, from Trujillo in the Dominican Republic to Somoza in Nicaragua and Pinochet in Chile. According to Márquez, the book was influenced by several tyrants rather than simply one. "Every dictator is the same dictator." These governments were similar in that they erased dissent, controlled the media, and portrayed the leader as the country's father. Above the law and history, the dictator becomes timeless. The novel stays away from names, dates, and exact locations because of this historical context. Márquez does not write about a single nation. The structure of dictatorship itself is the subject of his writing. The book turns into an archetype in which power is perpetual, recurring, and ultimately destructive to oneself.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: FOUCAULT AND BIOPOWER

Michel Foucault makes a distinction between biopower, which is the ability "to foster life or disallow it," and sovereign power, which is the right "to take life or let live." Biopower works by controlling time, health, and population.

Both are embodied by the Patriarch in the book. In addition to ordering massacres, he also has control over people's memories and lifestyles. "He had his portrait printed on the postage stamps and his name given to the days of the week." His body becomes the state. When he grows old, the nation grows old. When he rots, the nation rots.

Additionally, Foucault contends that power generates discourse. The Patriarch creates official history through radio and decrees, and the novel's disjointed narration reflects this: there is no one truth, only versions governed by power. As a result, biopower in the book extends beyond bodies to memory and time itself.

POWER, TIME AND THE MYTH OF ETERNITY

Magic realist details, such as vultures that don't devour him, a palace where time has stopped, and cows grazing in the presidential bedroom, support the dictator's wish to live forever. Time in the book is circular, with chapters looping, events repeating, and 200 years passing in a single sentence. However, eternity is a trap. The Patriarch is isolated because he cannot die. He cannot love, cannot have true relationships, cannot engage history. Foucault notes that ultimate authority leads to utter solitude. The dictator's attempt to control time ultimately erases him from it. When he is ultimately found dead, "nobody could say for certain how long he had been dead." Eternity sinks into anonymity.

DECAY AND THE BODY OF THE NATION

Decay is the novel's main theme. "His skin was like parchment" as the Patriarch's body deteriorates. Goats, rain, and weeds cause the palace to deteriorate. The country deteriorates due to war, corruption, and poverty. This is biopower in reverse. Instead of fostering life, the dictator's power produces death and rot. The body politic mirrors the physical body. Márquez uses grotesque imagery to show that power that tries to be eternal inevitably turns into waste. The final scene children playing with the dictator's skull is the ultimate deconstruction. The symbol of absolute power becomes a toy.

NARRATIVE STRATEGY AND MAGIC REALISM:

In and of itself, Márquez's style is political. The monotony and chaos of dictatorship are reflected in the unending lines and changing narrators. The weariness that citizens feel is also felt by readers.

Escapism is not what magic realism is. It exposes political reality. Márquez illustrates how dictatorships construct their own reality when it rains for eleven years or when the dictator's mother is three hundred years old. "Magic realism in Márquez is always grounded in historical violence," according to critic Gerald Martin. The most accurate way to characterise authoritarianism is through the fantastic.

CONCLUSION

Márquez's most blatant criticism of dictatorship can be found in *The Autumn of the Patriarch*. By using Foucault's perspective, we can understand that the patriarch has biological and temporal authority in addition to political power. He attempts to live forever, yet all he achieves is rot. The novel's structure, which is disjointed, repetitious, and ultimately collapsing, embodies its message. Márquez cautions that all absolute power results in erasure and isolation by dismantling the fantasy of eternity. As soon as he passes away, the dictator who desired to be remembered forever is forgotten. This is still a potent metaphor in postcolonial Latin America: countries that create cults of personality around their leaders eventually ruin the leader and themselves.

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