

Latin-American Dictatorships as a Source of Literary Inspiration

- Fiction in 20th Century -

The literature that deals a historical fact helps us to understand the history, showing us life of fictive individuals representing persons who lived those historical circumstances from an intimate, partial and improbable perspective and thus is not opposed to the “official history”; it creates a fictive chronicles of historical moments.

Using the words of Miguel de Unamuno, there is something small and substantive, that history does not manage to capture: *the intrahistory*, things that happened in the lives of people that witnessed great historical events:

All the things described daily by the newspapers, the history of the “present historical moment” is nothing but a surface of a sea, a surface that freezes and crystallizes in books and archives, and once they are crystallized in a hard layer, not major to a poor skin in relation to the intrahistorical lives we live inside of its immense ardent center. The newspapers say nothing about the silent lives of millions of men that wake up at any hour of the day in all the countries of the globe by the order of the Sun and go to their fields to proceed to their dark and silent eternal everyday work, that work, that as the submarine corrals create the bases for the islets of the History. The sound leans and lives on the august silence, on that immense silent humanity raise those that make noise in the History. This intrahistorical, silent life, continuous as he bottom of the sea, is the substance of the progress, the true tradition, not the lied tradition that tends to seek in the history buried in the books and papers and monuments and stones.

MIGUEL DE UNAMUNO, “*Entorno al casticismo*”(As to the Purity), 1905

The history and the literature that picks up an historical event aren't two mutually exclusive or contradictory disciplines, they accomplish themselves and enrich the reader, as they give him a different focus on the same event. Without the help of arts we wouldn't have the possibility to learn how a historical occasion as a war, triumph of an ideology, or a revolution affected the everyday life of families and anonymous, common and usual people.

As Unamuno says, under this surface treated by newspapers, books and archives, there is an intrahistory and the arts, through all its different disciplines, that recover it from the History, look after it, transform it and make the world know it turned in a work of art.

In Latin America the writers did not limit themselves to write about topics attractive to the readers, they also have found a source of inspiration in their countries' social problems. There is no doubt that the social problem most known among the public and most developed by the authors is the dictatorship thematic, which became itself a subgenre of the Latin-American fiction.

It's worthy highlighting, that in poetry, as well as in the dramaturgy and the fiction, this topic has been present, with more or less power, through all the national Latin-American literature.

These works show us a chronicle of the ways that a dictatorship affected the lives of the citizens in their most day to day aspects, without trying to displace the history. As the history in its desire to be an objective and truthful discipline, it leaves aside the intrahistory.

A person who desires to study a dictatorship of a Latin- American country will find enough relevant historical documentation through which is possible to get information about the precedents, causes, consequences, key dates and outstanding details of such event, but if a an approach to the human experience is wanted, the history doesn't offer an open door, as the history encloses many dramas lived under those circumstances only under concepts like for example overthrowing through a Coupe d'état, application of the Martial Law, suppression of the Law State, repression from the Armed Forces, violation of the Human Rights, etc.

As the historian Hernández Sanchez-Barba says:

The history does not consist of accumulation of dates and details and of their arranging following intellectual criteria, but of trying to understand the human experience, the why of the activities, in its world of relation to the time, space and other human beings¹.

Leaning on the definition by Hernández Sanchez-Barba, we can state that from this point of view the literature contributes to the history, as the reader enters thorough the pages of the work of art in a world created using principally truthful dates, because the author documents the historical period he will treat, and on this base he constructs a fictive world that has to be true to life and real circumstances.

¹ Mario Hernández Sanchez-Barba, "Iberoamérica en el siglo XX: Dictaduras y Revoluciones" (Ibero America in the 20th Century: Dictatorships and Revolutions), 1988.

If the history sustains there were numerous violations of human rights, the author creates an example of this situation. If there were hundreds of persons sent to exile, he shows us the details of one of the cases, frequently being himself one of the victims of the exile. The dictatorship fiction is a partial and subjective story of the author, through which he wants to offer a deeper and more human overview of the history, in purpose to make the reader understand from a more complete perspective what means to live in a dictatorship.

Las dictaduras como inspiración literaria: narrativa del siglo XX, es un trabajo que se apoya en tres pilares: la historia, la inspiración y la obra literaria.

In the first part, dedicated to the history we will try to identify the historical precedents that allowed the proliferation of such a type of government. To do so, we will have to check certain characteristics of the societies of the colonial age and the first decades of the life in independence, a period of searching the ways to organize the nation.

We will also include a systematization of the dictatorships to this part, based on the proposal of Pablo González Casanova, who considers four stages of the Latin – American dictatorships, complying with the chronological criteria and features of each phase. This will allow us provide their study and impact on the literature.

In the second part, we will focus on the inspiration; this means we will try to discover the motivations that led the author to treat such a controversial topic –especially if it is contemporaneous to his life- and a topic apparently so little attractive to the massive public. We will proceed to determine if a work of art is a product of a literary tendency, a personal need or of an empty space in the history that it expects to cover.

In the third part we will treat the literary work; here we will find many previously mentioned points seen from the perspective of the author; we will study the elements adopted by the author from the historical dictatorships and from the personalities of real dictators to construct this fictive world and make it plausible for the reader and coherent with the historiography. To achieve this, we will focus on famous novels of this subgenre and other, seldom known, but also offering an important contribution to the intrahistory of the dictatorship, as they give us a view not so much explored by the literature.