



Tracking the Theme of Love in Gabriel García Márquez's Narratives

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ABSTRACT:

Novels in Latin America emerge in post independent times when the inhabitants of the continent begin nation building. The entire continent however slips into great political turmoil due to anarchism unleashed by dictatorial regimes. Intellectuals propose that writing novels would save nations and that the more novels that got written the stronger would the nations emerge. These novels have been called as the foundational novels and are premised on romances between white males and indigenous colored women who supposedly “civilize” the “barbaric” through a sacred Christian marriage. Such love stories actually took off from Sarmiento’s Civilization-Barbarism political debates last century and stretched on till mid twentieth century. Garcia Marquez’s love stories take off against such foundational narratives to expose instead the falsity of such myths. This paper proposes to look at three novels to trace how different love stories premised on the social trappings of incestuous relationships as in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* spanning colonial era to modernity, or racist agenda in colonial Latin America as in *Of Love and Other Demons*, or of unequal love as in *Love in the Time of Cholera* explode myths of foundational romances.

Key words: García Márquez, foundational novels, Latin American literature.

The novel as a literary genre is birthed in Latin America only after the Spanish American wars of Independence. It isn't birthed before because the Spanish Crown prohibited it in her colonies apparently for the fear that it would overexcite the imaginations of the inhabitants and give rise to insubordination. The other reason for which it was banned was the fact that during colonial period reading of fiction was associated in the minds of many people with idleness, addiction to fantasy and search for mental emotion (Lindstorm 78). Nonetheless from the first half of the nineteenth century this attitude of the people changes, novels emerge and finally the narrative occupies an important place in Latin American society as a serious form of expression; it is associated with national consolidation and development or progress of the new nation-states through various themes and stories. These themes or stories were always conjugated on the question of how marginalized elements or the “other” were represented in discourse of the nation. The “other” was the barbarian and was linked to everything related to the inhospitable landscape of the interior, women and indigenous. This thought took off from Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's famous civilization-barbarism political debate. The nineteenth century proposed to resolve this dichotomy with a love story that climaxed with command and control of the “other” through matrimony that legitimized the love story. These love stories which addressed issues of the formation of nation-states through miscegenation and marriage are called foundational fictions, national novels or national romances.

This article traces the theme of love first in the foundational fictions/romances in relation with the process of construction or reconstruction of the nation-states in Latin America, then in the Boom and Postboom novels. It proposes to relate it with the narratives of García Márquez by focusing on his three texts: *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *Love in the Time of Cholera* and *Of Love and Other Demons* to

understand how the theme of love changes in these narratives and explodes the myths of national romances.

The foundational fictions are the novels written in the nineteenth century and first decades of the twentieth century. They are called “foundational fictions,” “national romances,” or “national novels” in that these novels were instrumental in molding the national identities of Spanish American countries. The emergence of novel and the process of construction or reconstruction of nation-states in Latin America went hand in hand after the wars of Independence. The main objective of these fictions was to reconcile, unite and constitute a national matrimony between the marginalized and non-marginalized, between the white creole and “uncivilized” indigenous through love stories. The ideal national matrimony was often projected through love story between the whites and Indians. The writers of foundational novels concerned themselves with the question of how to reconcile the opposing elements of civilization and barbarism in order to resolve the internal conflicts of the new nation-states.

The political engagement of the foundational novels can be discerned from the fact that many of these writers were political leaders of their country. Writers such as Juan Bosch, Bartolomé Mitre, Rómulo Gallegos were not just writers but also presidents of their respective countries during different period. They wrote because of the fact that they were obliged to depict the ideal national (hi)stories of their countries through novels. They were encouraged and encouraged others to write out of urgency in order to fill a history which would legitimize the recently independent nation-states and for opportunity to direct the national history of their country towards an ideal future (Sommer 76). They presumed that good novels reflected the good conditions of their country, reflected the major achievement of their country, and only a strong nation-state could produce good novels. They postulated that Latin American life would improve substantially once a good number of novels were written; the novels would awaken a deep meditation and healthy criticism in their society; they would teach people about their history, their customs which were hardly formulated then, and the ideas and the sentiments which had been shaped by still unsung social and political events (Sommer 77). For them the narrative and the state complemented each other. However, during that period Latin America was the poorest region in the world in terms of original novelists. Thus the writers of foundational fictions felt and comprehended the burden to write novels out of necessity.

The foundational fictions were written according to the literary traditions of romanticism and naturalism. The writers wrote their novels influenced by the ideals of compean positivism and Enlightenment. They tried to establish through their work a sense of national identity. Hence it is hardly surprising that they dwelt on the indigenous question, the dichotomy of “civilization” and “barbarism” which we see in novels such as *Amalia* (1851) of the Argentine José Marmol, *Sab* (1841) of the Cuban Gertrudis Gómez de Avellanada, *Martín Rivas* (1862) of the Chilean Alberto Blest Gana, *María* (1867) of the Colombian Jorge Isaacs, *Doña Bárbara* (1929) of the Venezuelan Rómulo Gallegos, and even in *Aves sin nido* (1889) of the Peruvian Clorinda Matto de Turner. As regards Brazilian novels one can see such tendencies in novels like *O guaraní* (1857), *Iracema* (1865) both written by José de Alencar, *Enriquillo* (1882) by Manuel de Jesús Galván. The protagonists or lovers who suffered unrequited love or whose fates were predestined to end in tragedy in these novels depicted the myth of romance and social realism as foundational and accurate respectively.¹ The figure (usually a woman) allegorically represented the nation in those works that did not deal with the theme of reconstruction of the nation-states explicitly, it suggested the path the country ought to follow, it outlined a landscape and local customs to produce a distinct national literature (Lindstorm 79).

If we read individually, the foundational novels seem to be very different, not only in the context of space and time but also in regards to social ideals and concomitant strategies. In fact it is difficult to identity communality or similarities of foundational fictions when projects they propose are diverse such as reconciliation, racism, nostalgia, modernization, free commerce, protectionism, etc. Nevertheless, all these projects had a common agenda which was national consolidation and development of the new nation-states. Thus, they are called foundational novels or fictions. For example; in *Amalia*, José Marmol represents the future of Argentina. The romance (“romance” as a theme and not as a genre) of the elite

¹ The term “romance” here does not denote a genre but theme. The romance as a genre is a poetic composition or ballad of Spanish origin, generally consisting of octosyllabic verse. It is derived from juglaresque tradition.

lovers in this novel expresses desire for an ideal state of the nation in which the conflict between “civilization” and “barbarism” is resolved. Eduardo Belgrano and Amalia represent and reconcile opposite or conflicting regions.

Martín Rivas intends to mitigate the problems of class division through happy union of Martín and Leonor. Martín, a poor but intelligent and ambitious young man falls in love with arrogant Leonor, daughter of Don Dámaso who is usurer in Santiago. The novel narrates a passionate love story, depicts optimistic representation of character of the Chilean nation. Besides, Alberto Blest Gana documents the enormous gap that exists between the haves and have nots in this novel. *Aves sin nido* insists that the only hope for Peru to achieve future justice is to carry the enlightenment to the provinces so that the indigenous are liberated and not exterminated (Sommers 80). The novel deals with love story between a white man and indigenous woman; it also shows the theme of immorality of priests. Therefore, it was censored and scandalous. Both the happy and sad ending in these narratives as well as in novels such as *Sab*, *María* reflect desires of the chaste and young protagonists to establish productive and conjugal unions which represented national unification.

The foundational fictions culminate in *Doña Bárbara*. Written in 1929 it not only narrates a love story between Santos Luzardo and Marisela, daughter of Doña Bárbara, but also projects double emancipation, of an internal tyrant and her external ally Mister Danger. Bárbara is allegorizes atrocity or barbarism of Latin American cacique. While Mister Danger represents the United States, the danger or harm that this country can do to Latin American countries. Thus it is deduced that to consolidate and mature Latin America must liberate itself from the internal tyrants as well as the neocolonial power of the United States. The union of Santos Luzardo and Marisela, nevertheless, defeats the barbarism of Doña Bárbara who is unable to obtain neither the lands nor heart of Luzardo; thus the novel proposes to resolve the dichotomy of civilization and barbarism.

As regard the novels of Mexican Revolution such theme of love is not found. Nevertheless, in *Los de abajo* (1951) of Mariano Azuela, the novel which primarily talks of the violent days of Mexican Revolution, we see that there is a kind of romance.² However, the romance now acquires forms of deception and separation. Luis Cervantes cheats Camila; the latter later has to become lover of Demetrio Macías. Besides, the characters in the novels of the Mexican Revolution suffer a process of moral decadence. For instance; the heroic Demetrio converts into a looter, womanizer and drunkard without any direction. From there the theme of love in Latin American narrative enters into a problematic phase as we later see in the Boom novels.

The Boom novels also deal with the theme of love. However, unlike foundational fictions where love stories play important role to found and consolidate the nation-states, the Boom novels exactly do the opposite. The Boom novel unwrites or rewrites the myth of the foundation of nation-states in Latin America; they protest and resist the foundational fictions; they try to move away from historic novels or stories which were novelized to prove that there was neither romance nor erotic policy that could bind national fathers to mothers (Sommer 91). For example; we see in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* that Macondo was founded on exile, violence, solitude, wars in place of peace and nonviolence. The mothers maintain the big house. Instead of telling a love story, the novel rather deals with the theme of incest, violence and desolation. From beginning till the end the theme of incest stands out. Numerous incestuous relationships occur in the novel. José Arcadio Buendía and Úrsula Iguarán are cousins. Nevertheless, they marry each other and have children. The brothers José Arcadio and colonel Aureliano Buendía sleep with the same prostitute Pilar Ternera. Aureliano Babilonia is born because of the illegitimate conjugal relation between Aureliano and his aunt Amaranta Úrsula. These events indicate that unproductive or illegitimate love adventures dominate the novel. The romance or love stories which take place in this novel are not “irresistible” but “irreparable” since they fail to unite hero with virgin heroine who would give birth to legitimate citizens. Therefore, Aureliano Babilonia is born with a pig's tail. All these demonstrate that *Hundred Years of Solitude* is the antithesis of foundational fictions since the desired love story is suppressed and what occurs in the novel is precisely “undesirable,” illegitimate and violent union. It does not cement the foundations of Macondo but it goes on undoing them, particularly as regards to the ideas

² There is a debate regarding the year of publication of the novel. Some critics maintain that it was published in 1916. While others say that it was published in 1915. The year mentioned between parentheses is according to Phillip Swanson which he cites in his *Latin American Fiction* (2005).

of compean positivism and Enlightenment linked with foundational fictions. At the end of the novel a hurricane blows away Macondo completely from the world map. Thus García Márquez subverts the national imaginations of a Latin American country united by “chaste” love, and instead he brings our attention to coercion and repression that these imaginations implicate (Restrepo 259).

It is not just García Márquez who challenges the myth of romance as foundational and social realism as truth. Including other writers of the Boom such as Carlos Fuentes retorts to the same in his novel *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*. Propelled by the utopia of Cuban Revolution the Boom novelists trivialized the mythical subtext of national consolidation and progress. They experiment with their narratives. They claim a complete rupture with novelists of the earlier generation and they deny them any intellectual debt. They declare that they are literary orphans instead of recognizing Latin American literary tradition of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century; they don't find inspiration in writers of foundational fictions but rather in writers such as William Faulkner, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Franz Kafka, etc. and they even maintain that the writers of foundational fictions were positivists and populists. The failure of compean positivism in Latin America represented, for them, the failure of Latin American political leaders and they demonstrated that Latin America cannot imitate the European model of economic and social development. Latin America must follow her own model in order to progress. Such model could not be in accordance with love-making illusion of the foundational fictions. On the contrary, they sustained that love was conjugated around incest, chauvinism and machismo, violence destroying thus the myth of romance of the foundational fictions.

The Boom narratives differ from foundational fictions in several ways. While some critics doubt if Boom was truly a literary phenomena or promotional literary activity of the publishing house Seix Barral, the novels themselves of this period show certain characteristics distinct from foundational fictions. These characteristics, for instance, include, the tendency to subordinate observation to creative fantasy and mythification of reality; tendency to emphasize mysterious, irrational, ambiguous aspects of reality and personality, often culminating in absurdity as metaphor for human existence; tendency to doubt or be suspicious about the concept of love as existential medium and to emphasize, on the other hand, lack of comprehension and individual solitude; anti-romanticism; tendency to subvert the concept of linear chronological time; to replace the omniscient narrator in third person with multiple or ambiguous narrators; a major employment of symbolic elements; a major employment of erotic and humorist elements; rebellion against all forms of moral taboos, above all those related with religion and sexuality; tendency to abandon realist scene of traditional novel, replacing them with imaginary spaces; tendency to devalue the concept of death in a world that is by itself infernal etc. (Shaw 4).

The theme of love in the narratives of García Márquez written during the Boom contains political and social ideology. However, we see in his Postboom novels that love liberates itself from political and ideological burdens of the foundational fictions as well as of his earlier mythologizing novels such as *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Eréndira* and *Her Heartless Grandmother*.

The Postboom is a problematic concept. Philip Swanson maintains that perhaps all words that begin with “post-” or “pos-” are potentially problematic and political at the same time (10). Thus, the Postboom is no exception. As is the case with structuralism or poststructuralism, or with modernity or postmodernity, there is a lot of debate on the Boom and Postboom. How do these two literary phenomena differ? Who are the writers that truly form part of these literary movements? The idea that the Postboom exists and its existence depends on the death of the Boom is very ambiguous. This term became popular during the eighties. The critics, usually, opine that the Postboom writers were born in the decades of the forties, fifties and sixties. However, there is no consensus among them as regards the writers who can or cannot be considered as the Postboom writers. It is not easy to locate Postboom clearly since most of the writers were writing actively before the end of the Boom. In fact writer such as José Donoso belongs to both movements. Critics also opine that the works of Manuel Puig and Severo Sarduy reflect transition from Boom to Postboom.

However, the Postboom is distinct from the Boom in various manners. The literary tendencies of the Postboom which developed during the last years of sixties and the early years of seventies rejected the narratives of the Boom. These new literary tendencies were particularly visible in the novels written by new and young writers born in the above mentioned decades. The Postboom novels also stand out from the Boom novels in the sense that many writers now wrote in popular language employing the elements of

culture of mass media. Unlike the Boom writers they retort to realism and maintain that the works of the Boom writers are elitist, exclusive and therefore they distort reality of Latin America. During the Postboom even the established writers of the Boom such as Carlos Fuentes, García Márquez, Vargas Llosa change their style of writing narrative and they question their own previous literary work, language and stylistics through their new work. As regards the themes both the writers who wrote during the Boom as well as the young writers now write about crime, poverty, globalization, class difference, sex, sexuality, daily life, love etc. But now the theme of love in the Postboom novels neither deconstruct nor reconstruct the myths of the foundation of nation-states as the Boom narratives did. Love is no longer related with consolidation, neither with construction or reconstruction of the nation-states. The Postboom novels do not deal with politics or political themes in an open or explicit manner. The presence of women writers is another important feature of the Postboom. During the Postboom women writers such as Isabel Allende, Luisa Valenzuela, Giannina Braschi, Cristina Peri Rossi, Elena Poniatowska appear in the literary field and they write actively about issues related to women. They also criticize and reject the Boom narratives.

There are literary movements within the Postboom such as McOndo, the Crack generation etc. The writers of McOndo break away from magic realism and they associate themselves with popular culture and mass media. They emphasize that they belong to generation of McDonald, Mac Computers, McIntosh etc. which signify a globalized world and they opine that magic realism had eclipsed Latin American literature. They see Latin America as a world dominated by American popular culture. They defy magical, rural or natural world as shown in the Boom novels and magic realism. They think that magic realism distort the image of Latin America because it reflects exoticism of the continent.

If Boom was promoted by Cuban Revolution and Seix Barral, one can say that Postboom was perhaps propelled by globalization, democracy and neoliberal policies. While the Boom consisted of national and totalitarian epic narratives, the Postboom gave birth to failed, marginalized, fractured narratives that trivialized banal and daily reality. The Boom narrative searched for an imaginary truth; the Postboom rejected any ideological or material truth. Thus we see that Postboom narratives do not construct or deconstruct the myth of construction or reconstruction of the nation-states in Latin America.

Thus the theme of love in the Postboom liberates itself from the burden of nation formation and it takes off in other direction. It is not surprising then that love in the Postboom novels of García Márquez such as *Love in the Time of Cholera*, *Of Love and Other Demons* is reduced to personal comic strips or stories which reflect political and social problematic that lovers have to dare in order to see realized their illusions of love. García Márquez wrote these two novels in accordance with the narrative style of Postboom.

Of Love and Other Demons does not deconstruct or reconstruct the myth of romance of foundational fictions. It rather narrates a prohibited love story between Sierva María de Todos los Ángeles and Cayetano Delaura or the solitude that these characters go through because of absence of love in their lives. Sierva María suffers abandonment and lack of love since her birth. At the age of twelve she is bitten by a rabid dog in her left ankle. Her parents, marquess of Casaldueiro Iganacio and his wife Bernarda Cabrera, do not realize that due to parental neglect their daughter grows up in the patio of the slaves, she learns three African languages, she worships a Yoruba deity, she assimilates African customs. Despite her white skin and status as daughter of aristocratic creole, she has an African heart (Penuel 42). After being bitten by a rabid dog and although she does not get rabies, the catholic church of Cartagena thinks that she has a demonic disease and she needs exorcism. Therefore, she is sent to convent of Santa Clara. Nevertheless, Cayetano Delaura, the priest authorized to carry out exorcism in the convent thinks otherwise; he thinks that the perturbed girl suffers more because of her parents' neglect and the decision to carry out exorcism has no meaning. He falls in love with her. But nobody notices the growing love between twelve years old girl and thirty six years old priest. Everybody is concerned with the question of exorcism and if she is really possessed by demon or not.

Meanwhile with the passing of time Cayetano Delaura is obsessed with Sierva María. He discovers a secret entry to the convent and starts visiting her every night. He recites poetry to her. The two lovers hug each other and sleep together. But suddenly the "misdeeds" of the priest are exposed. The Inquisition declares him a heretic, guilty and condemns him to serve many years in a leprosy hospital. The process of exorcism begins. The bishop officiates it in front of the authorities and monks. They chop off her hair. When they chop off her hair and burn it, Sierva María naturally behaves like a person possessed by demon. Despite the harsh exorcism that she receives, she waits for Cayetano but in vain. She

never comes to know why her boyfriend is absent during the exorcism ceremony or why he no longer visits her. At the end she stops eating and dies just before the sixth exorcism (Martin 509).

This narrative shows us through social commentary of family, criticism of church, and the question of love as demon, that the perceptions of love can be so different and confused that at the end nobody understands the true suffering of a twelve years old girl in love. Also set in the vice royalty of seventeenth century of New Granada, the story shows symbolism and conflict of traditional cultures in colonial Latin America (Penuel 38). Sierva María learns African beliefs of the slaves because she grows up with them. However, the church believes that she is possessed by demon and therefore she behaves strangely and she tells lies. Besides, the novel presents the possibility that love is not demon, rather it is lack of love that is demon. It affirms both the power and necessity of love and questions our ability to control our emotion. Love can salvage us, transform us, annihilate us or simply make us insane.

In the same way *Love in the Time of Cholera* narrates love story between Florentino Ariza and Fermina Daza that lasts more than half a century. The plot begins in a Caribbean city at the beginning of twentieth century, a period in which, according to narrator the signs of infatuation could be confused with the signs of cholera. It is based on a love triangle formed by the characters: Juvenal Urbino, Florentino Ariza and Fermina Daza. Florentino Ariza, the main protagonist works in a shipping company of his uncle. Juvenal Urbino is a doctor and Fermina Daza with almond eyes, long hair, is the daughter of Lorenzo Daza who is accused of dirty business and is very strict with her daughter. Fermina's family belong to high class society.

The story begins on one Pentecostal Sunday at the beginning of the thirties, a little after the liberal party has come to power after half century. Juvenal Urbino, now old and in his eighties, dies when he falls from a ladder trying to recover the family parrot from tree. After the funeral, Florentino Ariza tries to kindle the romantic adventures that he had with Fermina when they were young. From there the novel shows a series of retrospective scenes which first tell love story between them, then intervention of Juvenal, the marriage of Juvenal and Fermina, their trip to Paris, rise to fame of Juvenal as important doctor in city, and finally union between Florentino and Fermina in the ship (Martin 455).

Florentino and Fermina fall madly in love when they are young. But they cannot marry because social and character differences separate them. Nevertheless, Florentino loves her, he promises her his fidelity, and decides to wait as long as it is required. When Fermina marries Juvenal, he takes decision. The decision is to become a respected citizen. Through the shipping company of his uncle his conditions improve. But at the same time he starts having illicit affairs with several women, above all with prostitutes, widows, and even with his fourteen years old niece América Vicuña who commits suicide when he leaves her for Fermina. Love in this narrative triumphs only after the death of Juvenal. After his death Florentino and Fermina unite in the ship and the novel ends with romantic love and a happy ending.

Thus we see in these novels love stories dissociate from any “foundational” or “national” romance as a political discourse in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. On the other hand, they address and articulate the theme of love as social restrictions or unequal love. *Of Love and Other Demons* reflect the social problem of miscegenation during colonial period. Miscegenation was common and very inscribed during colonization. However, at the same time it was not indefinite. It was rather controlled and it therefore explodes racist agenda in colonial Latin America as we see in the novel and thus the theme even acquires a scandalous dimension.

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