

Latin American Protest Literature:
Literary Strategies to Combat Oppressive Paradigms

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ABSTRACT

Latin American protest literature is as diverse in nature and subject as it is often identifiable in strategy and tone. Though addressing a diverse array of topics in a variety of forms and styles, Latin American protest literature displays some consistent characteristics that extend beyond simply the foundational aspects of the genre. This paper hypothesizes that many of these shared characteristics are rooted in the political, social and environmental paradigms in which the region exists. Three textual examples will be used as case studies: *La United Fruit Co.*, by Pablo Neruda, *Guatemala 1954: Funeral for a Bird* by Arturo Arias, and *And We Sold the Rain* by Carmen Naranjo. The texts are meant to represent diverse aspects of the genre of Latin American protest literature, though are not sufficient to comprise a survey of the subject. The samples will each be analyzed through two different lenses: historical context and literary qualities. The nexus of the two elements will then be analyzed in an effort to identify the relationship between historical context, established power paradigms, and the development of protest literature in Latin America.

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Latin American protest literature is as diverse in nature and subject as it is often identifiable in strategy and tone. Though addressing a diverse array of topics in a variety of forms and styles, Latin American protest literature displays some consistent characteristics that extend beyond simply the foundational aspects of the genre. This paper hypothesizes that many of these shared characteristics are rooted in the political, social and environmental paradigms in

which the region exists. Through analysis of the history and power structures that surround each work, the origins of the genre's defining characteristics can be identified and explored.

This exploration endeavors to identify the characteristics of Latin American protest literature and the formative impact of its regional and historical context, through the use of three textual examples as case studies: *La United Fruit Co.*, by Pablo Neruda, *Guatemala 1954: Funeral for a Bird* by Arturo Arias, and *And We Sold the Rain* by Carmen Naranjo. The texts are meant to represent a wide range of the genre of Latin American protest literature: The four authors represent the nations of Chile, Guatemala, and Costa Rica; the sample includes one poem and two short stories, two of which contain elements of satire; and while one is relatively widely translated and distributed in English, two are alternatively limited in their English availability and renown. Despite this diversity in origin, structure and reception, these samples contain identifying characteristics that transcend their region or message to contribute to the definition of the genre as a whole.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: ROLE OF THE UNITED FRUIT COMPANY IN CENTRAL AMERICA,
WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON GUATEMALA
TEXTUAL EXAMPLES: LA UNITED FRUIT CO. AND GUATEMALA 1954: FUNERAL FOR A BIRD

Historical Analysis of the United Fruit Company and its Effect on Guatemala and the Region

Considered by many the originator of the concept of the banana republic, the United Fruit Company (UFC) at its peak in the mid to late twentieth century was “a law unto itself.” As Peter Chapman writes in his work, *Bananas*, the company was “more powerful than many nation states ... and accustomed to regarding the republics as its private fiefdom” (Chapman 2). Throughout its century of existence, the United Fruit Company “controlled as much as 90 percent of the market” (Kurtz-Phelan), yet their ambitions were not limited strictly to banana sales.

The United Fruit Company had wide holdings throughout Latin America, including Costa Rica, Cuba, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Colombia, El Salvador, Belize, Honduras, Panama, Ecuador Santo Dominica and Guatemala: from the islands of the Caribbean to the inland of South America (Chapman). The company's economic policy was that of complete value chain control. In most countries with a UFC presence, the corporation owned not only enormous swaths of land and controlled substantial sectors of a nation's GDP, but additionally bought or built the nation's infrastructure including railways, telecommunications and shipping lines.

The UFC did not shy away from exerting the incredible political power that came with its economic influence. The corporation came to serve as a tool of United States foreign policy. It was reported that the two strongest tools at the United States government's disposal to exert their will throughout the region were repressive Nicaraguan political dynasty, the Somoza family and the United Fruit Company (Chapman). During the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, it was the United Fruit Company that provided the US with several of its ships.

Its most infamous period began with its role in the Guatemalan "coup" of 1954. Guatemala during the mid-twentieth century was extremely stratified socially. The corporation's long arm in terms of political influence extended to the uppermost echelons of American politics. Two of its most powerful advocates were Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and his brother, Director of the CIA, Allen Dulles, both of whom served on the legal team of the UFC. At the time, the US was locked in the Cold-War-era foreign policy perspective of containing Soviet power above all else. In Latin America, the US used their largely unchecked might as a superpower in a bipolar world to assert control over the region.

In 1949, Guatemala's democratically elected leader, President Jacobo Arbenz, nationalized land belonging to the United Fruit Company in the name of social justice,

continuing the precedent set before him by President Juan José Arévalo, the first democratically elected president since Guatemala gained independence from Spain. President Arbenz, reacting to the extreme economic inequality present in Guatemalan society before his presidency, began enacting reforms after his election aimed at promoting democracy, encouraging the rights of marginalized peoples, and redistributing resources. These reforms promised to upend the existing economic structure in Guatemala and upset the United Fruit Company's oligarchical control over the nation. In one speech, Arbenz acknowledged the threat he faced due to his policies, noting:

For some time our measures have conflicted with the policies of great foreign consortiums which form the dominant circles in some countries, principally the United States of America ... As long as we do not conform to the United Fruit Company and some others affected by the agrarian reform, they will continue to try to recoup the lands which popular sovereignty had legitimately expropriated for the benefit of the nation and the peasants" (Schlesinger 77).

In reaction to the United Fruit Company's economic interests in addition to the spectral threat of the spread of Latin American communism, a plan was formed by the CIA to overthrow the democratically-elected government of Guatemala. Through psychological, military and diplomatic attacks, the US was successful in staging a manufactured coup, ultimately swaying the Guatemalan military to force President Arbenz's resignation. The aftermath of the coup saw the complete deconstruction of the liberal, democratic structure of the nation.

The newly installed, US-backed president Colonel Castillo Armas was assassinated three years after Arbenz's resignation, and the nation descended into a protracted thirty-six year civil war. More than a decade after the war's conclusion, the UN Historical Clarification Commission reported the death toll at over two hundred thousand, ninety-three percent of which were caused by the Guatemalan military (Schlesinger xxxii). Though the United Fruit Company was not the only factor in the US decision to support a coup against the Guatemalan government, its

economic and political power facilitated the direct and immediate response of the US government. Its example starkly demonstrated the degree to which unchecked imperialist power and predatory economic practices can pressure a stable democratic nation to devolve into base brutality and decades of chaotic repression.

Analysis of Pablo Neruda's La United Fruit Co.

Established at the outset from the title of the poem itself, "La United Fruit Co.," by Pablo Neruda is a direct critique of the United Fruit Companies presence in Central and Latin America and the influential powers that supported it. The poem narrates the progression of the company's influence, from its entitled beginnings to the ultimately tragic consequences of its exploitative and careless presence. Neruda employs elements of satirical humor and stark images in order to serve as a witness for history and a voice for the silenced.

The identity of the speaker and the exact subject of the poem are not explicitly defined. If the speaker can be interpreted as Pablo Neruda himself, it could be argued then that Chile, his native country, is the subject of the narrative. This could be supported by the author's intonation of "my own land" in line 8. However, more likely is the interpretation of "my land" to be the broader region of Latin America, encompassing all lands that were subjected to the control of the United Fruit Company. Within the poem, Neruda never specifies a nation, border or exclusionary landmark. Additionally, on lines 10-11, the poem recounts, "It rechristened its territories/ as the 'Banana Republics'" implying that his testimony of the United Fruit Company describes the reality of their presence in all the nations in which they "reserved for itself."

This sense of regional solidarity seems a hallmark of Latin American protest literature, particularly within the power paradigm of North vs. South, imperialism vs. subjected, United

States vs. Latin America. Every Latin American country has experienced imperialism in some form, and though the form and style vary by country and time period, no nation is unique in its imperialistic experience in and of itself. This sense of unity binds the region, particularly in this work, in not only a shared experience, but a shared history, emotion and aspect of identity. In “La United Fruit Co,” Neruda mentions the leaders of Guatemala (“Ubico flies”), Nicaragua (“Tacho flies”), Honduras (“Carías flies”), The Dominican Republic (“Trujillo flies”) and El Salvador (“Martinez flies”). All are propped up through the influence and the interests of the United Fruit Company, and all disparate nations are shown to be affected by a common oppression. They are a common affliction of Latin America, born from the policies of imperialism and neoliberalism.

In “La United Fruit Co,” neoliberalism at its most predatory is depicted as influencing the whole of Latin America, across borders of nationality. This is a similar premise as Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Year of Solitude*. In the novel, the idyllic and communal country of Macondo (a name reportedly repurposed from a UFC banana plantation near to Márquez’s home (Chapman)) is corrupted and decayed by the arrival of the “Banana Company.” The conflict culminates with the “Banana Massacre” and the deaths of three thousand workers (Márquez). However, similar to the events depicted in Neruda’s “La United Fruit Co,” the accepted historical record is swayed in the favor of the powerful corporate interests. “The recollection of the events by one of the survivors was contradicted by the false version accepted by historians, and repeated in the school textbooks: ‘aquí no ha habido muertos’ [‘here there have been no deaths’]” (Posada-Carbo). These events and themes such as the arrival of imperialist corporations and the bias of historical discourse are echoed across Latin American

nations and writers. Issues of international marginalization, though varying from country to country, remain a consistent regional perspective of Latin American protest literature.

The powerlessness of the speaker is highlighted in the work. The forces entering into his land are depicted as possessing the authority of God (as false and satirized as this God may be). Conversely, the forces with the power to combat the United Fruit Company, and the “blood thirsty flies” it has empowered, are forces that lay deeply dormant within the land itself. Neither of these forces is depicted as easily accessible or controllable by human powers. This is enforced by the representation of dictators such as Trujillo, Ubico, Carías and others as non-human entities. The only actual human figures included in the poem are the figures of the “Indians” and a dead body. Both representations are passive and defeated. Verity Smith writes on Latin American protest literature, “Latin American writers, with few exceptions, confess to an engagement with society that is entrañable or visceral, and it would seem that the vitality of their writing is connected to the urgency with which they experience and perceive that reality – the interaction between self and circumstance” (Smith 680). In “La United Fruit Co,” the interaction between self and circumstance is bleak. An individual seems powerless against greater forces, of both history and present, which control his or her environment.

The representation of the disempowered individual seems to fit the overall tone and delivery of the work. Neruda’s generally cynical and resigned tone conjures a sense of veteran outrage, matured and compacted in the soul through decades of bearing witness to repetitious and unpunished offenses. What seems telling about this poem is that as biting critical as its prose may be, in essence the work serves as more of an appeal to recognition than as a rallying cry. Neruda depicts the ravaged state that his region has become at the mercy of lecherous foreign entities. He goes on to describe the helplessness of the land and native people of nations

subjugated by the presence of the United Fruit Company. However, the trajectory of his work follows a similar progression as the tragedy itself. The poem observes international corporations entering the nation and the subsequent destruction experienced by the nation. Never does it explicitly condemn the US, an inherently complicit actor, or stress the autonomy of native people and their rights to justice and sovereignty. Instead, the poem simply observes, embodying the position of marginalized people and lands that it depicts.

This seems to stress the act of writing as protest in and of itself. The acknowledgment of crimes and atrocities is the first act of protest that can occur. The poem, and by extension the speaker himself, is situated in a position of weakness within the power paradigms of wealth, class, politics, ethnicity and countless others. Before combating directly the tangible powers that oppress, the speaker must first defy the power structure that contains them. The act of writing breaks the ingrained understanding that the corporations, world powers, military dictators, are the only actors allowed to mold the officially accepted narrative. As Verity Smith writes, “[Latin American protest writers] see their role as educating both themselves and their audience to the subaltern Other, consisting of the marginalized segments of society who until this point had been both invisible and voiceless” (680).

Throughout the world and in Latin America in particular, it is the powerful actors that have the ability to control the structure of discourse. One of the most blatant examples of this is exemplified by President Reagan’s response to the Nicaraguan “coup” and the Iran-Contra controversy. After a ruling by the International Court of Justice in the 1984 case of *The Republic of Nicaragua vs. The United States of America*, the US was declared guilty of breaching the national sovereignty of Nicaragua, using force against the nation, and intervening in national

affairs, in addition to being complicit in training Contra rebels to commit human rights violations against their fellow countrymen.

These rulings, given by an international authority, by all international law and political hierarchy, should have carried the weight necessary to enforce justice on behalf of the economically impoverished and geographically small nation of Nicaragua. However, due to its dominating economic presence and permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, the US was able to not only refuse to participate in the trial and continue to perpetuate its own rhetoric without contest, but it was also able to leverage its position on the Security Council to deny the International Court of Justice's verdict and revoke Nicaragua's right to monetary compensation and restitution. At the most fundamental level, the entire nation of Nicaragua was stripped of its voice. The United States, and by extension any nation or entity with more influence and funds than the marginalized state, was given the right to define the discourse of history while perpetuating a false reality. Within this environment of constructed discourse and dictated historical narrative, the very act of recounting a historical situation can become defiance. Though the US possesses the ability to politically overpower the voices of the marginalized in the official recording of history, protest literature provides an alternative to the official account, uninhibited by intimidation or coercion. Its very existence becomes a threat to the hegemonic power structure in which it is contained.

On an individual level, the observational nature of the work implies social significance as well. The macro political power dynamics of the international community are replicated on a micro level in domestic national affairs. A cross-national study of indigenous groups in Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Guatemala by the Americas Society concluded that, "levels of participation still do not reflect the size of individual countries' racial and ethnic populations,

and representatives elected to office often struggle to pass legislation that tangibly addresses the demands and needs of these communities” (Agrawal 2012). In Chile, for example, the indigenous group the Mapuches has suffered through decades of disproportional poverty and discriminatory land policies. Think tank Libertad y Desarrollo reports, “177 violent incidents related to indigenous-rights claims” (G.L. 2013) in 2012 alone in the Araucanía, the Chilean region most heavily concentrated indigenous population. These violent outbreaks often occur do to a lack of political voice in the Chilean government. Likewise in Guatemala, similar to small Latin American countries’ lack of voice within the international arena, the economically and ethnically marginalized social strata experience repression and representational neglect within their own nations. Today in Guatemala, though the indigenous Mayan population represents 51% of the total population (the only indigenous culture that makes up the majority in a Central American nation), government representation remains relatively limited. Currently only 15 indigenous leaders serve in the National Assembly, a group of 158 members (WDMIP). As Neruda highlights the “Indian” population of Latin America as the ultimate victims of a predatory system, he elects himself to serve as the mouthpiece for thousands of the politically voiceless.

Though the voice Neruda gives to the silenced serves as the poem’s most powerful element of protest, the defiance expressed through the poem does not end simply with its mere existence. In the first stanza, Neruda describes Latin America as a region in waiting: “and over the sleeping dead,/ over the restless heroes / who brought about the greatness, the liberty and the flags,/ it established the comic opera.” To the poet, the true identity and history of the nation resides only temporarily dormant deep within the land itself. The establishment of a “comic opera” on the surface of the country is not a sustainable endeavor. The true nature of land

remains in the depths of the soil, and it can be extended, in the depths of the indigenous heart. Neruda warns that the dead are only “sleeping,” and the heroes are “restless.” The legacy of regional pride, identity and triumphs, developed across centuries of empire building, conquest, colonial rule, and rebellion, claim an ownership over the land that transcends any dictator or transnational corporation. Beneath layers of helplessness and lamentation that the work conjures in the reader, lays this underlying truth, literally buried beneath the earth of the nations. In these few lines, the region no longer becomes purely a passive, plundered victim of modern globalization and greed, but a nuanced entity of its own, a land with a strong history and identity, one which has weathered incursions in the past, and which can outlast the trials of the present.

Analysis of Arturo Arias’ Guatemala 1954: Funeral for a Bird

While Neruda addresses the corrosive and violent effects of the United Fruit Company and the imperialist neoliberal power structures, which directly led to the Guatemalan civil war, Arturo Arias’ piece, *Guatemala 1954: Funeral for a Bird*, deals with the human consequences of the ensuing violence in Guatemala. The first lines of each work bookend one chapter violence based on the appearance of corporations and their economic interests. As Neruda describes the development of structural and exploitative violence (“When the trumpet sounded,/ it was all prepared on the earth,/ the Jehovah parcelled out the earth/ to Coca Cola, Inc...”), Arias describes the aftermath of such policies (“Máximo Sánchez crawled into the light... Now that the bombs had stopped he could see the world”). Arias portrays the war torn land of Guatemala after the end of the civil war through the eyes of a not-quite-five-year-old, who has been forced to grow up in an environment of constant violence and fear. He depicts a nation primed by external forces for the propagation of violence and instability.

This work skirts the edges of the definition of protest literature. It does not rail explicitly against political injustice, condemn specific actors or even define the political circumstance in which the narrative is set. The nature of the topic it discusses and the striking, systematic victimization portrayed within defy any argument of literary neutrality. Though a more subtle protest than the other three works examined, *Guatemala 1954: Funeral for a Bird* is distinctly political work nonetheless with a clear point of view on the identity of the victims of the Guatemalan conflict, and a strong position on the effects of violence on society.

The protest style of the story can be most strongly associated with the characteristic of observational protest literature described by Verity Smith. “The idea of exposure, to desenmascarar (unmask) the realities that lie hidden beneath the façade of a democratic Latin America is the first and foremost task of writers of protest literature” (Smith 680). Similar to Neruda’s work, Arias leverages his unflinching view of childhood in a warzone as criticism against the powers that contributed to the conflict, inherently implicating the Guatemalan military, the interim politicians and the “gringo” foreigners from the United States. The injustice and tragedy an observer perceives in Máximo’s life experiences can be easily transferred to the Guatemalan civil war as a whole. Arias displays the cycle of violence and pain that ensued from the single catalyst of US opposition to Guatemala’s turn from neoliberal economic policy. The almost surreal, post-apocalyptic setting of *Guatemala 1954: Funeral for a Bird* is the devastated remains of what had been an emerging, stable, democratic nation before President Arbenz dared to implement domestic agrarian reform to the detriment of US corporate interests.

As Máximo learns to label the things populating the new world which he is beginning to experience, the new vocabulary he accrues consists of scars, welts, corpses, cockroaches and puddles of blood. Even in this scene of seeming dystopian horror, he finds wonder in the

openness of the world and the colors in the rain, emphasizing the traditional characteristics of childhood, starkly contrasted against a backdrop of a massacre. His vocabulary has strong implications on the course of his development, and the development of the nation as a whole.

The environment in which Máximo is born gives the boy no opportunity for safe quarter. This is symbolized in the way the rain droplets that Máximo is fascinated by suddenly turn into painful rocks of hail, or to him, “a cold piece of glass that melted.” Nature is literally inflicting pain on him only minutes after he emerges from his “safe” environment under the desk with his mother. He doesn’t know the word for hail, yet he is pelted by it nonetheless, just as he doesn’t understand the meaning of war, yet it is inflicted on him regardless. Máximo is helpless to the greater powers that control the safety and comfort of his life. This is a direct correlation to the helplessness experienced by the nation as whole. When its outside environment turns hostile (i.e. United States foreign policy), the nation becomes a victim to the whims of the more powerful.

Not only is Máximo subject to his environment, he is also shaped by it. Before he even leaves his home to explore the world, he begins his journey scarred. “He said so with scars on his cheeks. They were scars from something called welts” (Arias 187). Even embarking on his first independent worldly experience, he is not unmarked from the years he spent presumably in fear and hiding. Máximo is afforded no tabula rasa even in his extreme youth. He is already permanently impacted by the extreme terror of his environment, even if he cannot yet understand the meaning of his new world.

Arias’ main commentary centers on the impact of conflict and violence on future generations of citizens. The structure and timing of the work emphasizes the nature of war and violence to generate destructive, self-perpetuating effects. *Guatemala 1954: Funeral for a Bird* depicts the enduring nature of conflict. A civil war, whose impetuses were Cold War paranoia

and the maintenance of corporate interests, not only devastated a nation but ensured continued debilitation through the impact it has on future generations. In addition to destabilizing the present, the Guatemalan Civil War as a direct result of foreign intervention, served to retard future growth, security and health for generations.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: THE IMF IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE 1980S DEBT CRISIS
TEXTUAL EXAMPLE: *AND WE SOLD THE RAIN*

The IMF in Latin America: A Tarnished Legacy

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has earned an infamous reputation in many areas of Latin America. Chief among criticisms of the organization is a general dissatisfaction with the rates of inequality fostered through the endorsement of neoliberal economic policies. Another criticism is the creation of cycles of debt that leave many nations trapped accumulating debt and increasingly dependent on the IMF and external aid. Though at one point the region was the number one recipient of IMF funds, reaching up to 40% of total Fund credit (Cabezas 63), today, Latin American nations have increasingly begun to pay off their debts to the IMF. The role of the IMF is slowly changing within the region. However, the historic relations between the Fund and the region have left an indelible impact on Latin American economics, politics and society.

Far from exclusively affecting the economic sphere of Latin American nations, the economic structures often established through relations with the IMF have affected political and social spheres as well. Negative relations with the IMF have led to a diverse range of political repercussions that differ across Latin American nations yet often include a degradation of civil society, political unrest, and the reduced legitimacy of government institutions. Social impacts include widespread backlash against neoliberalism, particularly the austerity measures it

regularly demands, a shift towards the political left, and the development of nationalistic cultures of resistance (Smith, Peter; Brown).

Much of modern vilification of the IMF stems from its role in the 1980s Latin American debt crisis, and “Lost Decade” that ensued. Several competing factors including national economic policies and international currency fluctuations contributed to the plummeting of Latin American economies in the eighties. However, the role played by the IMF served as an international example of the ease with which international policy could inspire devastating economic consequences and perpetuate seemingly endless cycles of debt and dependency.

What would come to be known as the Latin American debt crisis began, as most cycles of boom and bust do, with relative economic prosperity. Experiencing stable economic conditions, many Latin American nations began to invest heavily in national development. To do this, nations took out increasingly large loans from international banks, other nations and multilateral organizations. Irresponsible lending policies that were encouraged by a stable global economic landscape and an influx of funds to banks from oil exporting nations allowed huge sums of cash transfers to Latin American nations through LDC (Less Developed Country) loans which came into fashion at the time (FDIC). In observing this emerging relationship, the IMF encouraged Latin American countries to further removal restrictions on loans and investment. In retrospect, the intractable cycle of debt and delinquency that followed seems inevitable.

On August 12, 1982, Mexico was the first nation to report that they would be unable to repay its debt (Smith, Peter 221). A strengthening US dollar had increased the strain on Latin American nations as their purchasing power decreased in relation. Combined with accumulating interest rates, nations were left combating an uphill battle of compounding debt. To make matters worse, as debt and resulting delinquency increased, the value of Latin American debt declined.

“At the end of 1986 the weighted average discount on Latin American debt paper in the secondary market was 36 percent; by the end of 1989 it was 72 percent” (Felix 734). Trapped under mounds of debt unable to be repaid, nations were forced to default or restructure, often becoming dependent on IMF payment plans that required them to accept neoliberal conditions that changed the shape of Latin American economic systems.

The impact of this cycle on Latin America was devastating. Ultimately, between 1981 and 1989, “almost 80 per cent of Latin American and Caribbean countries experienced reductions in their per capita gross domestic product (GDP) ... This loss averaged over 10 per cent but ranged all the way up to over 40 per cent” (Lüders 2). By the end of the 1990s, rates of employment, GDP and growth dropped to 1980 rates or even below in many Latin American nations during a time in which other world economies, Asian nations in particular, were experiencing unprecedented rates of growth. Many ascribe this regional discrepancy in growth to the infant-industry protectionist policies adopted by many Asian nations as opposed to the neoliberal, IMF-endorsed policies adopted by Latin American countries.

Rejection of the IMF and its policies has become the norm in Latin America. As Manuel Pastor Jr. writes, “In Mexico in 1986, Finance Minister Jesús Silva Herzog was unceremoniously dumped, partly because, as one Mexican official stated, he had become ‘a defender of the IMF without considering the internal repercussions’” (79). As protest against the Fund receives a warm reception within the region, international reception is cooler. A few influential western powers, the US being most prominent, have the highest stake in the IMF and disproportionate control over its political direction. As political distaste with the IMF has become a given inside Latin America, criticism of the organization and its policies are directed at the IMF leadership

structure and the western powers that they represent rather than the local or national leadership of Latin American nations.

Analysis of Carmen Naranjo's And We Sold the Rain

Carmen Naranjo's biting 1985 satire is a direct rebuke to the international and domestic policies that create the environment for destructive cycles of debt. Using an imaginary state as a hyperbolic example, Naranjo depicts a nation that owes so much money to the IMF that the only solution it can find is to sell its rain. Hoping to gain enough income to fund development projects, the nation sells the only remaining resource it can claim – its rain. After the IMF appropriates the income from the first aqueduct installed to capture rain in order to finance the nation's debt, the state isn't rattled and just installs another one to bring in more revenue. Predictably, that income is then demanded to cover the interest that the debt has accrued. When the last funnel is in place, the nation has become a barren wasteland unable to sustain life and the government is still as poor as it was before the project began.

In, "And We Sold the Rain," the nation is constructed as the main character. It is a figure besieged by debt and a lack of control over its own condition, egged on by the actions of global economic agencies and structures that are set up as the antagonists of the tale. It seems that no one can do any good to help break from a cycle of dependency and economic degradation created by the oppressive relationship between international lenders and receivers. Every action taken by the leadership of the nation serves to only further dig the hole of debt and national regression.

Portrayed as subjects of the international system, national leaders are not spared criticism from Naranjo. The president of the nation is, on paper, the spitting image of a reformist president. He has a "university-trained mind" with a "PhD in developmental economics" and

“impeccably tailored meritocracy” (667). What he has in these western-valued characteristics, he lacks in foresight and long-term thinking. After his tactics of praying to La Negrita and reinstating the deity, the Virgin of Ujarrás prove futile, he jumps at the chance to export the nation’s rain with “demented glee, his face garlanded in sappy smiles” (670).

As comically short-sighted, ineffective and removed from the reality of their citizens as Naranjo’s leaders may be, the true villains of the story are the multinational agencies. And, in terms of devastating power, the IMF plays the role of their ringleader. The narrative is structured around the decrees of the IMF and the whims of the prevailing liberal international economic ideologies. The president has inherited debt, unable to begin to pay off that sum, begin development projects or even provide basic public services. In a blatant show of irony, the government can’t even provide water for the people even though it rains every day.

The president is unable to receive any further loans from the IMF before the nation is able to pay off the interest or concedes to the adoption of classic neoliberal policies. In this way, IMF control over the fate of the nation is inescapable. The Fund influences the policies and development of the nation through either their withholding or loaning of funds. If they do not loan the money, the nation is trapped in a cycle of poverty created by their earlier loans. If the Fund does loan the money the economic, and thereby social and political, systems of the nation will be shifted to become a more open, neoliberal economy. Another impact of additional loans is the probable continuation of the loan-dependency-and-debt cycle.

The aid provided by the IMF and other organizations serves to be more detrimental than beneficial for Naranjo’s nation in “And We Sold the Rain.” As an offer of help, the IMF in conjunction with USAID, the World Bank and the European Economic Community (EEC), agrees to send fat cows for relief. These cows ultimately are more of a hassle and liability than

an effective form of aid. More importantly, they represent a capitulation with IMF economic conditions:

“Moreover one couldn’t count on those cows really being fat; since accepting them meant increasing all kinds of taxes, especially those on consumer goods, lifting import restrictions, spreading one’s legs completely open to the transnationals, paying the interest, which was now a little higher, and amortizing the debt that was increasing at a rate only comparable to the spread of an epidemic” (670).

The subject of criticism in “And We Sold the Rain” is also the target audience of the work. Naranjo targets the national leadership of Latin American nations, and more broadly the leadership of developing nations in general, in addition to the failing policies of the IMF and western powers. The satire is meant not only for Latin American commiseration, but to provide a subversive literary rebuke to the powers that wield so much influence over the region. Like Neruda’s “La United Fruit Co.,” Naranjo mocks the international organizations, led by western powers in particular, targeting the perceived arrogance projected by these organizations. Though the IMF purports itself as a wise authority (in a way adopting the condescending parental stance that aid activist Dambisa Moyo accuses aid organizations of often assuming) it fails on almost every level to affect any kind of positive change. Though it claims to have the answers, it serves to drive the nation further and further to destruction.

The contrast between the vague and the specific in “And We Sold the Rain” serves to artfully highlight themes of regional solidarity and common oppressors. For example, while the subject nation goes unnamed, the forces oppressing it are precisely and repeatedly labeled. Naranjo includes the figures of the very real IMF, World Bank, and EEC. These organizations interact with countries of only implied nationalities. This lends an element of regional solidarity through the implication that the depicted effects of the IMF could be applied to any Latin American nation. The only geographic identifier other than the climate of the subject nation is its

comparison to Macondo, the invented subject of Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. This ambiguity translates to universality as all Latin American nations are presented as occupying same end of international power paradigms as compared to international organizations controlled by more powerful western nations.

The identity of these western powers, on the other hand, are clearly labeled or heavily implied by Naranjo. France is mentioned by name as "those guardians of European meritocracy" (670), as are the European nations who are members of the EEC. The presence of the US in the story is the most subtlety depicted, though it is only thinly veiled as "AID" rather than "USAID" and "the Embassy" rather than "the US Embassy." These labels clearly delineate the transgressors and the wronged. Additionally, the labeling can be interpreted as a satirical critique of the way in which dominant powers are allowed distinct identities, while less powerful nations and the region of Latin America in particular, is often described as one faceless entity. This is particularly salient to the topic of the IMF as during this period IMF policy entailed of applying the same conditions and developmental strategies across all nations in the region, regardless of the individual conditions, politics and histories of the nations themselves.

The cyclical structure of the story mimics its subject of the cyclical nature of debt. The story begins with the unnamed Latin American nation self-destructing due to its debt levels. After the complete destruction of the nation is achieved, all citizens move to the newly prosperous nation, biting named Emirate of the Emirs, which has gained its prosperity from the benefits of their exported rain. When the price of oil drops, Emirate of the Emirs finds itself taking a small loan from the IMF. Inevitably the small loan starts the nation on a debt spiral that once again leads to the destruction of a nation. The cyclical structure of the story effectively parallels the seemingly limitless capability of the IMF and the process of debt to wreck

destruction on a country. Though the events are the same, no one seems to have learned from the events of the past. The ending sets a bleak tone for the future and presents an irony that seems depressingly familiar.

CONCLUSIONS: THE COMMON THREADS OF LATIN AMERICAN PROTEST LITERATURE

This historic context in which each work of Latin American protest literature is situated is not only crucial to understanding the social and political messages of the text, but also serves to reveal common trends and perspectives that arise throughout the genre as a result of the similar dynamics of power and influence that contain them all. The three case studies of Neruda's "La United Fruit Co.," Arias' "Guatemala 1954: Funeral for a Bird," and Naranjo's "And We Sold the Rain" do not make up a comprehensive survey of the genre by any means. However, through analysis of each text through the lens of social, political and economic power relations, commonalities can be found between all three that contribute to a more holistic understanding of the origins and development of Latin American protest literature.

Analysis of the texts reveals an overall consensus on the position in international power paradigms that most Latin American nations occupy. In comparison to western nations that are perceived as more powerful and able to more easily dictate their will throughout the international community, the texts self-identify Latin American nations as subjects to the whims and decisions of others. This is a direct contributor to another common thread of Latin Americans characterized as voiceless, and the resulting importance of literature to serves as both voice and witness.

The perception of lacking a voice that serves as a motivating theme for much protest literature carries over into the reception of the published literature itself. Writes Cuban author Antonio Ponte, "The time has come in which the cultural authorities have denied my existence as

a writer. And their precautionary measures would go even further, until I am converted into a ghost” (Ponte 17). These “cultural authorities” represent similar forces to those that serve as the repressive parties within the works of protest literature themselves. Latin American protest literature is influenced by political and social power paradigms internally, in the content of the text, in addition to externally as those same powers continue to exert their cultural hegemony and authority over the finished works.

The “cultural authorities” that oppress speech and criticism are not exclusively represented by external powers. Internal forces are also often complicit in the perpetuation of an atmosphere of restriction of expression. Latin American protest literature as a genre has been historically tied to the constant threat of violent repression. One reason so many Latin American authors are exiles from their nations or are forced to publish their works discretely is that criticism cannot be put forth without an element of risk, varying in degree across nations and time period. In 1972, author Manlio Argueta was forced into exile from El Salvador, “by the warning of a gun-waving policeman: ‘this is what you’ll get next time ... we’re sick and tired of poets in this country’” (Rowe 231).

Critic William Rowe cites Roa Bastos commenting on protest literature, “We all know that a genuine literary work has merit not for its good intentions ... but rather for the truth or *force* of truth that emanates from the collective social energy unconsciously projected through the sensitive filter of subjectivity: that of the particular author” (Rowe 233). This ideal of literary protest may account for the inward-looking nature of many works of Latin American protest literature. Through the author’s subjective gaze, the aim of the work does not stop at merely railing against the international powers-that-be, but fomenting internal “social energy” through an introspective consideration of a nation or people’s relations to current power paradigms be

they relations between government and people, historic colonizers and colonized, lenders and receivers of loans, socialist and capitalists, global northerners and southerners, or any other paradigm experienced across historical context, social identity or power relations.

As “And We Sold the Rain,” “La United Fruit Co.,” and “Guatemala 1954: Funeral for a Bird,” all unify the group of the oppressed against the larger external threat of the oppressor, though with varying degrees of styles and subtlety, the works all unify the “social energy” with a sense of Latin American regionalism. A powerful underlying message of the works is the sense of a shared identity throughout Latin America. This diverts energy from local problems or isolated injustices and broadens the discourse to lay bare the uneven and often exploitative power structures that dominate domestic hierarchies and international relations.

The subtle messages of regionalism that pervade the three sample texts correlate with historic Latin American reactions to imperialist or overpowering actors, particularly in the case of relations with the US. As Peter Smith's analysis in *Talons of the Eagle* describes, due to the extreme power differential between the US and Latin American nations, ("By the early twentieth century the United States became more powerful than the region as a whole" (Smith, Peter 361)) Latin American nations were left with a few options for strategic responses. After becoming disenchanted with one option of an appeal to international law to seek fair and balanced relations, for the nations that did not take the option of simply capitulating to the power of US and accepting unequal relations, there was the movement to unite Latin America through regional organizations. Though Bolivar's Dream is far from achieved, an increase in Latin American institutions such as the Organization of American States (OAS), Mercado Común del Sur (Mercosur), and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) has

been realized. This culture of regionalism and a common Latin American identity is one well represented in the selected samples of Latin American protest literature.

Another common thread that links the texts is the more stylistic elements of tone and delivery. Many of the works analyzed present their themes with an element of black humor or satire. It seems a resigned voice, employing humor as a subversive tool against the massive powers that be. For example, Pablo Neruda's *The United Fruit Company* begins with the satirical image of God parceling out the earth to giant corporations. Here, his humor cuts to the truth that most transnational corporations have god-like powers of land appropriation and economic influence, while pointing out the absurdity of the corporations' claims of legitimate land ownership. While, with a Manifest Destiny-esque mentality many corporations believe that they are entitled to Latin American land through a form of economic imperialism bordering on a second wave of colonization, there is no God or higher authority behind their claims, only money and political influence.

Arias employs a similar satirical element of irony in the concluding scene of *Guatemala 1954: Funeral for a Bird*. When Máximo is confronted by the Old Man, who sees the aborted burial, the Old Man assumes his childhood innocence, saying, "Well you made an effort, but this isn't how you bury the dead. Of course, it wasn't your fault. I'm sure none of you have had experience in the matters of death" (Arias 191). In his last line, he repeats again, "Of course, you wouldn't understand" (191). This is ironic because though Máximo is only five, one of the only constants in his life has been death. He trips on corpses as he walks and muses over the particular smells of bodies as encounters them. His age has not afforded him the innocence that all five year olds are assumed to have. Though he may "understand" death only as fully as a young child is capable, he has more "experience in the matters of death" than most grown soldiers. The irony

reveals a tragic reality about childhood development in an atmosphere of war and fear. In the story's last lines, "The Old Man opened his mouth to laugh. But nothing came out of it" (191). Like the Old Man, the black humor is contained within the pages and can be acknowledged, but the reality of the subject doesn't allow the production of true laughter.

"And We Sold the Rain" is based off of an absurdity. Naranjo's ability to juxtapose the hilariously bizarre and the realistically tragic creates a frank critique of the (slightly hyperbolic) real-world consequences of comically unjust or inept leadership on the national and international levels. Describing the trajectory of the nation, Naranjo writes, "By then we had already sold, to our great disadvantage, the tuna, dolphins, and the thermal dome, along with the forests and all Indian artifacts. Also, our talent, dignity, sovereignty, and the right to traffic in anything and everything illegal" (670). Her hyperbole of the sheer amount of resources sold, and her humorous lament of the end of illegal trafficking only serve to highlight the bleak relinquishing of a nation's identity and pride and the roots of truth imbedded in her index of all that the nation has lost.

In his article, "Conciencia de la Palabra: Algunos Rasgos de la Nueva Narrative Centroamericana," Arturo Arias stresses the intractable relationship between history and literature in Central American writing. "The historical process of writing, the historical process of reading and the historical process of social transformation accompany each other, find each other and blend together" (42). Nowhere is this more apparent than in Latin American protest literature. The genre is a synthesis of politics and narrative, influenced by historic power paradigms, observed social injustices and the equalizing power of literature. A source of critique and lamentation, protest literature is also a medium of empowerment. Voices that regularly go ignored or disregarded on the international political stage reclaim the recognition and validity

that they are often denied. In the words of Arturo Arias, much of Latin American literature is, “Unable to speak, unable to stop speaking” (41). Latin American protest literature by its content challenges the accepted domestic and international structures that serve as formative elements to its own development; and by its very existence, serves to shift the power dynamics of modern literary discourse.

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