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Germantown

The Utopia of Márquez

World-renowned novelist Gabriel García Márquez based all of his novels on the tales and stories that his grandfather told him. In his lecture, “The Solitude of Latin America,” Márquez believed: “This way legends become caricature, in a sense, as certain features are overemphasized to the exclusion of others” (Márquez, “Nobel”). Márquez became famous for his magical descriptions that reflect the real world. As he states, “Reality leads to imagination, which is a part of us, and therefore real history—the past, what has happened—becomes just a version, one of many possibilities” (Márquez, “Nobel”). In his novels and tales, Márquez expressed his vision of the real world and current events mixing together with illusion, creating a new term, “magical realism” (Puchner 891). According to the Norton Anthology textbook, his style of writing combines themes, such as “the contrast between dream-like experiences and everyday reality; the enchanted or inexplicable aspect of fictional creation; and the solitude of individuals in the society” (Puchner 893). This style of writing, one that incorporates reality with magic, creating utopia, became Márquez’s signature, and, later, led to the world-famous author winning a Nobel Prize in literature. The story “Death Constant Beyond Love” was written later in his career, when the author started his politically active period. In “Death Constant Beyond Love,” Márquez criticizes the oppressive, hypocritical, and unscrupulous powers of the governments of

Latin America, judges the apathy of the people, who accept the corrupt reality and play by its rules, and predicts the inevitable death of such a society.

Gabriel García Márquez criticizes the hypocrisy of the governments of Latin America by representing them through the deceptive senator Sanchez. In the novella, the main character, senator Onesimo Sanchez, has only “six months and eleven days to live” (Márquez, “Death” 911). Despite his deadly medical conditions, he is going to be re-elected for a new term, and travels around the country, presenting his campaign speeches. The Senator’s character and his absurd actions represent the real oppressive and hypocritical governments of Latin America. Márquez presents the governments as dead and sick, continuing to push its outdated ideologies and unpopular policies. The government, in the face of a senator Sanchez, creates an illusion of a successful, unbiased organization that conducts fake elections. The Senator puts on a mask of hypocrisy and fabricates the environment where he presents the electoral speech because the citizens purposefully do not attend it. Márquez in detail describes the fake surroundings, including Indians, who were rented to create an illusion of a large crowd: “The carnival wagons had arrived in the morning. Then came the trucks with the rented Indians who were carried into the town in order to enlarge the crowds at public ceremonies” (Márquez, “Death” 911). Not only the people—the potential voters—were fake, but also the birds at this meeting were artificial. They were dead, like everything that the current governments touch. Senator Sanchez ordered fake birds to further develop his lie: “As he spoke his aides threw clusters of paper birds into the air and the artificial creatures took on life” (Márquez, “Death” 912). This vivid description adds

to Márquez's criticism of the deceitful government that wears masks of deception and creates a "circus" (Márquez, "Death" 912).

Everything in the world of senator Sanchez is fake, caricature-like. Even the security men "had fallen asleep with their rifles" instead of guarding the senator (Márquez, "Death" 914).

Márquez adds that the unscrupulous government impersonates happiness and success only for the purpose of personal gain, not for the benefit of the citizens. When the senator is talking to his colleagues, presumably other government officials, he explains to them, "you and I both know that the day there are trees and flowers in this heap of goat dung, the day there are shad instead of worms in the water holes, that day, neither you and I will have anything to do here" (Márquez, "Death" 914). Sanchez explains that all politicians should not solve the problems of their citizens because these problems bring them profit. He adds, "I don't have to repeat to you what you already know too well: my reelection is a better piece of business for you than it is for me... you make your living from it" (Márquez, "Death" 914). Sanchez, just like the governments of Latin America, does not care for the living of the citizens; he is ready to stage happiness rather than make it a reality. He uses and oppresses the citizens of his country for personal gain. Profit and money are the only things politicians care about.

Márquez judges a government that lies to its people, stages success, and promises a wonderful future, knowing it will not happen. When Sanchez walks through the town, looking at the poverty that his people are living in, he expresses a nice small gesture in order to portray himself as a helpful and mindful senator. However, instead of solving the big issues for poor people, he offers a donkey to a woman as a way to "console everybody without having to do

them any difficult favors” (Márquez, “Death” 913). Highlighting the real problems of Latin American countries, such as poverty and lack of water and food, Márquez points out that these problems will never be solved because of selfish, corrupt governments that put on success masks and pretend that these problems do not exist. Márquez reflects on and criticizes the hypocrisy of the governments of Latin America by describing the unscrupulous Senator Sanchez and the poor life of his constituents.

Moreover, Márquez blames the citizens, in the character of Nelson Farina, for accepting the corrupt reality and fully obeying it. The author in detail describes the wretched life of the citizens who live surrounded by poverty and crime in a “village which by night was the furtive wharf for smugglers’ ships, and, on the other hand, in broad daylight looked like the most useless intel” (Márquez, “Death” 911). Despite the large number of significant or essential problems faced by citizens, they do not seem to expect any help from the government, but they themselves are not able to take any action to change the situation. When the senator parades around the town after his speech, a woman approaches him: “I am not asking for much, senator” she says, “just a donkey to haul water” (Márquez, “Death” 913). Márquez highlights the absurdity of the woman's request, who asks for a small favor instead of calling attention to the real, large problem of the town. She represents the weak and hopeless people of Latin America who follow the status quo, blindly accept the hypocrisy of its governments, and do not fight for a better system and representatives that can solve their issues.

Furthermore, Márquez symbolizes Latin American citizens through the character of Nelson Farina who bribes the senator and offers him his daughter, Laura Farina, in order to get illegal papers. For Farina, a bribe is an everyday solution to any problem. He met senator Sanchez before and, “had begged for his help in getting a false identity card” (Márquez, “Death” 913). Márquez, once again, emphasizes the absurd, criminal relationships between citizens and their government. Farina knows how corrupt and hypocritical the government is, and, instead of fighting for better representatives, he accepts the reality and uses it to his advantage, just like the citizens of Latin America. The author adds that every year, “Nelson Farina never gave up and for several years, every time he found a chance, he would repeat his request with a different resource” (Márquez, “Death” 913). The word, “resources” symbolizes different types of bribes that Farina offers. This year, he decides to use the beauty of his own daughter, Laura Farina, as a bribe in order to get the documents: “[T]he daughter had inherited her [mother’s] color and her figure along with her father’s yellow and astonished eyes, and [the Senator] had good reason to imagine that he was rearing the most beautiful woman in the world” (Márquez, “Death” 912). Farina is ready to use his family to benefit himself, and he is not afraid to bribe the senator himself. Even though Farina knows that the senator is happily “married to a radiant woman who had given him five children and they were all happy in their home,” he sends his daughter as a sexual gift, hoping to please the senator and get the illegal papers (Márquez, “Death” 911). Sanchez accepts the “gift” and has an affair with a young woman despite his “happiness” at home. Márquez uses the character of Farina and the poor townswoman to symbolize the typical

citizen of a sick, dying society, highlighting the apathy of the people who are afraid to break the system and defend their rights, and instead, simply, follow the status quo.

Márquez uses the novella “Death Constant Beyond Love” to emphasize the inevitability of the death of a society with a corrupt government and apathetic, inactive people. Márquez exploits juxtaposition of different perspectives where the senator represents not only the Latin American governments but also society as a whole. By describing the almost dead senator, Márquez predicts the death of hypocritical Latin American governments and their dormant people. The senator was powerful and happy until he received the news of his imminent death, and “he would be dead forever” (Márquez, “Death” 911). According to Márquez, such a passive society that consists of hypocritical government and inactive citizens will die forever because it cannot exist in poverty, blind subordination, and idleness. Before dying, the senator, just like an ill society, grabs a last hope for survival—in his case, the love of Laura Farina. Sanchez uses death as an excuse to break moral rules and cheat on his wife: “[H]e resolved then that death made his decision for him” (Márquez, “Death” 914). He uses the innocent young girl, Laura, who is being sent as a bribe, to shift the focus of his life from death to a forbidden sexual pleasure. Living a hypocritical and deceitful life as a senator is not enough to take his mind off the fear of dying. Now, all he is focused on is Laura, the most “beautiful in the whole world” (Márquez, “Death” 914). Even this illusion of love does not save the senator from the inevitability of death. “Six months and eleven days later he would die in that same position, debased and repudiated because of the public scandal with Laura Farina and weeping with rage at dying without her” (Márquez, “Death” 916). Márquez emphasizes that no illusion can revive

or resurrect a sick society. He mocks the weak and inactive society that finds the sexual life of the deceitful senator more important than his hypocrisy and corruption. It is interesting that the moral life of others is much more fascinating to people than real, serious problems—the corruption and hypocrisy of people in power, the endless promises of government to improve the lives of citizens, hopeless poverty, and most importantly, the people’s unwillingness to change anything. By describing the apathetic citizens and unscrupulous government, Márquez highlights the inevitability of the death of such a society.

“Death Constant Beyond Love” criticizes the oppressive, hypocritical, and unscrupulous governments of Latin America and their abuses of power for selfish benefits, and condemns the apathy of the citizens, who accept the corrupt reality and play by its rules; in addition, Márquez predicts the unavoidable death of such a societies. Márquez, who once started his journey as a listener to the tales of his grandfather, became a storyteller himself. In his novels, he reflects on the society that unraveled around him, and incorporates magical themes within the story. After winning the Nobel Prize in literature, the most prestigious literary award in the world, he dedicated his speech to the famous American writer and Nobel Prize winner, William Faulkner: “On a day like today, my master William Faulkner said, “I decline to accept the end of man”(Márquez, “Nobel”). Márquez agrees with his fellow storyteller, believing in a better, brighter future, despite the dark, heartbreaking reality filled with corrupt senators like Sanchez and weak and accepting citizens such as Nelson Farina. Calling himself an inventor of tales, Márquez feels, “entitled to believe that it is not yet too late to engage in the creation of the opposite utopia” (Márquez, “Nobel”). Despite the depressing reality that he reflects in his

writing, the author believes that inevitably corrupt governments and inactive citizens won't be able to survive. The society will be reborn into a new, better world. It will be a world where people have the power to create a new utopia of life, “where no one will be able to decide for others how they died, where love will prove true and happiness be possible, and where the races condemned to one hundred years of solitude will have, at last and forever, a second opportunity on earth” (Márquez, “Nobel”).

Works Cited

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