EMBEDDED DIALOGUE IN
EL OTOÑO DEL PATRIARCA

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El otoño del patriarca, Gabriel García Márquez' latest (and, according to the author, last1) novel, presents a number of stylistic innovations which reveal a new facet of the author's literary abilities.2 Thematically, El otoño employs many of the same motifs of García Márquez' earlier creations, in particular the quasi-mythical treatment of the ageless Patriarch, who many of the citizens do not even believe exists, paralleling, for example, the nameless Dictator in Carpentier's recent El recurso del método.3 Even the nameless country governed by the (equally nameless) Patriarch, the symbolic "prehistoric" invasion by the U.S. Marines, and the scatological humor distinctly hark back to the foundations laid in Cien años de soledad, El coronel no tiene quien le escriba, La mala hora, et cetera. Stylistically, however, García Márquez has added an entirely new dimension to the catalogue of literary maneuvers which characterizes his work to date, a fact noted even in the publisher's notes to the novel: "...su estructura y su lenguaje no tienen precedent..." (p. 14). Rather than employing the more conventional quotation marks to indicate that someone reported the events in question to the general, the author merely inserts the phrase "mí general" to allude to the presumed spoken interchange. This device, used from time to time in Latin American literature as well as in English and American novels, finds an especially striking parallel in Vargas Llosa's Conversación en la Catedral, where an equally noteworthy panorama of voices presents a multiple narrative perspective. Consider, for example, the following fragment from Conversación: "Pero no, ahí está Ana, qué te pasa, viene con los ojos hinchados y llorosos, despeinada: se lo habían llevado al Batuque, amor... la besa en la sien, cálmate amor, le sacaría el rostro, cómo había sido, la lleva del hombro hacia la casa, no llores solista."5 Despite the inherent similarity of narrative form between the two works, there are fundamental differences. Vargas Llosa reports indirect dialogue by inserting entire phrases which, by means of vocabulary, syntax and stylistic level, identify the character who is supposedly speaking at the time, in question. García Márquez, on the other hand, makes much shorter references to the indirect conversations, generally as in the example cited above, by simply inserting a form of direct address to indicate that the remarks at issue did in fact occur during a conversation. Moreover, the use of multiple narrative perspective in El otoño del patriarca is not confined to indirect dialogue, as will be shown below, and the structural function of this stylistic device is quite different from that in Conversación en la Catedral.

Another of the more unusual ways in which García Márquez effects a shift of narrative viewpoint is in the rapid change of verbal reference, in order to indicate that another narrative consciousness has taken over. An exemplary fragment occurs during a description of the General's propensity for harboring disloyal military leaders from throughout Latin America, and his cynicism with regard to their plans for a return to power: "A todos los hospedaba por unos meses en la casa presidencial, los obligaba a jugar dominó hasta despojarlos del último ciento, y entonces me llevó del brazo frente a la ventana del mar, me ayudó a doblarle de esta vida puñetera que sólo camina para un solo lado, me consoló con la ilusión de que me fuera para allá, mire, allá, en aquella casa enorme..." (p. 21). Here the sudden insertion of the first-person object in the midst of an apparently objective third-person narrative suffices to create the stylistic shock mentioned above. In another instance the voice of the General suddenly appears in the midst of a passage describing his relations with his dying double, Patricio Aragónés: "a él no le importaba la insolencia sino la ingratitude de Patricio Aragónés a quien puse a vivir como un rey en un palacio y te di lo que nadie le ha dado a nadie en este mundo..." (p. 28). Not two but three levels of discourse, deftly woven together in the space of a single passage, come together in the above example: the objective third-person narrator, the General's own mental ramblings, and the ongoing conversation of Patricio Aragónés after the latter has eaten poison destined for the hated despot.

At a later moment in the text, García Márquez interweaves a description of the meeting between the General and General Saturno Santos, the barefoot mystic who nonetheless manages to militantly defy the orders of the head of state:

no quedó nadie a la vista, salvo el general Saturno Santos, junto a su arpa mitica, con la mano crispa da en la cachet del machete, y estaba como fascinado por la vision del armario mortal que apareció en el pezante del vagón con el vestido de lienzo sin insignias, sin armas, más viejo y más remoto que si tuviéramos cien años de no vernos mi general, me pareció cansado y sol a, con la piel amarillenta del hi-
Esta es una transcripción de la página 37 del documento más largo, pero el texto completo no se encuentra disponible. Sin embargo, parece ser sobre la representación del tiempo en el teatro y el debate sobre la tradición del teatro español. La crítica parece ser sobre la obra "El otoño del patriarca" de García Márquez. El autor critica la representación del tiempo en la obra y su asociación con la tradición dramática del teatro español. La crítica también aborda la representación de la personalidad en la obra y su relación con la persistencia del pasado en el teatro español.

La crítica también menciona la relación entre la representación del tiempo en la obra y la tradición del teatro español. La crítica ve la representación del tiempo en la obra como una forma de expresar la persistencia del pasado en el teatro español. La crítica también menciona la relación entre la representación del tiempo en la obra y la persistencia del pasado en el teatro español.
juxtaposition of entire narrative elements, whose size and scope may far exceed the bounds of a single word, or even sentence. The resultant, obtainable by such textual manipulation, exhibit an essentially imagined diversity, and it is not difficult to find examples of paradigmatic overlapping and interpenetration in many recent Latin American novels, with a wide array of ensuing results. Taken in isolation, however, the overlapping of the paradigm onto the syntang is merely another stylistic device, devoid of any intrinsic value other than the juggling of signifying elements across a text in a manner contrary to the usual distributional constraints. In order for such a device to acquire literary value it must be integrated with fundamental elements of the structure of the narrative, rather than merely representing an embellishment of the language in which the narrative is couched.

In El otoño del patriarcia, the rapid juxtaposition of narrative point of view as exhibited in the above citations constitutes a clear case of paradigmatic overlapping, for in each instance the normally singular role assigned to the narrative consciousness is successively pre-empted by a number of distinct points or centers of consciousness, in defiance of the normal distribution of narrators in a novel. While a novel may, and frequently does offer a number of narrative perspectives, the boundaries separating the portions of the text assigned to the various narrators are usually clearly delimited, if not explicitly, then by some arbitrary assignment of roles, such as chapter divisions, or through the use of readily identifiable features of language. In El otoño del patriarcia, however, one narrator rapidly gives way to another, but never for more than a few words, after which either the original narrator returns, or a third (and occasionally even a fourth) narrative consciousness takes up the thread for another phrase or two. Outside of the principal narrator, who through the use of first-person singular and plural pronouns provides personal testimony to the declining regime of the General, the other narrators are drawn variously and apparently at random from the text, appearing sporadically as the textual flow touches some aspect of their lives and voices, but never remaining on center stage for long enough to supplant, in the mind of the reader, the dominant voice of the main narrator.

In its most obvious and superficial sense, the use of multiple narrative perspectives serves to create a "novel of voices," like Cabrera Infante's Tres tristes tigres, but in a fashion different from the usual patchwork of dialogue fragments; rather, as each character is brought into focus by the narrative, a few fragments of this character's voice are woven directly into the text by fusion with the voice of the narrator. Thus one is able to view the world of the novel from several vantage points, and to fully accept the effects of the actions of the General and his entourage on the mythical country. It appears, however, upon considering the entire structure and form of the novel, that the splitting and constant interchange of the narrative voice plays another, more subtle, role, which is nonetheless intimately connected with the thematic development of the text. Technically, this is accomplished by what may be termed a split signifier. It is a basic tenet of modern semiotics and linguistics that every sign consists of a signified, or referent, and a signifier, or external symbol: this split, first formally presented by De Saussure, has been refined and amplified by a number of subsequent investigators. Fundamental to most physically-based theories of signs, however, is the dictum that there must be one and only one relation between signifier and signified; that is, a surface symbol may not have more than one referent, nor may a variety of surface symbols have the same referent. Such a dictum, which possesses a certain logical validity when applied to the physically observable universe, is inadequate in the description of literary texts, which are clearly systems of signs, for it is in the nature of poetic expression to deform and subject to various modifications the fundamental signifying function which forms the basis for our communicative capacities. It is, in fact, quite possible for a given signifier (i.e. textual element) to have more than a single signified or referent; this, in effect, is the essence of symbolism and allusion. On the other hand, the reverse possibility, the coupling of several distinct signifiers with a single signified may also be isolated in a non-trivial fashion in literary texts. In the particular case at hand, the use of multiple narrative voices representing signifiers on the syntagmatic plane, creates a many-to-one relation to the overall paradigmatic role of the narrator, since the linear flow of the narrative is not interrupted by the introduction of various alternative voices, but is merely embellished and to a certain extent broadened. This is indirectly indicated by the unusual graphic form of the text: each one of the rather long chapters consists of a single sentence, punctuated throughout with a series of commas and representing a sort of stream-of-consciousness presentation, although with much greater semantic coherence than most other specimens of the same technique. As may be seen from the preceding examples, even the changes in narrative consciousness are effected without overt punctuation, thus permitting the narrative to flow smoothly both visually and verbally.

It is significant that the most centrally-located elements in El otoño del patriarcia remain without a name; the legendary General, who is occasionally named through his double, Patricio Aragones, is nonetheless never explicitly named in the text, except at the end, where he meets Death, who addresses him as Nicar, not his real name. His mother, Bendición Alvarado, confesses to him that she does not even have any real idea as to who his father was; moreover, any attempts to derive a nonenclature for the General from his mother's name will probably end in failure, since the Devil's Advocate during his investigation of the attempts to canonize the recently deceased Bendición Alvarado felt that this name, more indica-

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tive of the coastal regions, was probably not even the real name of the high-
lands-born woman. The country itself, although bearing obvious physical
resemblance to Colombia, is also left unnamed, thus lending a universal and
mythical air to the entire novel. By re-
fusing to identify by name the protagon-
ist of the novel, García Márquez leads
us to the feeling that the name is unim-
portant, for the General is a part of every-
one in the mythical land, that is to say,
a part of us all. At several points in the
novel, the narrator reports that
many people do not even believe the
General really exists, since they have
never seen him, and the only overt indi-
cations of his existence are the presi-
dential palace and the gala activities
which take place there from time to
time. This leads to the conclusion that
if the General does not really exist, then
his necessary presence is filled in by the
cumulative consciousness of all the sub-
jects of his realm; that as well as Patri-
cio Aragón, the General is in fact the
sum total of the individuals of which
the country is comprised; that the Gen-
eral, like God himself, is within rather
than without, each and every person af-
fected by his existence. Such an inter-
pretation is supported by the unique
use of paradigmatic overlapping and
split signifiers which is to be found in
the novel, for by constantly interchang-
ing the narrative roles, to successively
include the General, certain of his of-
icials, his lovers, and a number of non-
descript and anonymous citizens, the
author demonstrates not only the func-
tional interchangeability of the various
personalities, but also, by extension,
the equivalence of the General to the
other characters. The General’s voice is
lost among the other voices which pre-
empt the narrator’s role, and the ability
for his voice to sustain the narrative
is paralleled by his inability to maintain
a firm reign on his government. The
“autumn” of the General may therefore
be taken as merely an extension of the
fate which, perhaps only metaphorical-
ly, awaits mankind in general, and dic-
tators in particular.

Notes

1 An interview reported in Hispania, 57 (1974), 592; qualified in a later interview (Hispania, 58 (1975), 535).
2 All citations are from the edition by Editorial Sudamericana, Buenos Aires, 1975.
3 In Carpentier’s novel, however, the dictator, Valverde, does get named at one point in the text. There is also a humorous parallel here with the school principal in Bel Kaufman’s novel Up the Down Staircase, who is never seen, and whose presence is made known only by his voice on the public-address system.
4 Carlos Fuentes, La nueva novela hispanoamericana (Mexico: Joaquin Mortiz, 1969).
5 Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1969, p. 17.

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12 Trivially, for example, it is possible to consider every repeated use of the same symbol, such as a name, to constitute a split signifier. Other examples include the use of a recurring motif or theme, presented through several signifiers referring to the same signified. This latter possibility is discussed by Julia Kristeva, Le Texte du Roman (The Hague: Mouton, 1969), section 2.2.1.

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