

## LIGHTING UP: MAGICAL REALISM AND RESISTANCE TO DICTATORSHIPS IN LATIN AMERICA<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** This is a study that articulates the literary genre magical realism and the movement of resistance to military dictatorships in Latin America during the twentieth century. For that, the definition of the fantastic literary genre from T. Todorov is examined. The reasons for using fantastic fiction after the development of a realistic literature are investigated below. Finally, two works representative of Latin American fantastic realism are analyzed: *Incident in Antares*, by the Brazilian writer Erico Verissimo, and *The House of the Spirits*, by the Chilean writer Isabel Allende. This path allowed us to conclude that magical realism collaborated with the resistance to the military dictatorships in Latin America and fulfills the function of constructing and preserving the collective memory of this historical period.

**KEYWORDS:** magical realism; dictatorship; Latin America.

### INTRODUCTION

Latin America had singular dictatorships and forms of resistance throughout the twentieth century, whether in Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Colombia, Peru or even in Nicaragua, Guatemala or El Salvador<sup>3</sup>. It is

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<sup>1</sup> The present paper was originally presented at the panel "Lighting up: Magical Realism and Resistance to Dictatorships in Latin America" during the the 10-year anniversary celebration of the Interdisciplinary Nucleus of Law and Literature - NIDIL, held in May 2016, at the Law School of Universidade Federal do Ceará (UFC).

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<sup>3</sup> There were many titles that compelled me to the theme proposed: *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, by Gabriel Garcia Marquez; *The feast of the goat*, of Mário Vargas Llosa; *The house of the spirits*, by Isabel Allende; *Incident in Antares*, by Erico Verissimo and *Shadows of bearded kings*, by J. J. Veiga. Faced with the need to give viability to the lecture and to the article, only two works were chosen, by Allende and Verissimo. The absence of Gabriel García Márquez, the master of Latin American magical realism, in this

possible to affirm that Latin Americans have developed a specific type of literature in attempt to understand their singularities. This literary genre came to be identified as magical realism or fantastic realism. The analysis of this relation between literature as a form of resistance and dictatorship as an undemocratic political form could be done in two ways: through the exploration of literary and political concepts and through literary and political practices. In the first case, there is a theoretical study and a considerable content of abstraction. In the second case, a study with empirical and historiographic bias, which begins with reading experiences and is complemented by contextual analyses and search for subtexts.

In this study, the methodological proposal follows the second option. It is a question of stimulating a re-encounter with literature, in which is added the historical setting in which and for which the chosen books were written. Starting from the reading of Tzvetan Todorov on fantastic literature as a literary genre, taken as Ariadne's thread for entry into this literary labyrinth, the study focuses on the analysis of two examples of Latin American magical realism: *Incident in Antares* and *The House of Spirits*, respectively by Erico Verissimo and Isabel Allende, to analyze the military dictatorship in Brazil in the late 1960s and early 1970s and the Chilean military dictatorship of the 1970s.

As for the title of the article, it should be emphasized that “lighting up” means to illuminate, to be dazzled, to marvel. The marvellous has a very special place in Brazilian and Latin literature. Ariano Suassuna, in *Romance d'A pedra do reino* has enlightened us with his fantastic characters of the *Sertão*, the wilderness, a magical kingdom of enchanted beings that inhabit rivers, seas, lakes; in the lost memories of medieval times which we did not live through, but which we cultivate in a strange and enchanting translation via popular celebrations, decorations, titles, characters that are part of this immense mosaic that is the armorial movement. Lighting up means to enlighten with the marvelous tales of our historical errors, of our ways. When we are “lit up”, perhaps we are less haunted by the events that took place under the dictatorship, a political

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essay is due solely to the fact that, by dividing the panel of the Seminar with a literature professor specialized in the production by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, I established a tacit division of tasks, leaving for her the prerogative to approach the production of this author.

regime of closing democratic institutional channels and repressing dissenters. The dictatorship as the "shut up", the "want it or not", as a regime of denial of rights and exception and absence of control over arbitrary acts. The objective of this study is to analyze how literature can be a safe place for resistance and preservation of the memory of dark times.

### **MAGICAL REALISM**

Tavares (2003, p. 7) states that Jorge Luis Borges once said that fantasy was the preferred language of writers in the world at all times and that realism was "a recent eccentricity." In fact, the existence of the marvelous comes from afar, in the human imagination: Europe was dazzled by the marvelous Orient, of genies in bottles and flying carpets. It then created the marvelous west, the Eldorado and the strange tropical fauna and flora. Europe had its own marvels, in the forests without diversity, in the dark lakes, in the caves. It was from the 9<sup>th</sup> century on that it started to have contact to stories and folk tales of Indians, Arabs, Persians, that would form the *Book of one thousand and one nights*. Marco Polo, who in the 9<sup>th</sup> century was one of the first Westerners to stride the silk route, made his fantastic journey an account of the unspeakable. His detailed travel account of the East, including China, has long been one of the few sources of information about Asia in the West. The Arthurian legends do not have precise dates, but there is a book, written in the year 830, which tells of the battles of a king, as well as a chronicle, with the same intention, written in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Umberto Eco explores, in *Baudolino*, a narrative interwoven with the fascination of the marvelous medieval crusades of the Orient during the 12<sup>th</sup> century and under the command of the legendary Frederico Barbarossa. In the legends of Charlemagne and the Twelve Peers of France, in the quest for the Grail, the Song of Roland is populated by sorcerers and mysterious creatures. From the arc of the hyperbolic marvelous to the exotic marvelous, there comes the scientific marvelous of Jules Verne, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Marco Polo and the silk route: entertainment or powerful source of information? Arthur for the Anglo-Saxons and Charlemagne for the Franks:

fictional or historiographical narratives? What did these tales aim at: preservation of memory or supply, through an unreal narrative, of a series of explanations of the inexplicable? It is possible to attribute to myths and legends the function of establishing the founding narrative of a people with a desire to have a past. But before the constitution of an official history, produced by a field of studies that supports itself in sources and methods that inspire the scientific rigor and ambition of the truth, how could one abandon the literary practices of telling about the past? Why consider only the inscription said to be licit by methodological rigor? Thus, the main hypothesis of this research is that it is possible to *ask questions* to literature. Specifically, it is possible to question how much history is hidden in fantastic narratives. Especially in the case of narratives about dictatorships, it is a matter of asking what was the intention and reason for which they were produced. Perhaps because of the need to preserve memory in the face of all the diversities that memory finds to preserve itself. Man's struggle against oblivion, claimed by modern historiography, was already present, on the substratum of the need to narrate, even in the most archaic societies. In this case, when does the cut between History (actual record of the past) and Legend appear? What is the relation of 20<sup>th</sup> century History in Latin America and the emergence of Magical Realism as a movement or literary school? What is the role of literature in establishing an empathic knowledge of the other? What did Latinos want with their desperate cry of solitude projected into the fantastic realism that so much enchantment has caused in the world? What do we want when we look for fantastic literature? What escape do we seek and what do we intend to find?

All these questions require extensive transdisciplinary research. Almost all the researches undertaken to produce this study worked on the interface of History and Literature. History, Literature, Politics and Law would cross the interpretive horizon of the researcher, bringing also the risk of methodological syncretism and loss of taste for reading a work with pretensions that tend more to instigate reading than to answer questions. The recent encounter between Law and Language Theories, especially Semiotics, revealed more aridity and misunderstandings than contributions

of decidability for legal issues. Thus, the methodological cut that made the construction of this article viable was the choice by the analysis of the two novels already identified, anticipated by the contributions of T. Todorov.

Todorov (1975) elaborates a definition of the fantastic in literature and, in this way, provides several conceptions previously formulated by other theorists. For him the core of the fantastic is defined by, in a world that is exactly like ours, the one we know, without devils, sylphs or vampires, to produce an event that cannot be explained by the laws of this familiar world: “The concept of fantastic is defined as with respect to the real and imaginary, and the latter deserves more than a mere mention”. There is a strange phenomenon that can be explained in two ways, through natural and supernatural causes; The possibility of hesitating between the two created the fantastic effect. What characterizes the fantastic is a brutal intrusion of the mysterious in the framework of real life. The sudden presence of the inexplicable. For Roger Caillois, quoted by Todorov (1975, 32), “fantastic is a rupture of the established order, irruption of the inadmissible within the unchanging daily legality”. Thus, it is necessary that the text compels the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living creatures, possible, existing, that are faced by the inadmissible.

This inadmissible, sometimes, is constituted throughout the narrative. The effect can be astonishment, as in the tales of mystery and terror, in which the siege closes around the hero. For Lovecraft, still according to Todorov (1975), the criterion of the fantastic is not in the work, but in the reader's particular experience, and this experience must be fear. The fantastic tale must be judged by the emotional intensity it provokes: “a tale is fantastic quite simply if the reader deeply experiences a feeling of fear and terror, the presence of unusual worlds and powers” (Lovecraft apud Todorov, 1975, 40).

The hesitation or perplexity of the reader is, for Todorov, the second condition for the fantastic. It is different from the allegory of fables, with its speaking animals, and it does not focus on the production of poetic effect, using metaphorical constructions: the fantastic implies not only the existence of a strange event that causes hesitation in the reader and the hero. The hesitation happens between the natural or supernatural

explanation of the events narrated and experienced by the hero. It is also important that the reader adopts a similar attitude toward the text; we also need a way of reading it, which can be defined for the moment by exclusion: the fantastic must be neither poetic nor allegorical.

For Todorov (1975) one must also distinguish the fantastic from the strange. If the reader decides that the laws of reality remain intact and make it possible to explain the narrated phenomena, the work is linked to another genre: the strange. If, on the contrary, he / she decides that new laws of nature must be admitted, by which the phenomenon can be explained, this genre is the marvelous. That is why Todorov (1975, p. 48) states that “fantastic leads a life full of dangers, and can fade at any moment”. Between the marvelous and the strange is the fantastic. Todorov will further subdivide (1975) the fantastic into fantastic-strange and fantastic-marvelous: in the case of the former, events that appear supernatural throughout story in the end receive rational explanation; in the case of the fantastic-marvelous, it is necessary to install hesitation at least as to which final solution to choose, when the fantastic claims its rights over the text: “we are in fantastic-marvelous, or in other terms, in the class of narratives which present themselves as fantastic and which end in an acceptance of the supernatural” (Todorov, 1975, p.58).

Todorov (1975) identifies, among all the variations of the marvelous, one with an “excuse” and the pure marvelous. Although the marvelous is present in the history of literature, there is a specific phenomenon that invades or breaks out, erupts, in the literature of Latin America in the 20<sup>th</sup> century which uses the pure marvelous, with no excuses in the end. What does Latin America want in rescuing the fantastic through magical realism? Todorov (1975) never ceases to question, closing his book, beyond *what* is fantastic, *why* the fantastic. While the first inquiry was related to the structure of the genre, the second one looks at its functions. Todorov quotes Penzoldt (Todorov 1975: 167): “For many authors, the supernatural was only a pretext for describing things they would never have dared to mention in realistic terms”. For Todorov himself (1975, p. 167), systematizing the topics covered in fantastic literature, “one has the impression of reading a list of forbidden themes, established by some censorship: each of these themes was, in fact, many times, prohibited, and may still be so today”.



According to the Hungarian theorist, alongside institutionalized censorship, there is another censorship which is in the author's own psyche, constituting itself as the prohibition of addressing certain topics considered taboo: “more than a simple pretext, the fantastic is a means of combat against both censorships: sexual misconduct is best accepted by any kind of censure it is inscribed on the devil's account” (1975, p. 167).

In the historical context, magical realism emerged in one of the most troubled periods in Latin America. Between the 1960s and 1970s, Latin American countries were living in the establishment of dictatorial regimes of government. Realism emerges as a form of reaction, using the magical element as reinforcement of words against dictators' regimes, attempting to circumvent the common censorship of these regimes. It was a way of reacting through the word. As fantastic as it may seem, there is history here, and this genre is not the pure fantastic of European literature, but a magical realism, a specific literary genre. If this is true, as Tavares (2003, p. 13) states, that “the fantastic appears when something breaks and things begin to happen that could not have happened, in the sense that we could not have allowed them to happen at all”, what relation can be made between the establishment of dictatorships and their terrorist devices and the capacity of resistance to these regimes? It is possible to say that in the fantastic narrative a kind of redemption was discovered: the ability to elaborate a version of a traumatic present / past by the deep desire to speak of freedom under a dictatorship.

### ***INCIDENT IN ANTARES***

The work of Erico Verissimo will be examined, initially, from the literary trajectory of Verissimo and the perspective of an engaged literature, in the molds proposed by Sevcenko (1985). Then, we will analyze the peculiar aspects of the narrative, from the presentation of the book *Incident in Antares*. Erico Verissimo was one of the most productive Brazilian writers. He became known for his monumental work, *Time and the Wind*, which tells of the formation of Rio Grande do Sul, his native state. The historiographic character of the work is clear. As well as in *The Adventures of Tibicuera*, a fantastic narrative that tells the story of Brazil, from Anchieta to the construction of Brasilia, in the voice of an enchanted native-

Brazilian who witnesses several episodes of our development as a nation, since he witnessed the arrival of the caravels. Verissimo also wrote children's books, such as *The Bear with Music in the Belly* and *The Three Poor Little Pigs*, and novels, such as *Clarisse* and *Behold the lilies of the field*. That is why the choice of *Incident in Antares* may perhaps cause strangeness as it seems a point outside the curve of his production. For Bordini, *Incident in Antares* acquires characteristics of innovation in the work of Verissimo:

He is creative in assembling the action into two separate parts, the first, a true national history of infamy, announcing and grounding the second, in which the absurd appears, under the guise of magical realism. Thus, “it departs from the author’s usual genetic process, going from the global conception to the characters and scenes, and tracing parts of a work already in process (2006, p. 12).

The first questioning could be about Verissimo's purpose in writing *Incident in Antares*, a critique of the military regime, since the novel was released in 1971, under the military dictatorship, under the command of Garrastazu Médici. Then, it would be the question of the method chosen. Although it may have the epithet “libel for freedom”, *Incident in Antares* does not only fit into the sphere of politically engaged literature, identified by Sevchenko (1985). In analyzing the work of Lima Barreto and Euclides da Cunha, Sevchenko recognizes the activist ethic of the writer, who makes literature the record of a mission, accomplished in spite of many setbacks, not only persecution and censorship, but incomprehension and rejection. In this activist ethic, the intellectual exercise is taken as a political activity that investigates the social foundations and seeks a deep identification among all human beings, for the establishment of a politically oriented empathy.

For Sevchenko (1985, 79), “engagement becomes the ethical condition of the writer” and the “writer-citizen” emerges. The so-called utilitarian or engaged literature emerges as the alternative way of forming opinion. For this conception of literary writing, only the forms of cultural creation and reproduction that are instrumented as factors of social change are valid. It is based on the belief that literature is capable of producing new historical conditions. The lyrical impulse of the romantic novel gives way to engagement. Despite giving testimony of its time, *Incident in Antares* has



other properties that make it unique. Fantastic and humor are the challenging elements that most characterize the narrative of the Antares episodes. At the climax of the narrative, while the dead talk in the bandstand (the fantastic), the choir of the young people hidden under the canopy makes the scene very funny, in the bare and vain attempts to locate and repress them (humor as a subversion of authority).

How can we bear witness to a time when, in Brazil, the prisons were full of opponents of the regime, in which torture and murder were practiced, because of this opposition? How to describe the violent practices that in Brazil have always been an instrument of obtaining and guaranteeing authority? How to bear witness to the changes that Brazil has undergone in the three generations of the 20<sup>th</sup> century? Verissimo created a small world in Antares, and its characters are varied and archetypical. This is a property of the works of magical realism: an explosion of labyrinthine characters and even disorientation in the succession of the generations of Vacarians and Campolargos, such as the Buendia, in the *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and the successive women Nívea, Clara, Blanca and Alba, from *The House of the Spirits*.

The book is divided into two parts: part I – Antares; And part II – The incident. The second part covers a period beginning in 1963, when the incident itself occurs, which lasts three days, and ends in 1970. Antares is the result of a slow process of formation of an urban nucleus, frontier, started from a dozen houses around a ranch where cattle were raised. The construction of the scenario in which the “incident” unfolds is the first part of the book. The town grows thanks to the dispute of prestige and power between two men, patriarchs of the two strains that will rule in Antares during the Brazilian Empire and much of the Republic: the Vacarianos and Campolargos. Verissimo gives life to the patriarchs, builds the personality of his firstborn, narrates episodes of fighting and revenge, and it is their grandchildren, Xisto Vacariano and Zózimo Campolargo, who will lead the approach of the two rival families in an alignment of protection and maintenance of power against the onslaughts of the new dangers that come at the end of the twentieth century to destabilize the built world under the command, corruption and violence. One of these dangers is the University:

the grandson of Xisto Vacariano leaves Antares to study Social Sciences and returns with a group of colleagues who, guided by a professor, end up producing a study about Antares that infuriates the literate inhabitants; the fate of this study is also symbolic, since it has little impact as an instrument of transformation of the *status quo*.

There are about ten characters who make up the select group of “good men” from Antares: besides the two colonels, the judge and the prosecutor, the mayor, the deputy, the two doctors, the owner of the newspaper “The voice of truth”, Lucas Lesma, a teacher and sometimes the old priest. They will be the preferred targets of the dead who will denounce the iniquities of Antares on the bandstand in the second part of the narrative, in which episodes of the past are reconstituted. Bordini emphasizes intertextuality and the option for magical realism, which grew in prestige in the country as a literary genre:

In its first part, it evokes, in a satirical way – due to the excessive violence that characterizes the ruling elites of Antares throughout the history of the formation of the city – “Time and the Wind” [...] In Antares, there is a continuous rise Of authoritarianism, ranging from *caudilhismo* without pity to the support of a discretionary regime through oppression and torture. In the second part, where the main action of the plot unfolds, the force opposing this state of things is not on the side of life... The opposition comes from death implied in it the erasure and annulment of the possibilities of transformation of society (2006, p. 12).

For a more specific analysis on resistance to dictatorship, the characters João Paz and Padre Pedro-Paulo stand out. Joãozinho Paz is dead. He appears only in the second part, in which the incident is told. It is the incident that inscribes him in history, through the possibility of telling how he died. His story is told backwards, since he does not figure in the formation of Antares, carried out by the patriarchs and their families. Joãozinho Paz did not exist in this first part of the story. He is the victim of the deputy in a torture session accused of forming a “communist and revolutionary” group, the “Eleven of the Antares”. It is not known whether the group exists or not, but we can see the irony here: could eleven men revolutionize Antares? Joãozinho is killed and taken to the hospital, where the doctor testifies that he died of pulmonary embolism. Joãozinho returns to restore the truth about the torture session, which was also submitted to

his pregnant wife, who ends up confessing / inventing names to survive with his son, being saved by Father Pedro-Paulo, who embarks her to the other side of the Uruguay River, *disappearing from history*.

Father Pedro-Paulo, the young clergyman of Antares, represents the new generation of priests that appears in the Brazilian Catholic Church, with the Liberation Theology movement. It is he who questions the misery of the favela and is never present in the meetings of the “good men” of Antares. A man with many doubts, but with a lucidity about his political struggle for the real world, the material conditions of life, the need to look at poverty as a social problem, which shows in the narrative the existence of a favela in Antares. It is the priest who immediately feels affinity for the research project of university professor Martin Francisco, who hears in confession the doctor who had given the false death certificate of João da Paz, who carries out the clandestine flight of Ritinha to Uruguay. And besides all this, he is a priest in love with the judge's wife. Thus he bears in his identity the founders of the Roman Catholic Church. Was this the sign of the ransom of primitive, subversive, clandestine Christianity itself, persecuted and surviving by the strength of its martyrs? Pedro-Paulo and Joãozinho lead a conversation when the second, already dead, asks him to save his wife and son, in an almost allegory of Mary's flight to Bethlehem. Pedro-Paulo and Joãozinho are the two characters who incarnated despair, injustice, death under torture and the challenge of resistance.

At the end of the narrative, the successful strategy of denying the facts that occurred during the incident leaves only a vague memory in the memory of the elders. It is also the denunciation of Verissimo for the collective construction of the memory of a people. This epilogue of Verissimo's narrative also relates to the loss of memory of the inhabitants of Macondo, in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Finally, Bordini affirms that Incident in Antares potentiates its shocking effect and its critical assault on the Brazilian establishment by making death teach life, a lesson that is innocuous since the living do not change, leaving only the act of denunciation in the resistance of memory, despite the strategy of denying its existence. The narrative tells the reader that “force and time erase any history and that the only form of duration of what happens is in writing - as long as it can be read, even truncated, as the partly erased word that, at the

end of the novel, the little schoolchild tries to read on the city wall” (2006, page 13). Memory, preserved by written word, as the founding point of literature, against the strategy of forgetfulness, is what one wants in literature.

### **THE HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS**

For the analysis of *The house of the spirits*, we will initially present the work of Isabel Allende and, later, examine its narrative content. Isabel Allende, although born in Peru, “by accident”, is Chilean by creation and conviction. She shares the surname of Chilean President Salvador Allende, killed in the bombing of September 11, 1973, in the Palace of La Moneda, in the condition of his niece. Isabel worked professionally as a journalist, collaborating with several Chilean publishers, until her voluntary exile in Venezuela, beginning in 1976. In the book entitled *Paula*, Allende makes an exciting and sincere account of herself. *The house of the spirits* was her first novel, published in Spain in 1982, with great success, and for many it was a negative response to the fear that fantastic realism could have died after *One hundred years of solitude*. Isabel Allende became a professional writer and, among other books, wrote *Of love and shadows*, in which she recalls, under the scenario of a love story, the difficulties of resistance to the Chilean dictatorship, and *Portrait in sepia*, in which she narrates the beginning of the history of Chile, with traditional families, wineries and Chinese immigrants.

As a Republic, Chile was commanded, during part of the 70s and 80s of the last century, by military groups that were indicated by the president, as well as the members of the Supreme Court, body of the Judiciary. Left-wing parties were considered illegal even during the convocation of the plebiscite that in October 1988 rejected the military candidate and restarted direct elections in 1989. Throughout the nineteenth century, the period in which are located the events narrated in *The House Of the spirits*, the agrarian and conservative oligarchy played a preponderant role in the political system. Urbanization and industrialization have given rise to a middle class that would organize itself politically in the parties of the Socialists and the Christian Democrats, which, since the 1960s, have gained

political power. In a leftist alliance in 1970, Salvador Allende was elected and became the first Latin American Head of State linked to Marxism. Allende promoted the expropriation of the mines, nationalizing copper, and underwent a boycott of the North American government, which generated problems in the Chilean economy. He also accelerated the agrarian reform process, raised the workers' salaries, and froze commodity prices. The middle class turned against Allende, and on September 11, 1973 a military coup led by Pinochet overthrew the Allende government. La Moneda Palace, in which the president was, was bombarded by the military at noon, in one of the most tragic episodes of US military intervention in Latin America.

*The house of the spirits* has elements of a realistic and fantastic novel, permeated by magic and carried out by four women with significant names: Nívea, Clara, with gifts of clairvoyance, Blanca and Alba – Clara's granddaughter and Blanca's daughter –, who becomes a socialist and, therefore, opponent of the patriarch Esteban Trueba, a landowner senator, reactionary of a corrupt Republic. The events take place between 1905 and 1975, and there are three narrators: Esteban, Clara and Alba. Again, there is a multiplicity of characters, and in this case, polyphony leads the reader, in various parts, to ask who is telling the story. It is a historical narrative of the formation of political forces in Chile during the twentieth century, in which fiction interpenetrates reality – containing events in certain plausible cases and in others of a supernatural order – and with elements of dreaming and terror. As in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the narrative could continue infinitely.

The coup d'etat in Chile, in 1973, also stops the narrative flow. Clara stops talking twice throughout the narrative: the first to believe that she somehow collaborated to the death of her older sister, Esteban Trueba's fiancée, with whom Clara knows that she will marry, through premonition. The sister is mistakenly poisoned by a political opponent of her father in an act that demonstrates the practices of an era. Clara remains nine years in silence and only speaks again to announce that she will marry Esteban. Esteban Trueba is, in the novel, the founding character of an order, of an authority constituted and demanded by work and force; perhaps the opposite of Clara, with her fanciful hypersensitivity that allows her to locate

the severed heads of her parents, killed in a car accident and lost in a field. Living with the couple, there is Esteban's sister, Ferula, who joins the fantasy and dreamlike atmosphere of the narrative, since she reappears after her death. The second time Clara is silent, she will stop talking to Esteban forever, although she will love him until the end of her days: discovering her daughter's romance with the son of one of her Las Tres Marías employees, a young revolutionary and artist, Esteban assaults his daughter. The three of them will be intertwined until the end of the story.

Like in almost all Latin American countries, the development of the twentieth century in Chile saw the emergence of a more articulate and elaborate discourse of peasants' resistance to oppression. There are several episodes worthy of a look at the relation between fantastic realism and resistance to oppression and the Chilean dictatorship, which between 1973 and 1990 recorded deaths and disappearances, exiling five thousand Chileans, forbidden to return to their homeland by the military regime, as will be mentioned by Gabriel García Márquez in his 1982 Nobel Prize speech. Like in *Incident in Antares*, the regression at the beginning of the century seems to show that the conditions for establishing dictatorships are not instantaneous, but the result of a long process of tension, exploitation and violence.

Esteban Trueba imposes himself by force as owner of distant lands, winning with work and discipline the inhospitable environment which was, until then, infertile and sterile. In this movement, Stephen subjugates the gentle peasants, descendants of the Native Amerindian peoples, who, however, do not share the wealth produced. The patron takes for mistress Pancha Garcia, a peasant girl of fifteen, whose mother and grandmother had also served in the manor house. From this relationship will be born a natural son, whose bastardy will lead him to meet again with the official family of Trueba, in shocking moments: the grandson of Pancha and Esteban goes to the house of the patron to denounce where Pedro Segundo, Blanca's lover, is; Then he is despised by Trueba, who recognizes the pettiness of the accusation. After that, this same grandson will ask him for money, because he wants to join the army, to be a carabineer, and, while he waits to be treated, he approaches the child who is his sister's daughter and



caresses her while he smells her. Years later, in the installation of the military regime of exception, like member of the Army that is in the power, again the bastard grandson of Trueba has the chance to torture the daughter of his sister.

Esteban Trueba, a respected and mature man, who keeps his business with an iron hand, persecuting and expelling from his lands anyone who intends to entice "his peasants", is also senator of a corrupt Republic. The escalation of progressive discourse overthrows power in an election that will bring it in line with the coup that will oust the elected government, led by the military and supported by the conservative elite, events narrated in the chapter entitled "The Conspiracy". The old senator will soon realize that this alliance would not put him back in the position of command, in the final chapters of the narrative, "Terror". The military owes nothing, they are in power and they are armed. Esteban Trueba asks a prostitute to find out about his missing granddaughter behind a wall of silence and terror. The epilogue is narrated by Alba, who escapes from the basements of torture to exile herself.

Several excerpts from the book also put writing and memory as a fundamental question of life: Esteban reads three times the piece of paper in which Ferula announces the death of the bride, Rosa, and it is also a letter that informs him about the death of his mother who approaches him to Clara; Clara has many notebooks to *write life down* and keeps a chest with the magic books of a flying uncle; Blanca and Pedro Tercero exchange letters of love in which he signs with the name of a woman; Chapter VIII, "The Count," begins: "this period would have disappeared in the confusion of old memories erased by time, were it not for the letters that Clara and Alba exchanged" (Allende, 1996: 265); When Alba was born, Clara studied her astral map and wrote down her destiny in white ink on a black paper album; hours before she died, Clara ordered her papers, taking out of the lost corners the notebooks of life; to record the time of decadence, Trueba narrates: "I cannot speak of this. But I will try to write it down" (Allende, 1996, 315).

One has the impression that a mighty river led the twentieth century and the characters of a demented Latin America into the books. Or that an earthquake opened a rift that engulfed all, men and women of that

continent who did not have an instant of quiet in the last decades of that century. In his speech at the Nobel Prize ceremony in 1982, Gabriel García Márquez says of the solitude of Latin America, “an immense homeland of hallucinated men and historical women, whose endless tenacity is confused with legend”. Looking back, he says:

In that period there were five wars and seventeen coups d'état... while 20 million Latin American children died before the age of two, more than all the children who were born in Western Europe since 1970. The disappeared by repression amount almost 120 thousand: it is as if today nobody knew where the inhabitants of the city of Upsala are. Numerous pregnant women have given birth in Argentine prisons but the whereabouts of their children are still unknown, either given in clandestine adoption or interned in orphanages by military authorities. By not wanting things to go on like this, about two hundred thousand women and men died across the continent, and more than 100,000 perished in three small and voluntary Central American countries – Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala. If it were in the United States, the proportional figure would be one million and 600 thousand violent deaths in four years. From Chile, a country of hospitable traditions, one million people have fled: ten percent of its population. Uruguay, a tiny nation of two and a half million inhabitants and considered the most civilized country on the continent, lost in banishment one in five citizens. The civil war in El Salvador has produced, since 1979, almost a refugee every 20 minutes. The country that could be made with all the exiles and forced emigres of Latin America would have a population larger than that of Norway. I dare to think that this extraordinary reality, and not only its literary expression, that this year deserved the attention of the Swedish Academy of Letters. A reality that is not that of paper, but which lives with us and determines every instant of our countless daily deaths, and which sustains an insatiable source of creation, full of misery and beauty, and of which this wandering and nostalgic Colombian is nothing more than A figure marked by luck. Poets and beggars, musicians and prophets, warriors and rogues, all of us, creatures of that wild reality, had to ask very little of the imagination, because for us the biggest challenge was the insufficiency of conventional resources to make our lives believable. This is, friends, the knot of our solitude.

The accuracy of the transcribed section requires no further analysis. The discourse continues to challenge the understanding of all this, which leaves Latin Americans so stunned; "Gabo" says that it is not surprising that there is a lack of a valid method to understand us and that, therefore, we remain increasingly unknown to ourselves.

### FINAL THOUGHTS

This paper is just one analysis out of many possible others. The grandeur of Latin American magical realism does not fit into so few pages. But it is possible to highlight some aspects. Verissimo and Allende seem to want to show that dictatorships do not settle “overnight”, that is, they do not erupt amidst economic crises or social upheavals, since these are events that only give the opportunity for these forces to be shown permanent and latent in conservative and authoritarian societies. At the same time, social upheavals are the result of long and slow process of questioning and resistance of those who feel oppressed and excluded from the enjoyment of the wealth produced by their work. The tortures, so recurrent and denounced during Latin American military dictatorships stem from the propitious conditions of formation of the mentality of these “torturers”, who in the past have become docile little collectors of caged birds. Many writers have already explored this double life of the executioner or torturer: their private lives, their family condition (or lack of). There are immemorial authoritarian political regimes that rely on these two figures to fulfill the abject activities of killing and torturing.

As Republics, Chile and Brazil lived the experience of being commanded by the military during part of the 60s, 70s and 80s of the last century. Left-wing parties were considered illegal, and the process of transition to democracy was severely conducted by the military. Throughout the nineteenth century, during which there are events narrated in the stories of Isabel Allende and Erico Verissimo, the agrarian and conservative oligarchy played a preponderant role in the political system of the two countries. Disorganized urbanization and industrialization have given rise to both a new middle class and new forms of urban political organization and of rural workers. The leadership of the students in an articulation with workers is also installed, represented in the books analyzed by the figures of the grandchildren (Xisto and Alba), who attend the University. The two countries have lived through the torture of these middle-class children as an experience of terror that may only be perpetuated for future generations through art.

Fantastic realism, as a literary genre, seems to be yet another of the tricks humanity has invented to ensure the need to transmit memory. It can be understood as a good solution to the embarrassing question: tell me what happened here at the time? Because one can only speak, historically, of dictatorship when it disappears. Before that, it has to be biased. An attempt to write about the reality that, even leaving the reader with the sensation of uncertainty before the supposed fact, makes possible the perception and the resistance to the return of the dictatorships, a sensation of “I know this story”. Because they always come back and you have to be alert and lucid to realize their silent return and their winding installation.

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**Original language: Portuguese**

**Received: 12 June 2016**

**Accepted: 21 Dec. 2016**