

RESEARCH ARTICLE

**PARABOLIC DIORAMA: FOLIATION OF THE AUTHOR TO THE CHARACTER****ARYA GOPI**

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ABSTRACT

The writer and the work are two complementing factors and which forms which is often a difficult bio-critical problem to solve. The influence of one on the other is hard to negate. The art works having the influence of its creators are numerous while a work forming the writer in the subsequent works is no less in numbers. Both these influences are inseparable. The use of alter ego makes this bio-critical problem even harder to decipher. Chilean writer Roberto Bolano, who has created a parabolic diorama with his own poetic self, ascended this practise of placing writer's alter ego at the epicentre of his works by instilling the writer's own self in Arturo Belano to create a new literary movement the creator always loved to build. Here, the writer creates a universe that revolves around his alter ego- Arturo Belano and a literary movement – visceral realism - with lost, failed and vagabond poets playing a major role. This study analyses how a new literary movement – visceral realism - is brought into life by a novel that has its writer's alter ego at its core. The study will also look into the deep influence of the alter ego of the writer on the movement and also how a work forms the writer and a literary movement. It also analyses major features, unique proportions and the eventual effects of the work on the literary world.

KEY WORDS: Latin American Boom Movement, Post-boom movement, magical realism, visceral realism, Roberto Bolano, alter ego

A new art movement is the need of a specific era, though it is well to remember that it is the subsequent result of hundreds of years of slow growth. It often produces new methodologies that will eventually form the aesthetic, psychological approach of that time period. In history, a new literary movement arrives contradicting the existing movement with a new set of narrative techniques, plot, style of writing, style of living, etc. which would

form the writers and their work of the successive years. Indeed, a breakthrough magnum opus that leads the inception of new literary movements like Lyrical Ballads, which was the harbinger of Romanticism and Gabriel Garcia Marquez's Hundred Years of Solitude, which popularised magical realism, etc.

Every age has its major literary form to which the most able and ambitious spirits of the

age are irresistibly attracted whether it suits their especial talents or not.

(Allen, 6)

In history, either the writer or a critic usually makes the proclamation about the beginning of the new era. Roberto Bolano – the Chilean writer – rewrites the history of literary movements by beginning a new movement within a work that speaks loudly about a new movement – Visceral Realism. He plays the role of a critic as well as the writer simultaneously and all his fictions can be read as an attempt to define the new movement he dreamt to put in place in order to wipe off the then-strongly-established Boom movement. The genre is declared through an alter ego character of the novelist, Arturo Belano, a failed poet. The novel brings into life the parallel literary world that automatically forms the transition age. In the novel, the movement is made by poets, but eventually, contrary to the wishes of the writer, the new movement was erected on another totally different genre – novel. The novelist dexterously crafts all four major ingredients for a movement to bloom up – a group of writers, a new style of writing, a new style of living and a peculiar global geography that represent the movement.

Certain times the character became inseparable from the author. Throughout his life, which was terribly eventful, Roberto Bolano thoroughly negotiates, with the existence and veracity. Nevertheless, the writer's influence on the work is so hefty that it is difficult to separate the writer from the work. From Shakespeare to Goethe and James Joyce to Woolf, the influence of writer's charisma on the work often varied. Tracing the personality of Shakespeare in Shakespearean works is an excruciating attempt as he had always kept his persona behind the mask of a properly cultivated and chiselled world of letters. In contrast, Goethe, cunning beyond measure, nevertheless invested a rival exuberance in his works that could match his personal allure. The sublime outrageousness of the second part of Faust, or of the greater lyric and meditative poems, forms a counter-sublime to Goethe's own demonic intensity.

While hiding all what were personal inside the luminous and popular world of his works,

Shakespeare had been finding a new awareness through his own works like W H Auden rightly phrased it – infinite energy of Hamlet that created Shakespeare! It is not just the writer, his social and religious positions, that can influence the writer, but a work can also do it. According to Harold Bloom, Falstaff and Hamlet may better said to best represent the work in the writer, because their influence upon Shakespeare was prodigious.

The contrast between Shakespeare and Goethe demonstrate that in each – but in dissimilar ways – we can better find the work in the person, that we can discover that banal entity, the person in the work. How a writer influences himself is a vast unexplored problem in criticism.

The bio critical problem can divided into two areas, difficult to disengage fully. Accomplished works affect the author's life, and also affect her subsequent writings. It is simpler for me to surmise the effect of Mrs Dalloway and To the Lighthouse upon Woolf's *Late between the Acts*, than it is to relate Clarissa Dalloway's suicide and Lily Briscoe's capable endurance in art to the tragic death and complex life of Virginia Woolf.

(Bloom, 13)

In effect, it is how the author hears himself and listens to himself. The hearing can be replaced or rearranged with overhearing, leaving ample space for transcending the life of the author to something that he/she either wants to live or hates to live. When it comes to novel, facts are not secret. It is just a raw material, which set the platform on which the writer creates a world of imagination, carved well with a suitable language, plot and theme. Shakespearean invention of overhearing has made the Elizabethan age of literary magic, with the creation of innumerable words that was spoken by characters peeled out from history and mythology.

It is no better than foolishness if the writer is always read between the lines. But, it is indeed a necessity to read how a work forms a writer because art transcends the writer to a better self.

The writer in the character is not a new subject either. Saying David Copperfield was his

favourite child, Dickens had no hesitation to bring in his autobiographical connection to the character. James Joyce did it with Stephan Dedalus. Dedalus is explicitly the fictional extension of Joyce. In James Joyce, the extension of his own magnetism is not limited to *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The problem of self-portraiture was not just an artistic problem Joyce faced in his work, but it was the central problem, as in Roberto Bolano. Robert Scholes, in his essay, *In Search of James Joyce*, observes,

Looking at James's works as a whole it appears as if he needed an image of himself in every work as a way of verifying its reality, as a measuring gauge for the validity of his other portraits, real and imaginary.

(Scholes, 103)

Representing writers own figure has its pros and cons. It is an equally dangerous affair.

The real danger for a novelist of having an alter ego in your novel is that he or she is likely to be bland, blank and uncharacterized. A character is unlikely to take an independent, surprising life if only a vehicle of the author's views. A good example would be Nicholas Jenkin's in Anthony Powell's twelve-novel sequence *A Dance to the Music of Time*. He may be a necessary figure around whom a large number of characters, observed over almost half a century, cohere. But in order to allow us to view what Powell wants us to see, he can be permitted no insight or opinion that is not the author's own. He is another protagonist of a novel who himself becomes a novelist.

(Muller, 101)

Roberto Bolano – the Chilean writer who came into fame with the novels published after his early death – created a Bolanian space where his life is overtly represented and his dreams are widely announced. Finding a superior alter ego than Bolano's in the post-world war literature is indeed a difficult task. Arturo Belano is too close and too far from the writer, making the bio-critical problem of whether the writer forms the work or the work forms the writer even difficult to solve.

Like many other alter egos, Belano narrates the story very rarely but the story revolves around him and it is even harder to visualize him as the protagonist with the works often following a surprising plot-centric, crime-centric, sex-centric narration technique. Neither the character nor the writer has an entity beyond the crime-struck plot they live in.

However, in the chaotic world of poets created by the writer, Arturo Belano has a significant role, who puts an end to the Boom movement through uncanny, surprising narrative experiments that run around a large group of vagabond poets who travel from poverty to drugs and drugs to anarchism with a dream to create an equally disturbing new literary movement that will – they dream – encrypt their name in the world of letters forever.

The writer – Roberto Bolano -- and the character – Arturo Belano -- live with the same dream and they have the same manifesto. Life written large everywhere and death looms large, again for both of them. However, the character is luckier to have it real earlier than the writer who had to wait till the early 20th century to see it real, despite announcing as early as in 1976.

In 1976, Roberto Bolano – then a twenty-three-year-old – had a revolutionary proclamation, which had made no instant impact on the world of letters. He, in front of Libreria Gandhi – read a manifesto asking his fellow poets to give up everything for poems and hit the road. The true poet, he said, should abandon the coffee house and take the part of 'the sharp shooters, the lonesome cowboys... the spat-upon supermarket shoppers in the massive individual collective disjunctive – the cunning, the lonely, the unnoticed and despised'.

It is not sure whether his fellow writers followed what he said. But, his alter ego – Arturo Belano—did exactly what he proclaimed and through the later literary success – *The Savage Detectives* – in which Arturo Belano along with compatriot writer Ulises Lima announces a new literary movement, called the visceral realism – a literary form of infrarealism which had already made its roots deep in painting. After this manifesto –titled *Live it All Again*, he has lived next

two decades by doing numerous jobs and writing at night. In 1998, with the publication of *The Savage Detectives*, Roberto Bolano had finally eclipsed, at least partially, the juggernaut generation of Latin American literature, the famed "Latin American Boom" titans like Carlos Fuentes, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Gabriel García Márquez, all of whom were born in the 1920s and 1930s.

The novel features around a group of failed and lost poets who dream and live for visceral realism and they discuss in detail about various writers, style of writing throughout the novel and hence making the novel a critical analysis of the movement as well as a major work under the movement. The movement favours action rather than writing, or if there is writing, it is to chronicle a level of libertinism that probably goes beyond mere realism. Rooted in realism, the visceral realist movement has deep political and social undertones.

In the novel Rafael Barrios, a fellow writer of Arturo Belano, defines Visceral Realism after Belano and Lima – two founders of the movement -- left Latin America:

Automatic writing, exquisite corpses, solo performances with no spectators, *contraintes*, two-handed writing, three-handed writing, masturbatory writing (one wrote with the right hand and masturbated with the left or vice versa if we were left-handed), madrigals, poems novels, sonnets always ending with the same words, outrageous diaries, mail-poetry, projective verse, conversational poetry, anti-poetry, Brazilian concrete poetry (written in Portuguese cribbed from the dictionary), poems in hard-boiled prose (detective stories told with great economy, the last verse revealing the solution or not) parables, fables, theatre of the absurd, pop art, haikus, epigrams (actually imitations of or variations on Catullus, desperado poetry, Georgian poetry, poetry of experience, beat poetry, apocryphal poems by bpNichol, John Giorno, John Cage (*A Year from Monday*), electric poetry, bloody poetry, lettrist poetry, pornographic poetry, (heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual

with no relation to the poet's personal preference), apocryphal poems by the Colombian Nadistas, Peruvian Horazerianos, Uruguayan Cataleptics, Ecuadorian Tzantzicos, Brazilian cannibals, No theatre of the proletariat....

(SD, 196)

For the visceral realist in the novel, it is more a life style than writing style and the novel through its fake characters and real-life characters underline the manifesto of the new movement. Majority of its characters are dropped out of school for reading, writing and co-living a life that is struck by sex and drugs. The novel defines the living style...

The next day I stopped going to classes and I spent time having these endless conversations with the visceral realists, who back then were still more or less normal, more or less, sick kids and we were not calling themselves visceral realists

(SD, 162)

In novel, like in life, it was the fantasies of Arturo Belano, the alter ego of Roberto Bolano, who moved to Mexico City along with his family and who wrote masochistically, as he later put it, and took a sadistic pleasure in his reading. Many critics opine that these were the automatic result of the developments of adolescence darkened by dyslexia, chronic insomnia and problems of sexual nature. While these developmental issues that paved for the style of living of the movement inside the work, it was the turmoil and political disappointments that created the plot. By the time the movement was floated in hypothesis by the novelist, the Cuban revolution had ended in repression and misery; the Mexican PRI, a revolutionary body-turned ruling party, had been predominantly discredited by the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre of students in Mexico City; the guerrilla movements in Guatemala, Nicaragua, Columbia, and Peru had failed, leading to vicious leftist infighting. Nevertheless, these political setbacks had never stopped writers from joining revolutions. In *The Savage Detectives*, Bolano paints a bitterly funny picture of the aftermath of revolution in another Central American country. It was nothing but his life that made him write this.

Bolano and his close friend and Chilean writer Mario Santiago lived to read poetry and never accepted poetry as a full time career, despite living full time on the ecstasies of writing poetry. For them, avoiding poetry as a career was in fact a way to live in poetry. In a bid to install the movement, he had travelled in each nook and crannies of Bohemian Mexico City with Santiago and the writer remembers a hoarding that demands Bolano to "Go back to Santiago, and take Santiago with you" (First Santiago refers to Chilean city while the second to Mario Santiago). This indicates that the movement has an impact during its transformation age itself. During his stay at Barcelona in 1998, Bolano writes to Santiago:

The stretch we travelled together is already history in some sense, and it endures. I mean: I suspect, sense, that it's still alive, in the dark but alive and still defiant – who would have thought. Well, not to get carried away. I am writing a novel in which you're called Ulises Lima. The title of the novel is *The Savage Detectives*.

(SD, 584)

He refers to the Visceral movement, which he feels still there in the air, which even then had made little impact on Latin American Literary circle. He was always impatient on any discussions on exile screaming he did not believe in exile, especially not when the word exile is set beside the word literature. Albeit, exile and travel hold the major part of his writing. And, he always conscious of being a foreigner everywhere he went, beginning with Chile. This political and geographical turmoil of the post-cold war set the undertone of Visceral movement.

For the group of writers in the movement, life is after all, nothing but a platform to perform all anarchism at its extremes. The poets of the genre are well depicted in the novel in a part where the novelist talks about another poet, Catalina O Hara...

I know her little after she had separated from her husband and all poets were dying to fuck her.

(SD 162)

The nomadic nature of the poets of the genre is depicted clearly in an area where Arturo Belano is described by Joaquin Font.

...Belano knew how to swim with the sharks much better than Lima did, no doubt about that. Much better than I did. He came across better, he know how to handle things, he was more disciplined, he could pretend more convincingly.

(SD 165)

The Savage Detectives also put forth a style of 'writing' as well'-- Ulises Lima writes on the margins of the book he stole and every scrap paper while Belano write on notebook.' As in real life Bolano, the movement is full of book thieves who love to read as living. And there is no shortage of visceral realist as the writer brings in a busfull of visceral realists' to depict the influence that the movement made on the literary circle in the novel and during a journey Belano was sitting with a pregnant poet – Xochitl -- while her husband sitting with Ulises Lima. And he got all the attention,' says the novel pointing to the attention the writer got from all corners.

The Visceral movement has been set on a plot that was typical to the nature of the movement, which many critics named the Bolanian Universe - the geography of Bolanian novels- which is rightly described as 'the unknown universe'. It captures this unpolished, vagabond, and criminally seductive world through a group of anarchist, exiled poets who want to establish a new Visceral realistic movement. His works are captivated for depicting many day-to-day realities of the Latin American landscape such as guilt-ridden old priests, murderous fascist airman, women trapped in a bathroom amidst civil movement, generations of lost poets and unabated crimes that leave hundreds of dead bodies of women on the Mexican border, etc.

The Savage Detectives depicts the nature of this geography by picturing Arturo Belano through the eyes of Auxilio Lacouture, who called herself 'the mother of all Mexican poetry'.

I know all the poets and all the poets know me. I met Arturo Belano when he was 16 years old and he was a shy boy who did

know how to drink"... ... On his come back to Mexico, he started to smoke marijuvana, still he was as nice as ever.

(SD 179)

For Bolano, the geographical space is a slice of the tensions of the present and optimisms of future. A Chilean by birth and Mexican by residence, Bolano has a deep-rooted liking to Mexico,

...A city that at some points in its history was a kind of heaven and today is a kind of hell, but not just any hell – the special hell of the Mark brothers, the hell of Guy Debord, the hell of Sam Peckinpay, or in the other word, the most singular kind of hell.

(Between Parentheses, 40)

And, this Mexico, with its drug smugglers, murders and increasing number of poets has set the geography of Bolanian Universe – a universe of 'mad artists, mad writers, mad poets, mad professors, mad murderers, mad cops and mad prisoners.'

And this generation detach themselves from the yester generation as typically pictured in the novel saying that Arturo Belano's sister complaining to him that he never read his mother's letter and he always offer that just hang up there, i would come and settle it, which hardly takes place.

CONCLUSION

With a life-size alter ego that span across a series of novels and novellas, Roberto Bolano has paved way for the inception of a single-author literary movement – Visceral realism. A literary movement created around the life of a group of vagabond, anarchist writers who travel with gun at one hand pen at the other. *The Savage Detectives* talks in details about the dream of the writer to create a new literary movement that put forward a new life style rather than a literary/writing style. In the manifesto of the movement that the writer had proclaimed during the 70s, he proclaimed the fellow writers to shed off the comfort and hit the road. His characters have done this and hit the road and thus Robert Bolano – through his alter ego -- has succeeded in creating a literary movement through a novel about the same literary movement. This way, the novelist, the character and the work created a new history of creating a

movement with fake writers who live the lives fitting to the movement.

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