

CONTENT AND CONTEXT IN SPANISH AMERICAN FICTION: A
MARXIST PERSPECTIVE

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Letter of Recommendation

We certify that this dissertation entitled "Content and Context in Spanish American Fiction: A Marxist Perspective" was presented by Bam Dev Adhikari under our guidance. We hereby recommend this dissertation for final examinations by the Research Committee of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University, in fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English.

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APPROVAL LETTER

It is approved that this dissertation entitled **CONTENT AND CONTEXT IN SPANISH AMERICAN FICTION: A MARXIST PERSPECTIVE** by Bam Dev Adhikari under the supervision of Prof. Shreedhar Gautam and co-supervision of Prof. Krishna Chandra Sharma has maintained both the scope and intensity of the research of this level.

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation entitled "Content and Context in Spanish American Fiction: A Marxist Perspective" submitted to the Office of the Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University, is an entirely original work of my own and I have made due acknowledgments to all ideas and information borrowed from different sources in the course of writing this dissertation. The results presented in this dissertation have not been presented anywhere else for the award of any degree or for any other reasons. No part of the content of this dissertation has ever been published in any form before. I shall be solely responsible if any evidence is found against my declaration.

Bam Dev Adhikari

Date: -----

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Abstract

This study examines three representative Spanish American novels, Mario Vargas Llosa's *The Green House*, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits* written respectively in Peru, Colombia and Chile, all being written in the second half of the twentieth century. The first two texts belong to the Boom of Spanish American fiction of the 1960s and Allende's novel, though written a few years later, also carries the spirit of the Boom. The Boom in Latin American fiction came in a context when the continent was divided into hope and despair, hope surged by the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and despair because of military takeovers and civil-military conflicts in many Spanish American countries. Allende's novel came as the reaction of Chilean president and socialist leader Salvador Allende's murder and 1973 Pinochet coup. Further, the novels by the Boom authors were translated into different languages and sold internationally in millions of copies in a period when the tradition of reading novel had dwindled drastically and some critics/scholars were even thinking about the 'death of the novel.' The Boom not only revived the tradition of reading novels but also made the scholars and researchers think about the content and context of these novels to find the reason behind their popularity. The international audience read these texts to understand the social political context of Spanish American countries in the post 1959 era.

The Boom was an experiment in both form and content of the novels. The novelists like Julio Cortazar (Argentina), Carlos Fuentes (Mexico), Mario Vargas Llosa (Peru) and Gabriel Garcia Marquez (Colombia) came up with innovative form and content in their novels. Llosa used kaleidoscopic form, very much like the style of

cinematography and Marquez and Allende used magical realism, invented in Europe and popularized by Spanish American writers. As the content of the novel, these novelists have dealt with issues of marginalized people, women in abuse and exploitation, civil-military conflicts and disturbance of foreigners in state administration in the context of their own countries and continent. In other ways, the writers have dealt with social criticism as the content of their novels. These are the issues that are raised by Marxist thinkers and scholars while dealing with the problems of a particular country/region. Further, these three writers studied in this research had an affiliation with Marxist/socialist leaders in Spanish America. Marquez was a close ally of Fidel Castro, Llosa had established solidarity with Castro administration and Allende was Marxist journalist and a niece to Salvador Allende, Chilean socialist president (1970-73). These facts also incited the researcher to critique the texts from Marxist perspective.

As these novelists have presented the realities of Spanish America in general and the realities of their own countries in particular as contents of their novels, and they have chosen the forms of their novels deliberately, the researcher becomes inquisitive to know the relationship between the content and context and form and content of these novels. While talking about the relationship between the content and the context and between form and content, the researcher wants to know how the forms these novels deliver the contents to the reader, how the contents shape the form of the novels, how they explore the historical inner reality of Spanish America, how the novelists have used the forms of the novels to provide social criticism, to express their yearnings for identity and cultural emancipation and what kind of model good governance they suggest for Spanish American countries.

To find the answers to the questions raised above, this research project analyzes these texts from Marxist perspective with special attention to the context, form and content. Theoretical support has been taken from the writings of Marx and Engels, Lenin, Mao, Leon Trotsky, Georg Lukacs, Raymond Williams, Fredrick Jameson, Terry Eagleton and others. Marxist thinkers pay credit to Hegel for the concept of history, art and literature and Hegel's famous claim "content determines the form" has been endorsed by Marxist critics while giving their views on form and content. The analysis of Marxist views on art and literature (both form and content) helps narrow down Marxist concept of literature in three points.

1. Both form and content of a literary work are interrelated to each other, the form is not a container of the content.
2. The content of a (literary) work determines the form.
3. Art/literature is dialectically related to the material condition of the context in which the text is produced.

The analysis of the novels shows that all three novelists have offered the critique of existing social/political/economic condition and they have stood for the revolutionary change in the Spanish American continent. Written in complex narrative form mixing stream of consciousness, third person and kaleidoscopic narration, *The Green House* makes advocacy for the right of the indigenous people of the Amazonian hinterlands and gives a strong critique of the capitalistic economic and political system. The elite whites exploit the indigenous Indians by misusing government institutions like the military, Church and local government. The superstructure of Peru, the institutions like church, army and other government agencies work as the agents for the suffering and exploitation

of women. These women sell their bodies in the brothels and help the businessmen earn surplus money. Llosa gives a message in the novel that prostitution is the byproduct of capitalism and as long as this system remains effective, women will not get their liberation. By critiquing social/ political/ economic corruption, Llosa expresses his yearning for social justice and order in Peru.

One Hundred Years of Solitude is regarded as a classic example of Magical Realism, in which the limits of reality and fantasy fade away quite naturally. In magical realist narration, the whole novel narrates an allegorical tale of Spanish America, how the continent was settled, advanced and spoiled by capitalism and imperialism. Eden like Macondo, the fictitious place of the novel, grows slowly towards modernization and it attracts people from outside. Macondo adopts the capitalistic mode of the economic system from the beginning of its modernization endeavors. Commercial and Industrial activities assisted by science and technology make Macondo a prosperous town. Its prosperity prepares the ground for foreign influence and an American company starts commercial agriculture reducing the local inhabitants to agricultural proletariats. The foreigners squeeze Macondo's resources dry, earn surplus money by appropriating the local people's labor and create a big gap between the owners and workers. The class struggle, the confrontation between the owners and workers ultimately leads Macondo towards its apocalypse. The apocalypse of Macondo allegorically refers to the apocalypse of white domination and local elite imperialist alliance in Spanish America. Finally, Marquez ends the novel with the possibility of regeneration, regeneration in a different form, not in the same form of politics and economy.

In magical realist narration, *The House of the Spirits* recounts the history of the socialist movement in Chile though the novelist never discloses the name of the country in the novel. Giving a slight feminist twist to magical realism, the novel records the events of Chile from the first quarter of the twentieth century to the 1970s. As a niece to Chile's socialist leader and 28th president Salvador Allende, Isabel Allende uses the Chilean coup and the murder of Salvador Allende as the central event of the novel. Narrating the history of the communist/socialist movement in Chile from the early 20th century, Allende makes a central argumentation on whether socialism flourishes through democratically held elections or through armed revolution. In this discussion, Allende discredits the first option and makes her stance clear with a message that there is only one option of socialism in Chile, the armed revolution. This option is yet to be practiced and, she expresses her hope that social justice may prevail in the country with the arrival of socialism only through the armed revolution.

All these three novelists have offered social criticism by writing in favor of poor, marginalized and subordinated people. By using innovative form and content, these novelists in the generation of post-Cuban revolution are clear in their message that the elite rule is not suitable for the continent; that the military is a strong barrier of good governance and that foreign intervention is never favorable for any country of the continent. Indirectly they suggest that Spanish America be ruled by civilians without the intervention of military and foreign agencies. In other words, they make advocacy that only Cuban model of socialism can bring social justice in the Americas.

In the context of Post Cuban Revolution and post Chilean coup, the novelists have effectively delivered the content by choosing appropriate forms for their novels Marxist

concept 'the content determines the form' truly applies to all these three novels. By using kaleidoscope, Llosa has been able to locate the places of abuse and exploitations as if he is showing these places through the lenses of a movie camera and with the stream of consciousness, he shows the native Indians who can only feel but cannot express directly how they are being exploited. Marquez has used magical realism as an epic style for his epic like content, the origin, development and apocalypse of white Spanish America. In the same way, using magical realism with a feminist twist, Allende has associated the liberation of women with the liberation of the nation itself.

The research not only shows form content relationship in a particular context, it also indicates that we can understand about political/economic/social situation of a place by studying its intellectual productions. The writers express their criticism on social/political/economic condition and their countries with their imaginative works, novels. The content-context dichotomy can be applied to study other works by other writers to see how they have related the form and content of their imaginative works with socio-political realities of their own countries. These three novels are masterpieces of three writers and they can be studied from many perspectives. New historicism can be a good tool to make research in these three novels because all these novels are related to the history of Spanish American countries. Ecological/ environmental research can be done on *The Green House* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* because the former portrays the scenes of rubber collection in the rainforest of the Amazon and the latter talks about how uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources invites the apocalypse of Macondo. Similarly, ethnographic research seems plausible in *The Green House* as it records the activities of different tribal groups of Amazonia. *One Hundred Years of*

Solitude can be a model novel for mythical research. *The House of the Spirits* is a novel suitable for Marxist/feminist research because the novel is dominated by four women of four generations. The tool, analysis of form and content, used in this research can be applied with other novels from other countries to explore how the social-political realities of a certain country are depicted in its literature.

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