

Dictatorship Novel

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The long series of novels about Latin American dictators is initiated by the Spanish writer Ramon María del Valle-Inclán's

1926 novel *Tirano Banderas* (*The Tyrant*), about an imaginary dictator named Santos Banderas, whose country is an amalgam of various parts of Latin America. However, some claim Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's 1845 biography of Juan Facundo Quiroga (1788–1835), *Facundo: Civilizacion y barbarie* (*Facundo: Civilization and Barbarism*), as the most important Latin American antecedent. The next major texts of the subgenre are the hallucinatory *El señor Presidente* (1946, *The President*) by the Guatemalan Miguel Angel Asturias, based on the life of Manuel Estrada Cabrera (1857–1924), and *El gran Burundun-Burundá ha muerto* (1952, *The Great Burundun-Burundá is Dead*) by the Colombian Jorge Zalamea. However, the most important group of novels is a trio from the 1970s: *Yo el Supremo* (1974, *I the Supreme*) by the Paraguayan Augusto Roa Bastos, *El recurso del método* (1975, *Reasons of State*) by the Cuban Alejo Carpentier, and *El otoño del patriarca* (1975, *The Autumn of the Patriarch*) by the Colombian Gabriel García Márquez. As Roberto González Echevarría suggests, the exploration of total power in these three texts is also an exploration of the possibilities of the totalizing novel, in which a strange identification takes hold between the novelist and his subject. This marked the end of the triumphant period of the Latin American "Boom" novel of the 1960s.

Of the three texts, *Yo el Supremo* is, as Gerald Martin notes, the most radical, both in terms of its literary project and in its politics. A searing critique of Latin American history since independence, the novel is narrated largely by the Paraguayan dictator José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia (1766–1840), mostly after his death. It looks back at his twenty-six years in power as Supreme Dictator of Paraguay as well as forward at the century and a half to come. Roa Bastos makes abundant use of historical sources, many transcribed

almost verbatim, though often mischievously rewritten or recast. Responding to an invitation in "Dr. Francia" (1841), an essay by the British writer Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881), Roa Bastos re-creates the Paraguayan dictator in all of his complexity as a Jacobin (see BRITISH ISLES 19TH C.), a son of the Enlightenment, an intellectual who distrusts the people he has chosen to guide, and in a bizarre flash forward, as a Leninist or Maoist popular leader. Finally, the narrative shifts to the dictator's dog Sultán, who delivers a final devastating critique of Francia's alienation from his people. Roa Bastos's novel is the most radical of the dictatorship novels because it hews closest to the historical documents associated with a real dictator, yet at the same time manages to be many-voiced, allowing other subjects of that history to be heard.

Other dictatorship novels are sometimes set on a local, rather than national, scale. Examples include Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (1955), set during the Mexican Revolution (1910–20) and the Cristero War (1926–29), and the much earlier *Doña Bárbara* (1929) by the Venezuelan Romulo Gallegos. A recent example of the subgenre is Mario Vargas Llosa's *La fiesta del chivo* (2000, *The Feast of the Goat*), in which the Peruvian novelist re-creates the days leading up to the assassination of the Dominican dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo (1891–1961).

SEE ALSO: Genre Theory, National Literature, Regional Novel.

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Diegesis *see* Narrator; Story/Discourse
Direct Discourse *see* Discourse