EMBEDDED DIALOGUE IN EL OTOÑO DEL PATRIARCA

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 $m{E}$ l 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. 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, etc. 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 tiene[n] precedentes en la literatura latinoamericana y ni siquiera en la obra del autor..." In reality, this last assertion must be taken with a grain of salt, for, while the second part is quite true, the first statement is not, since the stylistic devices found in El otoño del patriarca do indeed appear in other current Latin American novels, to a greater or lesser extent depending on the work. The claims of uniqueness seem to stem from the natural impulse to identify the author with his masterwork Cien años de soledad and to regard any stylistic deviations from the patterns of this novel to be total innovations. Regardless of the predecessors for the stylistic devices used by García Márquez, it is clear that in El otoño del patriarca, these textual manipulations have been woven together to create a fabric which, even if not totally unique to Latin American fiction, certainly represents a milestone in the novela de lenguaje, as Fuentes has described the recent Latin American narrative.4

El otoño del patriarca can be studied from a number of different perspectives, and future investigations will undoubtedly touch on widely divergent points. The present note will, therefore, be confined to a single aspect of the text, namely an analysis of certain stylistic ventures which set this novel apart from García Márquez' earlier works; in particular, attention will be directed toward the rapid change of narrative perspective, a technique which the publisher's note rather inadequately describes as "la multiplicidad de puntos de vista al contexto del monólogo." The analysis will be presented within the framework of general semiotics, for it is in fact the mutation of the signifying function, rather than the concrete verbal choices, which accounts for the singular nature of García Márquez' stylistic achievement.

The most striking stylistic feature of the novel in question is the rapid switching, abruptly and in the middle of a phrase, between the narrator and a speech style evidently indicating the direct speech of another character. An early example of this technique is: ...era la suerte de contar con los servicios íntegros y la lealtad de perro de Patricio Aragonés, su doble perfecto, que había sido encontrado sin que nadie lo buscara cuando le vinieron con la novedad mi general de que una falsa carroza presidencial andaba por pueblos..." (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 "mi 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 acaricia el rostro, cómo había sido, la lleva del hombro hacia la casa, no llores sonsita."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. Moreoever, 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, to indicate that another narrative consciousness has taken over. An exemplary fragment occurs during a description of the General's propensity for harboring deposed 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 céntimo, y entonces me llevó del brazo frente a la ventana del mar, me ayudó a dolerme 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 thirdperson 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 Aragonés: "a él no le importaba la insolencia sino la ingratitud de Patricio Aragonés 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 on-going conversation with Patricio Aragonés 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 mítica, con la mano crispada en la cacha del machete, y estaba como fascinado por la visión del enemigo mortal que apareció en el pescante 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 solo, con la piel amarillenta del hí

gado malo... así que me dispuse a morir sin resistir porque le pareció inútil contrariar a un anciano que venía de tan lejos sin más razones ni más méritos que el apetito bárbaro de mandar. (p. 63)

This passage represents perhaps the greatest degree of textual complexity achieved in the narrative, for at least four interrelated levels of discourse may be isolated, each alternating with the others in a vertiginous succession. The passage begins with the voice of the omniscient narrator, followed, presumably, by the voice of the old General and someone addressing him, followed again by the General and finally with the thoughts of Saturno Santos. Each transition to the following stage is signaled only implicitly, generally by pronominal reference and verbal forms, but occasionally only by contextual clues.

At times, the narrator himself enters the fabric of the text as an individual persona, through the use of first-person



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pronouns. This entry is normally accomplished by means of the plural pronoun nosotros, beginning with the second sentence of the novel: "Sólo entonces nos atrevimos a entrar..." At other points, however, a first-person singular reference appears, apparently referring to the narrator, in the absence of textual clues which would indicate the interior monologue or speech of another character. Thus at one point it even appears that the narrator is a woman: "se solazaba la luz del aciago martes de agosto entre las joyas nuevas de los platanales del patio y el cuerpo del venado joven que mi marido Poncio Daza había cazado al amanecer y lo puso a desangrar..." (p. 99). At another point the narration is taken over briefly by a young man who comes to see the General: "pudo distinguirlo a él sentado en la poltrona giratoria... y sólo cuando me convencí de la verdad increíble de que aquel anciano herrumbroso era el mismo ídolo de nuestra niñez, sólo entonces entró en el despacho... y él me estrechó la mano... y le prestó atención asombrada..." (p. 107). The textual presence of the third-person narrator alternates, in this instance, with the inner voice of the young man himself, as he stands incredulous before the decrepit old dictator. Towards the end of the novel, the narrative voice briefly becomes that of a schoolgirl, toward whom the by now wasted and lecherous General has been making advances.

The preceding examples could be multiplied at will, to encompass nearly the entire text itself, since far from being an isolated and sporadically used stylistic maneuver, the intersection of narrative personalities is the dominant literary technique characterizing the novel, a technique of which only a few salient examples have been reproduced above. In reading El otoño del patriarca, one is led through a constantly shifting verbal maze, shimmering with voices at times unidentified, and at times remaining for only a fraction of a phrase, to be replaced by other voices representing a displaced center of consciousness which wanders continually throughout the spectrum of individual personalities contained in the narrative. It is this extreme use of the technique of multiple and at times nearly simultaneous points of view, rather than a totally original invention, that allows one to study García Márquez' last novel as a unique creation which is nonetheless composed of tried and tested constituent parts.

In order to relate the narrative techniques in *El otoño del patriarca* to a more general interpretation of the novel, it will first be necessary to digress momentarily and discuss some matters from the field of general semiotics. Fundamental to the case at hand is the wellestablished dichotomy between the

syntagm and the paradigm, a dichotomy which characterizes not only linguistics (and hence textual theory) but also any signifying system, regardless of the concrete nature of the signifying elements. The paradigm is best construed as the underlying system, representing at once the maximal set of simultaneous choices available at any given point in the evolution of a corpus of data, be it literary text, spoken fragment or some other expanse of signification. Related elements in a paradigm are united through relations of simultaneity, that is, for each temporally ordered slot that is chosen, one and only one member of the paradigm normally appears, the other members remaining as potential alternates, and maintaining an implicit state of dynamic tension between the chosen member and the other, simultaneously available elements to which it is opposed via the paradigm. This is, in fact, the essence of metaphor.

The syntagm represents the corresponding temporal axis, in other words, the concrete realization of a particular expanse of discourse, in which a paradigmatic choice has already been made for each temporally ordered slot. A syntagm corresponds to a corpus of generated data, which may be a spoken utterance, a written text, or some other combination of signs, in which each sign or slot represents the result of a specific choice from among the simultaneously available paradigmatic alternatives. The syntagm is thus represented as a relation of successivity, for each element on the syntagmatic plane is related to other elements by virtue of temporal juxtaposition, and not necessarily through any equivalence of form or structure, as is the case with paradigmatically related elements. Syntagmatic relations, therefore, generate metonymic structures.6

In normal discourse, the paradigm and the syntagm remain as mutually exclusive categories across an expanse of text; that is, for each slot of the syntagm, one and only one choice from the paradigm is made, to the complete exclusion of the others. It is quite possible, however, for the paradigm to in a sense "overlap" onto the syntagmatic flow, by presenting more than a single variant corresponding to a single slot or position in the linearly ordered syntagm. Trivial examples of this possibility include such techniques as pun and rhyme, where elements are spatially juxtaposed precisely in view of their paradigmatic relatedness, by means of form, meaning, or both.7 In the case of literature, however, the overlapping of the paradigm onto the syntagm may be used with much more far-reaching consequences, for, rather than being restricted to single morphemes or words. as in the cases mentioned above, paradigmatic overlapping may involve the

juxtaposition of entire narrative elements, whose size and scope may far exceed the bounds of a single word, or even sentence. The results obtainable by such textual manipulations exhibit an easily imagined diversity, and it is not difficult to find examples of paradigmatic overlapping and interpenetration in many recent Latin American novels,8 with a wide array of ensuing results. Taken in isolation, however, the overlapping of the paradigm onto the syntagm 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 patriarca, 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 patriarca, 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 marrative perspectives serves to create a "nevel 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,9 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. 10 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.11 On the other hand, the reverse possibility, the coupling of several distinct signifiers with a single signified may also be isolated in a nontrivial fashion in literary texts.¹² 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 streamof-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 punctuational indication. thus permitting the narrative to flow smoothly both visually and verbally.

It is significant that the most centrally-located elements in El otoño del patriarca remain without a name; the legendary General, who is occasionally named through his double, Patricio Aragonés, is nonetheless never explicitly named in the text, except at the end, where he meets Death, who addresses him as Nicanor, 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 nomenclature 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 highlands-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 refusing to identify by name the protagonist of the novel, García Márquez leads us to the feeling that the name is unimportant, for the General is a part of everyone 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 indications of his existence are the presidential 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 subjects of his realm; that as well as Patricio Aragonés, the General is in fact the sum total of the individuals of which the country is comprised; that the General, like God himself, is within rather than without, each and every person affected by his existence. Such an interpretation is supported by the unique use of paradigmatic overlapping and split signifiers which is to be found in the novel, for by constantly interchanging the narrative roles, to successively include the General, certain of his officials, his lovers, and a number of nondescript and anonymous citizens, the author demonstrates not only the functional interchangability 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 preempt the narrator's role, and the inability 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 metaphorically, awaits mankind in general, and dictators in particular.

NOTES

¹In an interview reported in *Hispania*, 57 (1974), 592; qualified in a later interview (*Hispania*, 58 [1975], 553).

²All citations are from the edition by Editorial Sudamericana, Buenos Aires, 1975.

³In 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.

⁴Carlos Fuentes, La nueva novela hispanoamericana (México: Joaquín Mortiz, 1969).

⁵Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1969, p. 17.

6These facets of the syntagm and the paradigm have been expounded by Roman Jakobson. See R. Jakobson & M. Halle, Fundamentals of Language (The Hague: Mouton, 1956), pp. 58-81; R. Jakobson, Studies on Child Language and Aphasia (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), pp. 49-94.

⁷See, for example, Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, trans. A. Lavers & C. Smith (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), pp. 86-88, for a discussion of the interpretation of the paradigm and the syntagm.

8Cf. for example J. Lipski, "Paradigmatic Overlapping in Tres Tristes Tigres," Dispositio, 1 (1976); "Donoso's Obscene Bird: Novel and Anti-novel" to appear in the Latin American Literary Review.

9Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, trans. W. Baskin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959).

10This dictum is clearly stated, for example, by

I. A. Richards and C. K. Ogden, *The Meaning of Meaning* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1923), p. 88.

11 Some examples have been given, within a semiotic framework, in the works of Alfred Jarry. See Michel Arrivé, Les Langages de Jarry (Paris: Klincksieck, 1972); "Structuration et destruction du signe dans quelques textes de Jarry," in Essais de Sémiotique Poétique, ed. A. J. Greimas (Paris: Larousse, 1972), pp. 64-79.

12Trivially, 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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