

An Analysis of Characters in Esteban Echeverr á's Novel: The Slaughter House

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Abstract: The Slaughter House is a masterpiece by the Argentine writer Esteban Echeverr á, the first truly realistic short story in Latin American history, and occupies an important place in the history of Latin American literature. Through the story of The Slaughter House, the writer creates several typical characters, exposing the persecution of the federalists and the total control of the poor people by the Argentine dictator Rosas, and reflecting the author's dissatisfaction and criticism of the Rosas regime. This article analyses the characters and explores the symbolic meaning of the work in order to better understand its content and value.

1. Introduction

The Slaughter House, one of the most outstanding classics of Latin American literature, was written by Esteban Echeverr á during the iron rule of Juan Manuel de Rosas, the well-known Argentine dictator. In the work, the Argentine writer uses numerous metaphors and symbols to create many vivid characters in order to expose the shameless behavior of the Argentine military dictator Rosas, who colluded with the Church to brainwash the poor people, accustoming them to a life of poverty and blaming all the evils on the unitarians. The work also reflects the author's satire and dissatisfaction with the military dictatorship of Rosas and his high praise for the centralized progressives. By analyzing the characters, readers can discover the author's contrasting attitudes towards the two groups and get a glimpse of Argentine society in the 1830s.

2. Synopsis of the Novel

The story described a slaughterhouse during Lent when the church forbade the slaughter of cattle, which resulted in a shortage of meat in this place. In addition, because of the torrential rain, there was an inundation that lasted 15 days. All these misfortunes plunged the people into terrible misery. Faced with this poor situation, the Restorer had to give up his prohibition. Then, fifty bulls were sent to the slaughterhouse. In the noise and exclamation of the people, forty-nine bulls were slaughtered, but when slaughtering the last one, the bull escaped. To capture it, the roper untied the lasso, but instead of lassoing the horns, he killed a boy as if the lasso had been an axe blow. Later, the bull was caught and killed by Matasiete, a more brutal butcher. After the death of the bull, an Englishman was riding by on his horse without mourning for the deceased wife of the Restorer, and

thus, was identified as a unitarian. The butchers, who were federalists, stopped him and questioned him. The young man, defending his dignity, died before being tortured[1].

Generally, Echeverr á describes a very chaotic situation: rats running around and away from the slaughter; mastiffs thinking of taking meat from the man's hand; people present speaking very ugly words for the meat. Besides, the writer meticulously depicts the main characters through his excellent writing skills and vivid words, allowing readers to know one of the darkest periods in the history of Argentina.

3. Writing Background

No work can exist without its context, and an analysis of characters requires an understanding of the context of the literary work and of the author's life, which is why it is necessary to introduce the author's social life and the context of his work: the dictatorship of the Rosas. Argentina broke away from Spanish rule in 1810 through the May Revolution and has been building a nation of independence ever since. In 1819, a new constitution was adopted to establish a republic, and the conflict between the economic interests of the different regions of the country intensified between the two factions, the unitarians and the federalists. In 1835 Rosas forced the Legislative Assembly to grant him "unlimited powers", thus beginning a dictatorship that lasted more than 20 years. During his reign, he actively defended the interests of the great hacienda owners, suppressed resistance by force, collaborated with the Church to oppress and brainwash the poor people and made them comfortable with the status quo, and has been described by historians as "the most reactionary feudal oligarch, upper-class merchant and political representative of Catholic power in Argentina". The author, Esteban Echeverr á, studied in Europe in the 1820s and was deeply influenced by French Romanticism and his quest for democracy and progress. On his return to Argentina in the 1830s, Esteban Echeverr á joined forces with progressives to secretly organize the May Association against the rule of Rosas, for which he was persecuted and exiled to Uruguay, where he died of illness. His short story *The Slaughter House*, written between 1838 and 1840, was not published until 1871, twenty years after his death, because of the persecution of Rosas[2].

4. Analysis of Characters

4.1 Restorer

As one of the most important characters in *The Slaughter House*, Restorer is the person who dominates almost the whole society. Even the church is only a representative of him because the church often meddles in politics and aggravates the suffering of the people instead of alleviating it. In this story, the Restorer is not a human but a divine who influences the material and spiritual life of the people. As for the material life, it is obvious that it is the Restorer who does not allow people to eat meat, but the irony is that the Restorer himself has special permission from his illustriousness not to abstain from meat. It is worth mentioning that many people die from malnutrition. This sharp contrast shows the hypocrisy of the so-called powerful. Spiritual dominance is reflected in the posters pasted over the walls of the slaughterhouse: Long live the Federalists! Long live the Restorer and the Heroine Dona Encarnación Ecurra! Death to the savage Unitarians! They not only write them but also say them to give their unrestricted support to the Restorer. It can be said that people's respect for the Restorer becomes the norm of life. This is very dangerous because this kind of thinking prevents people from seeing the truth and they do not care about the truth and will only end in social chaos. If we relate this story to the time when the writer lived, it is very easy to find that the Restorer refers to Rosas. With the description of this character, Echeverr á shows us the

damage produced by the military government and criticizes that this government, together with the church, limits the development and freedom of the people.

4.2 Judge

The other symbol of power in *The Slaughter House* is the Judge, an important man because he is the leader of the butchers and exercises supreme power by a delegation of the Restorer. At the beginning of the story, there is a confrontation over the guts of the animals, but the riot is immediately put to rest when the "terrible judge" gives the order, which shows that the Judge is a very powerful and frightening presence in the slaughterhouse. But actually he is hypocritical, which can be seen from the change in his attitude during the contact with the young Englishman. When he confronts the living young man, what he wants to do is to torture him, so he orders the others to take the pants off and tie him down on the table. All the words and actions indicate that the Judge, along with his subordinates hates the young man like the marrow of a bone. But when he realizes that the young man is dead, he justifies his action by saying that they just want to have fun with him and that it is not necessary to take it too seriously. This is a pretext. As a representative of the judicial system, he was supposed to symbolize fairness and justice, but in reality he never takes into account the interests of the common people, muzzling those who protested and denying them the right to speak, and then resorting to violence and the indiscriminate killing of innocent people to defend the rule of the dictator, becoming a symbol of injustice and unfairness. This is how the author exposes the unjust judicial system of the 1830s in Argentina and criticizes Rosas for depriving the public of their right to free expression through force and justice, turning what should be a democratic and free Argentina into a monopoly of his voice.

4.3 Matasiete

Matasiete is an interesting name with two meanings. On the one hand, in Spanish, the word "matasiete" is used to describe a man prized for his bravery. And in the other hand, this name comprises two parts, "mata" and "siete", which represent "kill" and "seven" respectively, implying that this person is an experienced killer because "seven" is a symbol of God. But in *The Slaughter House*, Matasiete is also a negative character. He is the most courageous butcher, so other butchers also called him "the beheader of Unitarians". Meanwhile, he is a man of few words and much action. He never talks much about how brave he is, how dexterous he is on horseback, or how excellent his skills are at butchering, instead, he prefers acting. When the other butchers have no way to kill the bull, he hocks the bull with one sure thrust and sticks his huge dagger down to the hilt in the bull's neck, killing the bull without any difficulty. When the others pique him, he trotted away spurring his horse to meet the unitarian. It does look like he is a man of great courage, but by connecting his character's personality with the original meaning of his name, which is a man prized for bravery in Spanish, it seems that such bravery is merely his protective color to survive the darkness of the time. Maybe Matasiete's nature is not like that, it is a society that forces him to be this kind of person. Some people cannot say what they think, the only way to survive is to join the federalists and do what they think is right. Millions of Argentinian people may have no other way than to be federalists to live.

4.4 Bull and the Englishman

The reason why the bull and the Englishman are put together to analyze is that they are pretty similar because they have the spirit of rebellion. Given that It was strictly forbidden to bring bulls to the slaughterhouse, the bull's appearance is an exceptional occurrence. Unlike the young bulls who

do not dare to run away and are killed one after another, this bull escapes from the slaughterhouse without fear and through the streets of Buenos Aires, caught with eyes blazing and struggling, which shows his defiance, bravery, fearlessness. Echeverría may compare these bulls to new thoughts in South America which have different ideas and attitudes towards reality, some submitting, some rebelling, some ending with silence, and some ending after changing the society. As for the young man, from the point of view of the federalists, he is a unitary dog, a pack of cigarettes, and even the devil. But from the readers' point of view, he is a dashing and handsome young man, who happens to pass by the slaughterhouse. The difference between the two sentiments is the result of the Restorer's dominance. When the butchers discover the young man, the first thing they see is not the figure but the political opposition. What's more, with his elegant appearance and language in contrast to the animalistic savagery and vulgarity of those around him, the young man represents the progressive forces of the country, the persecuted but progressive Argentineans who never succumbed to the dictatorship. Actually, the young author, Echeverría, was one of those who, even after his forced exile in Uruguay in 1840, never gave up writing to expose and criticize the oppressive dictatorship of Rosas.

4.5 Negro women

Those Negro women are as incapable of thinking as savage animals "whose ugliness matched that of the harpies". always appearing alongside hawks, dogs and other animals, doing the most menial of tasks, snatching the entrails of animals at the right moment and denouncing those who secretly hide them. They also denounce those who secretly hide the butter. The black women in the author's writing are savage, inferior and uncultured people, reflecting the author's racist ideas, especially against black and mixed-race people. In the nineteenth century, when Rosas seized power in Buenos Aires he had the support of many poor people, most of them black, who were mostly employed by white families or businesses, and when Rosas came to power many of them became informers for the federal government in order to gain benefits. As a result, there was great distrust between whites (the unitarians) and blacks (the federalists) during the Rosas dictatorship. It is for this reason that Echeverría portrays the black women of the slaughterhouse as dishonest and brutal informers.

The slaughterhouse in this work is called "Matadero de la Convalecencia", a name full of irony.

5 Conclusion

"Convalecencia" means "sanatorium" in Spanish, a positive word for hope and health, but the slaughterhouse in this text is a place not only ugly on the outside but also full of blood and mud on the inside. The gloomy and terrifying backdrop is made up of snarling vicious dogs and circling vulture. It is ironic that the massacre takes place in a place that should be clean and bright, as is the case in Buenos Aires (Spanish for 'clean air'), a place that should be a paradise, but is filled with violence and assassinations and 'hellish scenes' due to the dictator's rule." Secondly, the location of the slaughterhouse in the work is unique, as it is located on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, on the border between the city, which represents civilization, and the countryside, which represents barbarism, and is supposed to embrace the advanced ideas of the city and become a place of civilization and enlightenment, yet what happens in the abattoir has nothing to do with the word civilization. Finally, this slaughterhouse is the embodiment of Buenos Aires under Rosas, where class is divided, judges are supreme, everything in the slaughterhouse is bloody and brutal. The executioners are mainly made up of poor people from the outskirts of the city and the ostracism, hatred and even killings of the centralist youths in the slaughterhouse represent Rosas' oppression and assassination of the Argentine progressives represented by Echeverría. This was a place where

civilization and barbarism coexisted, a microcosm of Argentine society under the Rosas dictatorship.

"From a distance, the view of the Slaughter House was now grotesque, full of animation. " This is the description of the slaughterhouse, likewise, in terms of the region of that time, in appearance, it is peaceful and all the people are united together, but if we look deep down, the truth is that all the people are in enormous suffering without knowing it. The murder that happened in the slaughterhouse is a microcosm of reality—although it was the people who consider these progressives as enemies, burying the possibility of development, there still were numerous people died for their belief, like the young unitarian.

In conclusion, *The Slaughter House*, like a painting of customs providing us with a vivid picture of Argentine society in the 1830s, reveals the numbness of thought and the poor life of those at the bottom of society and criticizes the cruelty of the government of the caudillo Rosas. Thus, because of its profound literary and historical value, it is highly considered in the literature of Argentinian as a masterpiece of Romanticism in Latin America.

References

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