

TRAUMA AND TESTIMONY IN MARIO VARGAS'S THE FEAST OF THE GOAT

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ABSTRACT

*This research paper studies the presence of trauma and testimony in *The Feast of the Goat* by Mario Vargas Llosa. Trauma begs for the representation of the unrepresentable and works against any coherent narrative representation of the self; while testimony means to testify, which is usually in a court of law; when a witness is asked, under oath, to give his/her testimony regarding a particular incident. Similarly, in literature, when a character tells the story of his/her misery or past circumstances in an autobiographical form; such a narration is termed as 'testimonial literature'. Vargas, in *The Feast of the Goat* relates the history of the Dominican Republic during the dictatorial regime of Trujillo. The goat had ruled the Republic for 30 years with an iron fist. Urania, the lead character of the novel, came back to her home country after spending thirty-five years of self-exile. Hers is a journey of trauma and testimony. She first of all confronted her aged father in a dialogic exchange about the various incidents that had traumatized her in her childhood. She also spoke to her aunt and cousins about her traumatic memory of her teens when she got raped by Trujillo. The novel also referred to the national trauma of the Dominican People during the Trujillo rule and the mayhem that was created after his death by his so called supported.*

Keywords: Trauma, Testimony, Feast, Trujillism.

INTRODUCTION

The Feast of the Goat is a classic example of a historical account of the tragedies of the Dominican Republic under the 30 year long dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo, and the fact that under his rule the Dominican people spent a

life of oppression. According to Vargas, the writer of the novel, the Feast of the Goat is based on real facts and that the characters used are mostly fictional. So, it means that the events were real and are presented as they historically accrued. This reminds one of the Oscar winning movie Titanic, which was also based on real facts regarding the sinking of the ship that was considered unsinkable. Except for the characters of Jack and Rose Dawson, the rest of the events in the movie were based on real historical facts. Similarly, we have the example of writers like Naseem Hijazi, who was also known for historical novels primarily based on Islamic history. Hence, the same is the case in the novel *The Feast of the Goat*. The character of Urania might be fictional but the events in the novel are based on historical facts.

Mario Vargas Llosa is a Peruvian novelist born in 1936. He was awarded Nobel Prize in Literature in 2010. Alongside Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Carlos Fuentes and Julio Cortazar, he is considered among major canons of Latin American boom. Mario Vargas Llosa married Julia Urquidi while studying at National University of San Marcos. While in mean time he was doing seven at a time to earn his living. In 1959 he received scholarship from Complutense University Madrid where he obtained a PhD. His literary career came to a breakthrough when he moved to Paris. After the publication of his first novel “*The Time of the Hero*”, he received a wide acclaim as a novelist. Throughout his life he remained as an active political activist and supported Cuba Revolution but soon became disenchanted of it. His political views moved from left towards right-wing liberalism. In the following years Mario continued to produce internationally acclaimed works of fiction and non-fiction including *Conversation in the Cathedral* (1969), *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter* (1977), *The War of the End of the World* (1981), *The Feast of the Goat* (2000), *The Bad Girl* (2008) and *The Dream of the Celt* (2012). Apart from his significant literary career, Vargas continued to involve himself in politics.

The novel narrative is being divided into three portions. All these three narratives go hand in hand along divided chapters. One narrative describes the novel’s protagonist Urania, who after 35 years visited her homeland Dominican Republic, another narrative concerns about historical based assassins involved in Trujillo’s killing an third portion mostly deals with the dictator Rafael Trujillo’s last days before his assassination. The narrative of the novel jumps back and forth from 1961 to 1996, with flashes from the past

to the earlier days of dictator's ruthless regime. Since this novel is a historical fiction, so most of its characters are based on facts while some characters like protagonist Urania are fictional. Hence Mario Vargas Llosa clarified in statement that, "I have respected the basic facts but I have changed and deformed many things in order to make the story more persuasive and I have not exaggerated".

The novel's first storyline concerns Urania, who after 35 years lands back on her homeland the Dominican Republic. This portion deals with her introspection and memory of her past which clearly indicates she is facing a trauma. She fled her country after being raped by Dictator Trujillo and after studying at Harvard University is now a successful lawyer. But her life is full of indignation a frustration due the traumatic past she endured before her flight to America. Now back at home she confronts her father who shamelessly offered her daughter in exchange for favors from Trujillo. She recounts the incidents faced by her and fellow countrymen during monstrous era of dictator.

The second storyline deals with a group of assassins who are waiting on the night of 30th May 1961 for the arrival of Trujillo on a highway. Every assassin has his own story; almost every one of them suffered at the hands of Trujillo and had some kind of trauma revolving their lives. Their accounts depict how Trujillo inflicted pains on his citizens by attacking their personal and family lives as well as inflicting their religious, political and ideological lives. These assassins are remorseful due to those injuries. Trujillo came between their friendship and their beliefs thus poisoning their peace to the extent of their survival so that decide to retaliate in order to avenge their loved ones by killing the Goat.

The third storyline concerns about the dictator Trujillo himself. The Dictator is wrathful about the failure of his sons for being unable to follow into his footsteps and for the fact that they were living a rather extravagant and lavish lifestyle in foreign countries leaving their father alone to run the country. The severe ties with the USA also haunt him. Although he always tried to please the Americans but his recent ruthless deeds and particularly his failed assassination of Venezuelan President Betancourt turned the gringos against him. He is also facing physical decline as his prostrate is failing him, leaving him to urinate in pants. This makes him so indignant and for his machismo mind it is a mark on his manhood. The novel ends with Urania's

testimony of her traumatic episode to her aunt and cousins.

This research paper follows a qualitative approach. The methodology of the study involves close reading of the text as well as scrutiny of the pertinent literature available in the form of books, articles, research papers etc. After highlighting trauma and testimony in the light of available literature, the researcher tries to prove their presence in the novel *The Feast of the Goat*.

The paper is divided into four sections. After the first section which is the introduction, the second section is about the literature review in which the researcher has tried to explain the importance of Trauma and Testimony and its use in literary writings. Section three is the discussion in which the researcher has tried to provide evidence of the effective use of trauma and testimony in the novel *the Feast of the Goat*. Section four provides a conclusion of the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Testimony and Trauma

Trauma begs for the representation of the un-representable and works against any coherent narrative representation of the self. Leigh Gilmore draws on this when he contends that another life writing style has been conceived out of the complex connection amid trauma and testimony which is called the limit case autobiography. These luminal memoirs obscure the limits among memoirs and fiction, memoirs and history, memoirs and lawful declaration, memoirs, and analysis, or memoirs and hypothesis' (Gilmore 14). They are the result of the Catch 22s coming about because of the clash due to the overlapping of the portrayal of oneself and trauma, a contention that obscures the differentiation among testimony and literature.

It was after the 1950s that doctors began to extend the possibility of trauma to the psychical harm realized by an amazing event that the subject couldn't assimilate in target terms. It was Charcot in 1887 who first associated it with the setbacks of railroad disasters and after that to the 'shell-shocked' warriors of World War I by Mott, Freud and Myers and the possibility of psychosomatic trauma came to open notice because of the endeavors made by Sigmund Freud, whose idea of horrible anxiety is up 'til now present in contemporary trauma savants like Luckurst and Caruth who have delineated psychical trauma as: 'Something that enters the mind that is so uncommon or overpowering that it can't be absorbed by common mental procedures. We have, so to speak, no place to put it and hence it drops out of our cognizant

memory, still, it is as yet present in the mind like an interloper or apparition' (499). This description focuses on the lateness of the dreadful experience. This idea furthermore has its reason in Freud and Breuer's opening line of thought which explains that the main horrendous incident occurs without the harmed subject seeing it. In their masterpieces '*the Psychological Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena*' (1911) and '*Studies on Hysteria*' (1911), they demonstrated the concealment and failed "abreaction" of this at first dazzling event as the wellspring of the resulting headway of excited psychosis (Freud and Breuer 1911). Freud further developed this thought in *Moses and Monotheism* (1939) by describing the time of latency as: 'the time that go between the incident and the essential appearance of the reactions is known as the 'hatching period', a direct suggestion to the pathology of overwhelming ailment . . . It is the component one may term lethargy' (Freud 2001). These thoughts have progressed toward becoming primary for studies on trauma, as remarked by Luckhurst in 2008 that 'this two-fold concept of trauma, the principal overlooked effect comes back after an overdue break, has been indispensable to cultural trauma philosophy' (8), and similarly Caruth in 1995 has also built upon the theory of Freud when she simplifies the belatedness that portrays awful mishaps: 'the period during which the effects of the experience are not clear, . . . the dynamic improvement from an event to its restraint to it's coming back' (7). Autobiographical works react to the twofold need to make the gathering and individual horrendous experiences initiated by the exhibits of a tyrannical system and of giving a recuperating system for the difference in these awful memories into account recollections. Certain contemporary intellectuals, for instance, Cathy Caruth, Geoffrey Hartman or Shoshana Felman, balanced the therapeutic musings on psychosomatic traumatic movements to the narrative investigation, thus initiating studies in trauma (Whitehead 2004). As Geoffrey Hartman (2003) explains, the task of the trauma intellectual is to locate the psychic wounds in the words given by records overseeing horrendous encounters, since the effects of awful procedures can be followed in the narratives used by contemporary creators of different characterizations. As pundits of literature, we have seen the propagation of life-composing genre mutilating the standard limits among fiction and reality and between anecdotal stories and personal history, in this way muddling the portrayal of the written self.

As Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (1992) contend, our social orders have encountered a disaster of observing because of the horrible historic

happenings that occurred in the 20th century and which required verbalized or scripted testimonies so as to be worked through. Talking cure of Freud and Breuer's and conviction of Carl Jung stated that the recuperating procedure starts when the damaged individual can change horrendous accidents into an ordered account are established instances of the view that the primary advance for the recuperation of trauma is to verbalize the experience of torment. Similarly Hartman, like Felman and Laub, compares the capacity of writing to that of the talking cure. Suzette A. Henke, while building on this, has explained the term scriptotherapy as 'the process of writing out and writing through traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic re-enactment'. In this manner, one of the principal points of traumatic life writing is to relate some agonizing passionate calamity that has turned out to be unspeakable for the writer, with the goal that what can't be spoken might be composed (Henke, 1998). Researchers like Hartman (1996) and Felman and Laub (1992) think that oral and composed, artistic and non-scholarly declarations are helpful instruments for the individual and aggregate working through trauma just as for the conservation of authentic recollections for generation to come.

Testimony intends to affirm, which is more often than not in an official courtroom; when an observer is asked, after swearing to tell the truth, to give his/her testament with respect to a specific occurrence. Likewise, in literature, when a character recounts to the tale of his/her wretchedness or past conditions in an autobiographical form; such a portrayal is named as 'testimonial literature'. It implies that the character is bringing to the fore the abominations, savagery, and the stifling living conditions in an apparently abused society through his/her autobiographical account. The term testimony or testimonial literature initially arose from Latin America and the Spanish expression 'testimonio' when it emerged from human rights courts, truth commissions, and other international human rights instruments in countries, for example, Chile and Argentina. The autobiographies of Frederick Douglass can be considered among the primary noteworthy English-language works in this category.

Elie Wiesel's *holocaust as literary inspiration*, contended that, if 'the Greeks designed tragedy, the Romans the Epistle, the renaissance the Sonnet, our age developed another writing, that of testimony' (Wiesel). While this case might be begging to be proven wrong regarding literary history, it positively indicates the advancement of another classification of

inscription, the Holocaust testimony (and it might be that this sort is the precursor for a method for the comprehension an entire scope of 'traumatic' literature). While there has been much discourse of the noteworthy issues about testimonies - about their relationship to, or role as, historical writings, about the significance of origin, etc. - there has been very little that think about them as an artistic genre. Without a doubt, as one of the significant books regarding the matter calls attention to, 'the more we look closely at texts, the more they show us that, unwittingly, we do not even know what testimony is and that, in any case, it is not simply what we thought we knew it was' (Felman, Laub, 1992). The genre of testimony has an association with the subject of history. Much work has been done on the manners by which students of history draw on, use and judge testimonies (despite the fact that testimonies are not just works of history or assets for antiquarians). Thusly, numerous testimonies use history. While most testimony accounts pursue an autobiographical sequence of events, a few have instants where the progression of story stops and the content, in its grace or substance, moves toward becoming 'historical', offering elucidating history or reportage. It turns out to be evident that in any demonstration of bearing testimony the speaker/ author submits a genuinely charged testimony to an audience/ person who reads, who turns into the beneficiary of reality lying at the center of the agonizingly transmitted stunning happenings. Every one of these components are characterized in *the Feast of the Goat*.

Autobiographical works give a stage to share one's traumatic encounters. These horrible encounters are typically a consequence of brutality or abuse, or it could be about the encounters of one's survival over the span of a civil war. An individual, who has experienced a trauma, in his\her past, gets his/her healing system initiated by giving a narrative account of the real episode. The healing process begins when the casualty of trauma can change his/her horrendous mishaps into a chronological account. So, the principle venture to recuperate from a trauma is to articulate the awful experience. Some literary pundits have named it as talking fix or scripto-therapy. In the event that a writer can't talk about the terrible emotional crises; traumatic life writing offers him/her an ideal chance to illustrate those encounters.

Aharon Appelfeld, a child survivor of the Holocaust and the most famous Israeli author of Holocaust fiction, comments that after liberation from the camps, 'the inability to express your experience and the feeling of guilt

combined together and created silence.... its essence will always remain within that sphere which no expression can encompass' (Appelfeld32). This reflection might be to a great extent accurate, yet, this quietness in any case, the overcomes of a trauma or their children frequently become associated with a progressing discourse with the trauma, which leads them to connect with, deliberately or unwittingly, in creative articulation. The works fashioned by such an exchange definitely contain a dormant however amazing discourse that requires the reader to wind up occupied with his very own discourse with the trauma. Such masterpieces uncover much in roundabout methods: frequently, most of the gist can emerge from the vacant spaces, hushes and oversights inside them (for example gaps in verbal testimony, or paintings with physical gaps). For sure, some aesthetic practices can point to that area, the mental loci that harbor the most profound impacts of the trauma - those that are the most private and specific to the person. Generally, it is just through its roundabout and dialogic nature that the genre of trauma can represent the void at the center of trauma while as yet offering the survivor the plausibility of recovery and rebuilding.

Analyzing Trauma and Testimony

Mario Vargas Llosa's *The Feast of the Goat* describes life under the Trujillo tyranny in the Dominican Republic and the part played by the United States in sustaining the state. Rafael Leonidas Trujillo ruled the Spanish-speaking country of Hispaniola from 1930 until he was killed in 1961. A solid enemy of Communist, Trujillo was a savage despot who thought that order and progress with accumulation of power, and the exploitation and favoritism connected with it would achieve advancement for his devastated country. With solid help from the U.S. government, Trujillo manufactured a clique of character. A notorious womanizer, Trujillo ruled as though the Dominican Republic was his own reserved hacienda. In spite of the fact that the expression is spuriously credited to President Franklin D. Roosevelt when alluding to Nicaraguan despot Anastasio Somoza, Trujillo could have very much been regarded "a son of a bitch, but our son of a bitch."

The literary charm of Trujillo's dictatorship stems not only from his cruel and despotic thirty-one-year rule, but also from the characteristics of his own particular personality. He applied his name and that of his family to everything possible, from the streets of Santo Domingo, its buildings and monuments, to the name of the city itself, which during his regime was called

Ciudad Trujillo. He constructed a powerful self-image, and conferred on himself as many titles as possible—Benefactor, Padre de la Patria Nueva, Generalísimo—people unofficially called him *el Jefe*. His obsession with order and physical appearance gave him the reputation of a man who never perspired. He was fanatical about the physical appearance of his soldiers, requiring, under threat of punishment, that they remain impeccable while on duty, despite the climate of the island. His fixation with women led him to place a subordinate in charge of selecting the most beautiful young girls in the country for him to deflower. He sent his closest collaborators abroad and his enemies to prison in order to sleep with their wives. The most fascinating aspect of these infamous character traits is that everybody knew them by word of mouth, and Trujillo's chauvinistic and despotic reputation spread as a dangerous rumor. One can even say that Dominicans—including exiles and those who remained on the island, detractors and former collaborators—all contributed to these rumors as if they were traces of a tragic national past. Vargas turned these rumors into a book and Trujillo's personality, which already bordered on the fictional, became real.

A story told through the recollections of a moderately aged Dominican lady who presently lives in the United States and had headed out to visit her withering dad in Santo Domingo, the novel records the happenings that led to assassination of Trujillo. During the twentieth century, all Latin American nations suffered through the hands of a tyrannical government. If truth be told, Costa Rica, freed just since 1948, is the only country in the area that has continuously witnessed a democratic government. When the cold war was at its peak during the 1960s and 1970s, it was just in Colombia, Venezuela, and Costa Rica that democracy had survived. Towards the end of the cold war, all the countries in the region except Cuba had become a democracy. However, democracy has not progressed equally over the locale. Despite making great progress in countries like Mexico, Brazil, Chile, Peru, and Uruguay, democracy remained fragile in Ecuador, Bolivia, and Colombia. In spite of the fact that he came into power through democracy, Hugo Chávez has demonstrated little regard for balanced governance, partition of forces and regard for the opposition. However, in spite of these mishaps, Vargas Llosa's epic advises us that, all in all, Latin America has made some amazing progress. In spite of the fact that being blemished and even frail in certain nations, democracy is as yet the main genuine game around the local area. The days when Latin American nations were controlled by strongmen

like Trujillo are a distant memory. Indeed, even to some degree tyrant and character religion, inclined leaders like Chávez are not even as close to being all-powerful and tyrannical as Trujillo had been.

Following the convention of most caudillo narratives, the author combines historical research, fiction, and rumors to write his book. With the *Feast of the Goat*, however, Vargas does something completely new in the tradition of caudillo novels written by male authors. He makes a rape committed by the dictator the main theme of the plot and picks the prey, Urania, to articulate the story. In *the Feast of the Goat*, Vargas decides to make the main character and narrator of the tyrant's story a woman. Moreover, the rape of the woman is the novel's central event. As the author publicly stated, he chose a woman to be the protagonist of his novel and made her rape the main element of the plot in order to pay tribute to Dominican women, one of the most victimized groups during the Trujillo era. The author's intentions show, at first glance, that he purposely chooses to challenge the old-fashioned format of the man being both hero and writer of the tale. In addition, finally and symbolically, Vargas appears to recognize women as legitimate partners in the realm of letters and includes them within the realm of idealized "civil poets." In any case, the greater part of all, by expressing that he needs to pay tribute to Dominican ladies, Vargas appears to recognize that totalitarian regimes unequivocally depend on male-centric frameworks, and that manly supremacy—and rape—ought to be truly viewed as a component of a political scheme.

The fact that the novel, *the Feast of the Goat*, is primarily based on trauma and testimony could be gauged by the very fact that the young girl raped and ravaged emotionally came back to her native country to recall or relive that traumatic experience. She became a victim of Trujillo when she was barely 15 years old and managed to escape to the United States. The aim was to stay alive and start a new beginning. On the contrary, she lived but barely. Somehow she could not escape from the traumatizing experience that she had as a teenage girl. Despite trying hard to forgive and forget, her past memories kept haunting her. She even severed her ties with her home, friends, and country but to no avail; she remained a victim of her traumatic experience. Even after 36 years, she remembered the events of that traumatic evening in minute details as if it was only yesterday.

On her return after thirty-six years she kept wondering why she had comeback. One primary reason was to confront her past in the form of

her ailing father; who had a stroke and was completely paralyzed and bed ridden. She used foul language for her father because she felt her father had betrayed her. Her father was the most important person for her in her life. She used to consider him as a god and had so many expectations from him. She felt being used by her father and while talking to her aunt and cousins she found it difficult to express her true feelings about her father and hence, she started using bad language for him. One could easily feel the bitterness of all the years when she replied to her aunt, who questioned her on the use of bad language for her father. Of course, till that moment her aunt was not aware of what her father had done to her. Urania was truly bitter when she uttered, "*I said vile and evil because there are no stronger words; if there were, I would have said them. He had his reasons, certainly. His extenuating circumstances, his motivations. But I haven't forgiven him. And I'll never forgive him*" (315). She recounted the memory of the night of her rape to her aunt and cousins, who never knew the true reason she left the country. She was literally trembling when she recalled the details of that terrible evening of her life. In the words of Urania "*she had been trembling for the last thirty-five years*" (468) and this trauma was a constant reminder of that incident which she had been unable to forget as if it had been tied to her very soul. When her aunt showed her surprise that she remembered all these details, she responded that while she had forgotten many things, "*I remember everything about that night*"(452). For Urania, forgetting the atrocities committed by the regime was unacceptable. Her visit to her country and her kin after thirty five years provided her with an opportunity not only to face her worst fears but also to get healed. Her utterance to Marianita clearly indicated that her healing process had started. Her parting words were "*if Marianita writes to me I will answer all her letters*" (475). According to Urania, it was a good decision that she had come back because eventually she released that sometimes it is a cure for depression.

A tragic incident that occurred during Urania's school days was the tragedy of Rosalia Perdomo. She agonizingly remembered how Ramfis, the son of Trujillo, along with his friends, left Rosalia to bleed in the doorway of Marion Hospital after raping her. Rosalia happened to be Urania's school mate. She was a young and beautiful teenager who caught the eyes of Ramfis and he managed to snare her and ended up raping her and leaving her in a critical condition in the hospital. Such was the character of Trujillo and his family. They quite often played with the young girls of the nation at will.

She categorically tells her father that he might have forgotten the tragedy of Rosalia but she had not. She told her father that perhaps that was one reason why she came back after 36 years to confront him. She kept telling her father about the wrong doing of the regime and blaming him for keeping quiet and hence, acting as a silent partner in crime. She actually saw Trujillo in her father; who had no remorse and had no shame. Urania's bitterness is evident in the lines when she told her father, *"Do you know why I could never forgive you? Because you were never really sorry. After so many years of serving the Chief, you had lost your scruples, your sensitivity, the slightest hint of rectitude. Just like your colleagues. Just like the whole country, perhaps. Was that a requirement for staying in power and not dying of disgust? To become heartless, a monster like your Chief."*

The novel also showed true representation of national trauma. The people sitting in the car waiting for the chief to ambush him are in actuality victims of his wickedness and dictatorial acts. Each one of them had somehow suffered at his hands. Those sitting in the car include Amadito Garcia Guerrero, Antonio de la Maza, Salvador Estrella Sadhala, and Antnio Imbert. All four of them were at one time very close to Trujillo until they fell off due to various reasons. They had their valid reasons for joining hand to kill Trujillo. For example, Amadito was forced to kill his girlfriend's brother in the name of Trujillo. Antonio de la Maza had his own reasons. His brother, Octavio alongside Gerald Lester Murphy, was killed by Trujillo despite the fact that he had been a diehard Trujillista. Octavio was used as a scapegoat by Trujillo. Salvador had very close relations with the Mirabal sisters. The three Mirabal sisters were also got killed by Trujillo because they were accused of being involved in clandestine activities against the Trujillo's regime. The Mirabal sisters died in mysterious circumstances in a road accident. It was actually termed as a political assassination by the locals. Antonio Imbert was a governor of Puerto Plata during the regime and was unceremoniously removed from governorship. This incident started the beginning of the assassination plan against Trujillo. The second major reason for Imbert was the arrest of his brother, Segundo, who was an army officer and was arrested and implicated for the murder of Domingo Marion. Hence, all the four passengers in the car were victims of the atrocities of the Trujillo regime. We came to know about them when they were sitting and waiting for the Goat and to kill the time, they were talking about the bitter experiences which they had experienced during the rule of Trujillo. Trujillo would surely not hesitate to use even his

close comrades to strengthen his regime. It is very ironic that his assassins were the very people who had, at one time, served him whole heartedly and had now joined hands to kill him. Vergos narrated the history of Trujillo through the various traumatic incidents that had occurred in the lives of those sitting in the car.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion we can say that in *The Feast of the Goat* Vargas has presented the historical facts about the Dominican Republic through the various characters in the form of victims. These characters were victims of the wickedness and atrocities of the Trujillo's regime. Urania, the main character of the novel comes back after thirty-five years to confront her past. It took her thirty-five long years to muster the courage to come back and relive the traumatic experiences of her past with her close family members. She had the moral courage of confronting her father, through dialogism, about the various incidents that had traumatized her in her childhood. She did have a dialogue with her father in which her father was a mere listener, who merely responded nonverbally because he was rendered speechless due to a stroke and was therefore unable to respond to Urania's utterances. This setting provided Urania with the perfect opportunity to let out her anger and emotions which she had been holding back for thirty-five years. She also had an opportunity to talk to her aunt and cousins about her traumatic experience as a 16-year-old. She had been living with the memory of that fateful evening, when she got raped at the hands of the Goat, for thirty-five long years until she spoke about it to her aunt and cousins. Despite her aunt's protests she kept speaking until she finished her account. It provided her with a cathartic opportunity and she felt much relieved when she managed to say it all to her family members.

Traumatic experiences are not easy to articulate. Often people who suffer from a traumatic incident are unable to recount what actually happened to them because they find themselves fumbling or gasping for words. They are simply not able to put the incident in words. Sometimes, people take years to open their mouths about an incident. This is exactly what Urania did. Her prolonged absence provided her with an opportunity to find a very attentive audience. They were willing to listen to her because they wanted to know what caused her flee her country and not being able to return for thirty-five years. An important aspect of traumatic and testimonial writing is the

empathetic understanding of the audience. If the audience is not empathetic, they would not be able to relate to the traumatic experience of the speaker.

Vargas has also made references to the trauma of the Dominican nation. Through various characters he had managed to highlight the atrocities committed by the Trujillo's regime and what had befallen the nation after his death and the struggle of the Dominican people for democracy and the sacrifices they had made. One can see the glimpses of the iron fist rule of Trujillo during his rule and also how the people were victimized after his death by his supporters. In the end each character had his/her story to tell.

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