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THE HYPERBOLE OF CONSUMPTION AND EXPLOITATION IN *TENDER IS THE FLESH*: A GLIMPSE THROUGH MARXIST LENS

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ABSTRACT: This paper aims to study the novel "Tender Is the Flesh" by the Argentinian writer Agustina Bazterrica, attempting to extract and highlight its Marxist undertones. The novel is a dystopian work depicting one of the most horrific phenomena known to humankind: cannibalism. Not only is cannibalism widely accepted in the world, but astonishingly, it is normalized, regulated, and even supported by the government. This has led to the spread of a virus that renders all animal meat toxic to humans. Consequently, mass-produced industrial agriculture and meat industries have decided to fill this void with a new type of "specialty meat." Using Marxist analysis, this paper sheds light on how the consumption of human flesh, and all the processes involved in transforming it into inhuman meat to make it fit for consumption, can be interpreted as an exaggeration of the contemporary global situation in which the humanity and rights of workers are violated, and they are consumed by capitalism and the profit-driven economy.

Keywords: Marxist analysis, science fiction, reification, dystopia, literature and ideology.

Introduction:

The novel *Tender Is the Flesh* by the Argentine writer Agustina Bazterrica is one of the best-known novels. The novel is clearly one of the most horrific stories known in history for being about cannibals. In this novel, it's not just cannibalism in large places, but surprisingly, it's normalized, regulated, and even supported by the government for the purpose of spreading a virus that makes human flesh poisonous. Using Marxist analysis, this paper sheds light on how human flesh is consumed and the processes that permeate it to transform human flesh into a different taste and appear to be suitable for consumption. Although this narrative is exaggerated in the violation of human rights, it suggests even a little capitalism and a profit-based economy

Study Questions:

This study identified a number of questions:

- Do Marxists Help One Understand Consumerism

- What are the ways in which the novel has been used as an exaggeration to symbolize the human consumption of human capitalism and how it is exploited?
- How can institutions and governments contribute to the normalization of the system of intensive exploitation, according to the novel
- How Human Interactions Can Integrate with Market Logic and Commodification in the Novel

Aim of the study:

Clarifying the purpose of the narrative in which people were infected with a virus and how eating human flesh is acceptable and palatable. The virus was deadly to humans and was more effective in burning and killing on a large scale, so everyone on earth had to resort to plants to avoid kill each other. The study also shows how the novel has been perfected in reflecting the depth of human exploitation under capitalist systems. Clarifying Marxist contributions to modern literature, especially topics that include moral and social dilemmas

Simply reopening questions of power, class, identity, and human commodification in the dystopian imagination

The importance of the study lies in showing the author's use of the language to show consumerism and exploitation. It also shows how the human being is embodied in capitalist society and how he is transformed into a commodity. The novel in an imaginary universe emphasized the interaction of political and financial forces in an important dialectical way. Finally, the Marxist point of view is critical and is related to the reality of modern society

INTRODUCING BAZTERRICA'S CANNIBALISTIC DYSTOPIA

We begin with a review of "Tender Is the Flesh" by Agustina Bazterica, a dystopian cannibalism. Written from a seemingly objective and detached third-person perspective, "Tender Is the Flesh" by Agustina Bazterica is a chilling tale of a dystopian world where the meat industry has undergone a radical transformation. Instead of becoming less cruel and destructive, human flesh has replaced animal meat. The original Spanish version of the novel was written in 2017 and later translated into English in 2020, the year of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ironically, the predicament of a cannibalistic world is also caused by a similar virus infecting animal meat. The protagonist, Marcos Tejo, recalls the initial outbreak: mass hysteria, suicides, and fear. Especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, it is no longer possible to eat animals because they have been infected with a virus that is deadly to humans. This is the official stance. Words carry the weight necessary to shape us, and we try not to answer all the questions, he believes.. (Bazterrica, 2020)

The horrors described by Marcos bear a striking resemblance to those the world experienced during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the world adjusts to the new normal of masks, sanitizers, and other precautions becoming part of daily life, people in the world of Bazterica are coming to terms with the terrifying choice before them: adopt a vegetarian diet or consume their own kind. Strangely, most people in the world are choosing the latter.

This addiction to consuming living beings is a clear indication of the human condition. Instead of adopting a vegetarian diet and vowing never to eat meat again, people are coming to terms with self-consumption in this world. The meat industry must be careful to ensure there is no backlash against its new product—human flesh. The term "special meat" is used to mask the

degrading nature of this consumption worldwide. Marcos views the euphemism "specialty meat" as a marketing ploy for the broader rebranding and reshaping process undertaken by the government and major meat producers to ensure a smoother transition from animal meat to the new "specialty meat" (Bazterrica, 2020). Calling special meat by her real It's called human flesh by a death threat. It is truly outrageous that the government decides the appropriate punishment for acknowledging the humanity of meat intended for consumption is to send it to the slaughterhouse for processing (Bazterrica, 2020). This implies killing and preparing it for sale as meat.

This is where the protagonist, Marcos, comes in. He is internally conflicted. His job as a supervisor at the Cren processing plant creates a conflict between his profession and his personal beliefs. Being privy to the inner workings of the industry leads to an endless crisis because he recognizes the corruption of the processing industry, but he cannot admit it because he is caring for his elderly father, Don Armando, who suffers from dementia. We see Marcos's struggle to balance his professional and personal life, his separation from his wife after their inability to have children, Marcos's father's Alzheimer's disease and his sister Marisa's refusal to participate in his treatment left him feeling both internally and externally empty.

An Analytical Overview of Marxist Literature

Marxism was not initially a method of literary analysis, but its principles have been applied since the inception of literary studies. Literature has oscillated between being a tool for constructive critical dialogue and being viewed with suspicion if it deviates from the prevailing ideology, while simultaneously being aligned with the philosophical principles laid down by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. As the status of literature has evolved over time, it has become clear that Marxism offered a new perspective for reading and understanding literature (Dobie, 2003).

Among the most prominent Marxist readings mentioned by the researcher is the importance of studying conflict in the novels **Paradise Lost** and **Middlemarch**. Marxist criticism, confined to academic archives, plays a crucial and pivotal role in the transformation of human societies. It also clarifies this through a broader theoretical analysis that seeks to understand the ideologies, ideas, values, and feelings that people experience in their societies throughout history. These ideas, values, and feelings can only be embodied in literature through a deeper understanding of the past and present, an understanding that contributes significantly to liberation (Eagleton's Introduction).

Traditional orthodox Marxist theory posits that history is the primary driving force, the dialectical relationship between society and its economic systems, and between the means of production and their owners, who determine the fate of social conditions. Marxist theory remains a vital framework for analyzing contemporary literature and culture, providing a lens through which to understand how economic and social factors shape power relations and social structures.

Marxist analysis can also help clarify the precise ways in which capitalism and its associated systems of exploitation permeate contemporary society and literature. Unlike other theoretical

systems that merely show us how to broaden our horizons and ideas, Marxism has provided us with tools for change and progress through its own perspectives and beliefs.

The aim here is not to conduct an aesthetic critique that judges the work based on its form and unity, but rather to focus on its content. While not neglecting the formal aspects of the text, the analysis should therefore be limited to the political content of the phrase "Tender Is the Flesh." It should be noted that form and content are equally important in conveying the message of both the text and its author. Marxist criticism is well aware of this, and "sees form and content as dialectically intertwined, Nevertheless, he ultimately seeks to emphasize the primacy of content in determining form (Eagleton, 2023, p. 22).

Marx sees in the novel **The Slave Is the Body** the principle that "whoever owns consumes." He explains that a superficial Marxist analysis of a literary work like **The Slave Is the Body** reveals the troubled relationship between society and its economic system. The text explicitly depicts exploitation, commodification, and dehumanization, but this does not diminish the value of a Marxist interpretation of the novel.

"The Slave Is the Body" offers a profound critique of capitalist society and how the commodification of the human body leads to the creation of a unique form of ruthless capitalism. Bazterrica presents the meat industry as the primary capitalist industry in the world, using human flesh as a commodity to compensate for the shortage of animal meat, which is now unfit for consumption. The use of human flesh is presented as the culmination of the meat industry's long history. The exploitation of animals has been replaced by the exploitation of human beings, who are treated like animals and subjected to brutal conditions to maximize profits. The film highlights cruelty to humans, but at the same time we are often reminded of the cruelty that animals have to face in the real world. The first to be sacrificed at the outbreak of the GGB were the proletariat, represented by "migrants, the marginalized, and the poor," because the meat of their own kind had not yet been regulated. Those deprived of their rights were the first to be "slaughtered." Bazterrica points to how migrants in various countries began to disappear, and how it became clear that they had been chosen to replace animal meat, and that they had now become the primary source of protein for those who could afford it and for those who chose to abandon their moral affiliations (Bazterrica, 2020). As well as illustrating the plight of the proletariat, Bazterrica dedicates her art to their cause, as one would expect from a writer of fundamental Marxist critique (Eagleton, 2023, p. 35). Moreover, the processing of human flesh into meat for consumption does not end there; the skin is also used to make a new type of leather. Our protagonist is followed to the HIFU tannery, where the "smell of chemicals that halt the decomposition process of the skin assaults his senses and his psyche" (Bazterrica, 2020).

The exaggeration is evident in the opinions of scholars, where the dehumanization of humans is clearly manifested in their transformation into commodities consumed by the wealthy elite. The process of dehumanization before people are transformed into commodities is also vividly described. The dehumanization and consumption of human flesh can be considered a blatant exaggeration, consistent with the way the capitalist system treats people. The personification

of flesh as a fundamental relationship is consistently present in the novel. "The reduction of value to exchange value, the domination of the human world by things"—in this case, the thing that governs the world is "private flesh" (Selden, 2005, p. 96). Selden argues that this personification becomes clear when "the world of things begins to displace the individual". Previously, the thing had significance only in relation to people and did not hold supreme power; but in the material world, driven solely by the accumulation of things, the thing has replaced the individual. In Bazterrica's world, the individual is literally transformed into a thing, whose value is determined solely by its capacity to provide flesh.

The act of transforming human characteristics, relationships, and actions into the characteristics, relationships, and actions of human-made objects, which have become independent (and are perceived as inherently independent) of the individual, and which control their life. Thus, humans are transformed into object-like beings, no longer behaving in a human way, but rather according to the laws of the object world. Reification is a "special" form of alienation, and it is the most radical and widespread form in modern capitalist society (Bottomore, 2001, p. 463).

There has been a long-standing debate among scholars and Marxist theorists about whether reification is a form of alienation, commodity worship, or both (Bottomore, 2001, P. 465). The scope of this study does not allow for a full exploration of these concerns. What interests us here is how the world in **Tender is the Flesh** achieves extreme levels of reification through the medium of human flesh. All relationships in this world are determined by meat and its availability. Because they are raised on an exclusively non-vegetarian system, the characters in the book cannot imagine a world without meat or the option of adapting to a vegetarian diet. Marcos emphasizes the importance of maintaining friendly relations with the powerful people who run the breeding centers, regardless of their corruption and actions.

One such man is Guerrero Iraolo, who owns the breeding center of the same name, which supplies more than half the country. This hunter enjoys capturing celebrities burdened by crippling debt who have volunteered to be hunted and eaten if captured; if they refuse, their debts are forgiven (Bazterrica, 2020). In this bleak world, everything is determined by the precious meat. Marcos despises these people, but he cannot say so to their faces, let alone cut ties with them, because he feels that "no one knows if they will ever have to deal with someone like him again" (Bazterrica, 2020). Marcos appears skeptical of the government system, and his statements suggest that the GGB outbreak may be a government ploy to control the population and protect the interests of meat industry oligarchs by preventing their profits from diminishing once animals become unpalatable (Bazterrica, 2020). By focusing on the complicit role of the state in maintaining and reproducing these systemic structures of power and exploitation, we can also attempt to understand the novel's bleak society and the forces that drive it. Todd suggests that this work offers "The author makes a striking metaphorical comment on how the powerful few in neoliberal capitalism exploit and consume the less powerful majority (Todd, 2007). The state plays a crucial role in the production and distribution of human flesh, once it is legalized. The film "Bazterrica" depicts how the government acts as

an intermediary to maintain and legitimize this exploitative capitalist system. The government doesn't intervene to stop consumption; rather, it encourages efficient production and consumption. Marcos explains that the government cleverly decided to stop calling this new type of meat "human flesh," marketing it instead using terms like "special meat," "special steak," and "special kidney" (Bazterrica, 2020).

This dehumanizes people not only as meat substitutes but also as workers in the meat industry.

The workers depicted in "Tender Is the Flesh" have no power or collective representation to secure their rights as workers. They are forced to work in harsh conditions for meager wages and are expected to treat their own flesh with the same contempt they show animals.

The conclusion of this text makes us question everything Marcos has narrated, casting doubt on him as an unreliable narrator. One must understand the inherent contradiction in the human mind. Yasmin, despite enduring a horrific life for a brief period and the inhumane end she was forced to face, had to be disposed of, in accordance with Marcos's class affiliation and tendencies. Marcos was, and remains, a bourgeois clientele, living in a mansion, maintaining clandestine relationships with butchers, obtaining premium meat for his farm, and abusing Yasmin, ultimately treating her like an animal (after she has served her purpose). His brief infatuation with Yasmin and his concern about the way people are slaughtered can be attributed to his recent painful separation from his wife, not to any innate goodness. Marcos was destined to revert to his bourgeois values, to return to the ideology that aligns with his class. Eagleton believes it is important to maintain the text's fidelity to reality. "Naïve utopian ideology" and fairytale endings are not the norm in real life. What matters is the novel's "realistic power and honest portrayal," and how it brings to life class struggle and exploitation through pen and paper (Bazterrica, 2020). It is unwise to focus on trying to elucidate Marcos's motivations behind this momentary shift, or his return to his bourgeois status. Thus, Bazterrica recognizes that class is the dominant force in this inhumane and opportunistic version of capitalism. She foolishly weaves a story in which we encourage Marcos and Yasmin to succeed and achieve their "eternal happiness," but she proves herself both incredibly naïve and naïvely optimistic, because if one were to survive this class struggle in which the proletariat is utterly exhausted, Marcos would have to reaffirm his position as a member of the ruling class. Throughout the novel, Bazterrica obscures Marcos's true intentions and feelings toward the illegitimate child he will have with a "female." During his dinner with Orletti and Guerrero Iraolo, Marcos reflects on how he has committed a grave crime, but he doesn't care, because "the child will be his" (Bazterrica, 2020). He is indifferent to Yasmin's safety after she gives birth, and his concerns extend beyond protecting himself and his unborn child. All he does for Yasmin either makes his crimes against her seem easier to bear; or by humanizing her, he lies to himself that he has done nothing wrong. All the precautions he takes to keep her safe and comfortable stem from her being the mother of his unborn child, not from her being a human being. Bazterrica concludes her work with a chilling declaration that Marcos has always been the one in control. Yasmin is no longer a human being, but simply a "female," and Marcos speaks of her thus: "She had the human appearance of a pet" (Bazterrica, 2020).

CONCLUSION

As we have discovered so far, the world of "Tender Is the Flesh" is not so different from our own; indeed, it may be a strange reflection of it. Let us take literature as a reference and a mirror. The veneration of private flesh, the personification of all relationships that are centered on this revered private flesh, and the reduction of all transactions, whether social or monetary, are all governed by access to flesh. Likewise, in our world, this flesh can easily be replaced by money. The exaggerated representation is marked by remarkable hyperbole and vivid symbolism. In Bazterrica's work, everything is magnified through a twofold exposure—consumerism, fear, suffering, alienation, exploitation, and, finally, death. A cursory glance through a Marxist lens offers only a glimpse of what "Tender Is the Flesh" presents. Nevertheless, this paper has attempted to reveal how governments and corporations collaborate to ensure that consumption does not cease and to minimize resistance. People become alienated from themselves and from the nature of their consumption, and they continue to revel in the degradation offered by capitalist structures. And the extent of their absolute, dominant control, without any loopholes. The novel's ending leaves no room for doubt, determining the fate of this dystopian, cannibalistic world.

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