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The Chronicle of French Revolution in Alejo Carpentier's *Explosion in a Cathedral*

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Abstract

Alejo Carpentier was a well-known author of Latin American Literature of twentieth century. *Explosion in a Cathedral*, (*El siglo de las luces*, 1962) has disclosed the author's approach, who knew how to take advantages of the chance. This is considered Carpentier's most effective historical achievement that revealed his destiny accidentally. The novel is based on chronicle of French revolution in different circumstances and revealed the French history with winning destiny. It portrays the revolutionary hurdles, which were adopted from the other historians, who wrote about revolutions. Ultimately, Carpentier became successful to assemble immense information, dates and several documents; which were required to write the history of French revolution. The novel presents rare figures as characters without giving more importance to them. Some critics argued that it is characters who are more influenced with European modernity less than Latin America. The novel is about French revolution that is depicted through the character Victor Huggies and Esteban. The French revolution was fought twice as land and water with great efforts. The novel leaves it's most noteworthy mark in the field of history.

Keywords- Chronicle, Revolution, Explosion, Cathedral

Introduction

Alejo Carpentier is a leading Latin American literary figure. He was born on 26 December in 1904 in Switzerland and died in April 24, 1980. He is considered as one of the best novelists of 20th century. He can cover an entire book in a single chapter. He has originally written all his works in Spanish language. He is also a musicologist, essayist and playwright. He interpreted himself in high range and established himself with great ability as a Spanish

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writer. Most of his works have been translated into English language. He was beyond the Latin and Spanish speaking people. His first novel, *Ecue-yamba-O! (God be Praised)*, was published in 1933. It raised the essence of Black World of Cuba. It captures the close relationship between man and nature.

Carpentier also took interest in music and anthropology, which inspired him to write, *La Musica en Cuba* (1946). Through it he reveals a movement, a newly rising interest in the Black literature. It departs radically from the nativist perspective, and eventually condemns the trend as a required bad thing and known as an important fiction. He worked for all types of literary and non-literary genres. Most of his activities are concerned with the area of production like poetry. He devoted his time in various activities concerning the areas of production. He wrote two Afro-Cuban poems, *Liturgia* and *Cancion*. Both were published in 1930 and 1931 respectively. He wrote two short-stories, *Histoire de Lunes*, and *L'Etudiant*. His early works had highlighted his quality of writing. Through them he established himself as a great Latin American author. His early works are *El milagro de Anaquille* (1927), *Ecue-yamba-O!* (1933), *Histoire de lunes* (1933), *Viaje a la semilla* (1944), *Los fugitivos* (1496). These are the masterly works of Carpentier after that his evolution of writing has been appeared.

As far Carpentier's novel writing, his popular novels are *The Kingdom of this World* (*El reino de este mundo*, 1949), *The Lost Steps* (*Los pasos perdidas*, 1953), *Explosion in a Cathedral* (*El siglo de las luces*, 1962) and *Reasons of State* (*El recurso del metodo*, 1974). He used human elements in most of his works in place of imaginable accent that established the stature of his writing. He recalls the chaotic inversion in his novels. He searches the free things from the limited area of literature and celebrated pantheism forms of the world. His conception is one of some area of magnitude; to keep away from mad classification about nature, in support of an aesthetic system, which is free from time bound area. The aim of Carpentier is to put an aesthetic realization of primitive art. His novel, *The Kingdom of this World*, is about Haitian Revolution, deals with the triumph of a Haitian people's struggle for independence. He was known as the founder of magical realism, he used this term in his most of novels with the combination of fantasy and reality. His novel, *The Lost Steps* is his best known work. He returned to Hawana to join the victorious Cuban revolution. The novel contains elements of existentialism and magical realism, and it mirrors the tension between Europe and Latin America which is also found in his other novels. His is also known as revolutionary writer of Cuba. Through his works, he has written on various revolutions like Haitian revolution, French revolution, Cuban revolution etc.

His Cuban-born art was invented in young age by the scholarly work Afro-Cuban music, where he has completed his study with full concentration. The concentrate study of music keeps him away from other authors who are tone deaf enough only write names of

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telephone list or advertising dialogues. The Cuban works were come in light only the inner strength of Carpentier and through his wisdom.

Chronicle of French revolution

French revolution has been fought in a different scenario. It is the chronicle history of new world. Carpentier's *Explosion in a Cathedral*, is about French revolution. The novel is divided into seven chapters, each chapter contained the progressive history of Cuban and French revolution through the characters Esteban, Victor Hugues, Sofia, Carlos, Doctor Oge, etc. Victor Hugues was the most prominent character of these revolutions but the historian hid his identity as the protagonist. "Since Victor Hugues has been almost completely ignored by historians of the French Revolution-too busy describing what was taking place in the Europe between the time of the Convention and the 18th Bruimaireti divert their gaze to the distance confines of the Caribbean" (350). The novel, *Explosion in a Cathedral*, opened with mournful news of Carlos and Sofia's father's death. All the people have been assembled at Carlos and Sofia's home to express their sorrow towards their father's death. Carlos thought that this mourning is the year's mourning which had affected him deeply. Esteban was cousin brother of Sofia and Carlos, he was a nephew of their late father. Esteban's uncles death came like a disaster in his life. A famous painting was made on an ample canvas by an unknown Neapolitan master, which considered as the laws of plastic art to present a disaster.

After this great sorrow, Carlos, Sofia and Esteban had begun a new life with the solitary feeling, they thought that they were orphans in this world. Every evening, Victor went to Carlos and Sofia's house for caring them, in this way, he proved himself as a skilled master. Victor was not taking interest in Martinez de Pasqually's teaching, he told development of humanity was collective work of all human being not individual's hard work. Sofia had little confusion about ideological movement. She was also amazed that everyone was only talking about revolution, imagine about revolution. Esteban was totally unaware about all this discussions, his condition was like a blind man who was unable to see the things clearly. Victor said the whole Europe government had been frightened from ghost of revolution. "For two days they talked of nothing but revolutions, and Sofia was amazed at the passions which this new topic of conversation aroused. To talk revolutions, to imagine revolutions, to place oneself mentally in the midst of a revolution is in some small degree to become master of the world" (71). Sofia, Victor, Esteban and Doctor Oge had jointly taken the ship for the revolutionary voyage, where they enjoyed eat the fish food, French beans and drinking coffee. The ship entered on Santiago harbor, where Captain Dexter was carrying the ship on ashore, but he continue on the revolutionary voyage and leave the island of San Domingo by informing other passengers about the coming of North American sailors and expecting of revolution existing on time. Captain Dexter also found that all the taverns and hotels of the city are filled with refugees, there were no place remained empty for staying there.

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A boat was returning to France, there were refugees in it. Esteban was feeling anxious, extremely sorry, but happy on the new land, he thought that he would learn French, there would be possibility of emperor's arrest and lot of thing going to happen there, the citizen of the country will meet with humanity in this way, they are witness the rise of a new humanity. In chapter two Esteban was thinking about his own native land. Yet, he was responsible for the revolution, although, the revolution had open all the door of new life.

Esteban had become the active revolutionary fighter on every aspects of life. The revolutionary frenzy had left him alert. He often asked from his friends to take active interest in Revolution. Esteban took the revolution as a mission, he prepared the revolutionary literature; for Spain and translated from French documents. "At this time they needed men of firm conviction, who could write good Spanish and translate documents out of French, to prepare the revolutionary literature for Spain" (101).

Esteban had invented the new language for the use of republican France regime that eventually, developed brotherhood among French people. He was living in France like a prisoner, there was no way to return in his country. Esteban was also expecting the possibility of a long world war and the war would be continue for a long time that would able to change the entire scenario of the world. The chief objective of the French revolution was to re-establish the government rule of French colonies in America, and to take under control some territories of the America. In this way, Esteban had no doubt about loyalties of the revolution. To fight revolution in the whole nation, it was not easy task, it required lots of efforts for completion in a successful way.

A small fight had taken place between the French troop and the English troops. Both armies are ready to meet with their destination. A panic of the monarchist can be seen in the form of unfurled flags. The crews of the business vessels had been shown extra spirit at the harbor, set their resistance behind the artillery in the fort. Approximately, nine hundred soldiers had set bayonets to face the foe.

The climax of the war had been arrived through the news that General Cartier died during the war and General Rouger had been wounded and admitted to the military hospital for further treatment. "The French were victorious in this half of the island."(137) Esteban had dreamed about the different types of revolution. He wanted to seize Basse-Terre that was still under control of English government, he applied best practice of work to seize it. But there was something impossible that they had to fight with twelve hundred English soldier. Among all these circumstances French were firm to determine by winning, Gaudeloupe that was the beginning of new era with ending of English empire, this victory was celebrated with rolling drums in Place de la Victorie. The victory would go into the hands of French; governor of La Desirade and Marie Galante had committed suicide without fight with French troop. There was bloodshed everywhere that is why drainages were full of blood.

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After the three years of the revolution, Victor Hugues had gained the grand success in his life. Victor Hugues had been started his trip for reinforcements of men, arms and ammunition, towards remaining half of the island and identified weak points of the coastline. Victor wanted to increase the success which had been achieved through the revolution in order to establish the French regime. French republic had been functioning without any restriction of latitude. There are very few people remained, who are not loyal with revolution; Victor had prepared confidential report about disloyal people, those who had not working under the French regime.

After the first revolution, Esteban had been frightened, so he handed over the ship in an experienced captain, who carried the voyage carefully. During the voyage, the Frenchmen had found the things like new anchor, gun powder, chart, etc. in their hands. The crew members were very pleased when, they had chased to a Portuguese ship carried red, and white wine. There was an old boat, carrying Spanish slave, that was also wanted protection from French because the end of slavery in American colonies only possible in democratic regime.

The captain of the ship had received a letter signed and sealed by Victor Hugues. It quoted the French government's law about abolition of slavery business; Esteban has clarified that France is going to end the slave trade, in the coming future, France is not interested in the slave trade due to its democratic tenet. Although, the captains of privateers are ready to sell the slaves, which they have captured from the ships belonged to the Republic in Dutch ports, English, Spanish or other enemy countries. Within a few months, the revolutionary fleet had become a grand successful trade.

On July 7, 1798 America had declared a marine war on France, Victor had already sent a war message through agent in written documents. In North American's point of view, Victor was responsible for this war. They blamed on Victor for war. Esteban also inquired from Victor about the declaration of war. According to Esteban, the most significant protagonist of the revolution was found in Guianas. Although Victor was considered as a great revolutionary, many Negroes had been free after the revolution, they were searching their shelter. Finally, they found their home in Le Malingre. Esteban was worry about their poor life style, among all of them, some Negroes had allotted government houses. They had planted tree of liberty. Like Negroes there were dwellers of Acadia, they expressed their faithfulness towards French government and they told to French government that they had not only badly treated by the English soldier but, British also taken away their cattle and horses and they were deployed to live their life as beggars. They expressed their loyalties towards French government because French revolution was the true history of revolution.

American naval force had identified the French navel operation in the Caribbean Sea. They had prepared for fight according to French force. French revolution was being compared with Haitian revolution. Haitian wanted to become free from slavery, in the same

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way, Negroes wanted to become free and live their life in the air of freedom. Revolution must be fought for the welfare of human being. After this fight, the result would come in the form of equality; everyone would remain as equal citizen, either master or a slave both treated as same. They lived their life with full of happiness, pleasure and enjoyment and without behaving with each other as a discriminative behavior. After successful British revolution, their revolution will continue in America. It is fact that all the French revolution had been fought in America since sixteenth century. Knowledge about American history was difficult to French people and it was difficult to attack on America, while Dutch and Portuguese were easily won by French. Now, English emperor was forced to made deal with French for better government. After ten years, the same revolution had been fought in Haiti to remove the slavery system there. Revolution had many consequences, some people scared of revolution, and some faced counter-revolution. The new government's decree had been distributed in translated Dutch language for the citizen's awareness. Through the art of navigation the search of island had been done to face the invaders.

When Esteban remembered his old Creole house, starting weeping for a long time, then he controlled himself. One day, Esteban had visited his sister Sofia's houses. Sofia introduced her husband to Esteban. Esteban had reconciled the revolutionary effort in the field of human race and the revolution had brought success for France. The revolution had not only brought liberty but also fraternity. Sometimes revolution had been failed and did not get success every time. Some statements about Victor Hugues, "And the narrator concluded bitterly, draining his last glass of wine: "This time the revolution has failed. Perhaps the next will be the real one. But if they want to find me when it breaks out they'll have to hunt high and low" (261). Only men can enlighten the divine spirit and bring the happiness on this world. Esteban had quoted some basic text, questions and answers of Christian religion, important speeches etc. from 'Declaration of the Rights of Man', the French constitution.

The Negroes had applied the Haiti's example for revolutionary activity and moved towards success and come out from long suppression. Meanwhile, the French agitators had arranged ships to covering the city for attacking. Everyone was advocating for the ending of slavery system. "This was a very common occurrence-advocating the abolition of slavery or making insulting remarks about the Spanish monarchy. "They're still playing at revolution," (285)

Victor had decided that he would take the charge of the Cayenne government and end the governorship of Guadeloup. Finally, the aim of the revolution had been gained. Although revolutionary activities were followed very strictly, the fresh air had been coming from the sea shore that fragmented the whole houses. Now, the house is known as the ship house. It eventually, symbolized the new beginning of the life. In the month of September, a ship had been caring monks and nuns. An unknown troop had invading the city, when the army passed, some monks bestowed and blessings them. The days of procession had been arrived,

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the citizen of Paris and Rome become friend with each other and the French had become Catholic again. The whole government was in one uniform. The new constitution had become as law, known as revolutionary constitution.

The French colonies had been developed in America by introducing new idea of slavery and return the slavery system that had been existing in the year 1789, with the implementation of Decree of 16th Pluviose. Meanwhile, the news had spread out that millions of free citizens were returned to their old houses under the sticks and ropes. The manhunt had been started by the introducing another decree. Victor received news from government house that the French government's first plan of action to restored slavery system through publishing a law of Prairial.

Victor had defeated the English people in Guadeloupe, he was not drawn back the risk to open the war between France and America. Before eight years, Victor had abolished the slavery system and now, he was restoring the slavery system in order to showing courage. Victor had taken responsibility to publish the decree and spread the idea of revolution in America. Victor still wanted to spread the idea of revolution everywhere in the world including Lima or New Granada. He also wanted to write a history on revolution along with history of restoring slavery.

The Revolution is spreading towards America and covered most of the Latin American States. Sofia planned to write a novel, which is based on Revolution with the clear depiction of the history, but it is too bad to start write history by restoring slavery, however the idea was working, when hundreds of slaves were brought to hacienda and filled the land that was recovered from the jungle. Victor had devoting his time in recovering the land from virgin forests and collected resources from the Amazon River along with the shore of Pacific ocean.

The other result of the war was that the city was suffered with Egyptian disease; plague, hospitals were filled with sick people and there was no place remained in the hospital. People wanted that Egyptian troops should leave France without wasting town. Although doctors cleared that the disease had not same effect like plague. But the Egyptian disease had expanded everywhere, and took under cover most of area of the town, most of the citizen died due to it, there was death everywhere. The revolution had been stopped, through several means, and there were several ways, for the rejection and receiving of the revolution, and stop the loss the ample massacre. After the long fight in the sea, the ships were coming one by one on their home land. This is the time to analysis the result of the revolution: "once upon a time" had been replaced by the phrases "before the Revolution" and "after the Revolution".(366) After this tremendous victory, the time had come for celebration, with singing songs, playing guitar, organizing party with great fervor, people gathered in huge number while taking glass of wine to express their happiness. Esteban was busy in reading books like travel, poetry of Ossian and novel of Shakespeare. Carlos tried to reconstruct the

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life, with introducing French people in a new scenario. After the death of several Frenchmen and Napoleon, the French troop had been withdrawn from the war trip and shut the door of revolution with the sound of *Explosion in a Cathedral*.

Conclusion

In the novel, *Explosion in a Cathedral*, the roles of characters are described with more importance than the scenario, by the magnitude, and only the description of French revolution, with long battle, winning strategy, tactics, demarcation and finally the victory. Character's appear and disappear as an usual phenomena, and at the end of the novel, two main protagonist, Esteban and Sofia, are hide their identity, in the rebellion of the populace as Napoleon's invasion in Spain. Both protagonist, literally disappear, while the last statement of the novel, and focus on the painting that symbolizes the dormant potential for revolutionary catharsis: character will serve this capacity which cyclically reawakened, yet the character will perish anonymously, only as a supporting role that take the character in dark crimson.

Thus, through this revolutionary work, Alejo Carpentier, became the boom of Latin American literature. *Explosion in a Cathedral* proved more fruitful to carry out revolutionary culture rather than development of a character, indeed it has great influence upon European modernity of Latin America.

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