

The Savagery of Neo-liberalism as seen in Roberto Bolano's *The Savage Detectives and 2666.*

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ABSTRACT: Roberto Bolano (1953 – 2003) is the most famous post boom Latin American writers who attained fame among the English readers after the publication of the novel *The Savage Detectives*. The voluminous and also popular *2666* was published posthumously. He was a Trotskyite in his youth and left wing inclinations can be seen in his writings. Both the novels mentioned have elements of anti neo-liberalism and its evils on the Latin American Society.

Neo-liberalism encourages, "private property rights, free markets and free trade. The role of the government is ... to guarantee by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets. ..." (David Harvey pp 2) The protagonists of the novel *The Savage Detectives*, Arturo Belano and Ulises Lima are anti neo-liberalists. They are on the fringes of the society opposing the corrupt establishment. The evil savagery of neo-liberalism is portrayed in the novel *2666*, where a lot of femicide happens because of neo-liberalism.

Key Words: Neo-liberalism, Trotskyite, femicide, visceral realists and multinational companies.

Roberto Bolano (1953-2003) can be claimed as the most successful post boom writers of Latin America. His father was a truck driver and an amateur boxer and his mother was a school teacher. As a child he was dyslexic and was mostly isolated in school. Eventually he dropped out. Though he dropped out of school he did not stop his habit of reading which he must have acquired from his mother. He grew up as a Trotskyite and had political leanings towards the left. His sympathy towards the left and the lost generation can be seen in his writings. The family moved to Mexico where Bolano along with his friend Maria Santiago founded the movement called *Infra Realismo*. It was popularized in English in the novel *The Savage Detectives* as *Visceral Realism*.

Bolano travelled and read vastly. He did menial jobs and travelled from place to place in Spain and other countries in Europe and eventually settled in Catalonia Spain where he married and settled. Reflections of his life can be seen in most of his works where he represents himself as Arturo Belano. He gained popularity among the American readers after the publication of *The Savage Detectives* which won him the Romulo Gallegos award. The novel *2666* second in popularity only to *The Savage Detectives* won the American Critics Circle award which was received by Natasha Wimmer the translator in English.

Politics and Literature have been interrelated for many years. In the modern world politics is always governed by Economic principles. In fact it is the trade and the economic principles that determine the government. It is these principles that led to the toppling of Salvador Allende's government and brought in the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet often referred to as the 'Condor Years'.

On the superficial level neo-liberalism would appear as if it is an economic theory which would help an individual who is willing to work and trade his/ her commodities. History would prove the contrary. Liberalism on the first hand has only helped the conquerors and the colonizers, to procure raw materials and labour at a cheaper price and to sell goods at a higher price. Neo-liberalism is only an extension of it. The 'elite' groups and multinational corporations own the principles or dictate the principles that govern neo-liberalism. Soad Filho and Johnston state that neo-liberalism as the dominant ideology that shapes the present world. David Harvey in his book *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* states that

"... human well – being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate for such practices. The state has to guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up those military, defense, police and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee by force if need be, the proper functioning of the markets. Furthermore, if markets do not exist (in areas such as land, water,

education, health care, social security, or environmental pollution) then they must be created, by state action if necessary.” (Harvey pp 2)

The reader of the above lines is forced to concentrate on the words, ‘guarantee by force if need be...’ It was this situation that happened in Chile and was vehemently criticized by Bolano in his works. In the year 1955 a few students from Chile were sent to the United States to study economics in the University of Chicago. They were latter dubbed as the ‘Chicago Boys’. These so called economists did not do anything for the welfare of the state, that is, Chile here. Their economic reforms introduced the policies and philosophies of the United States. Their principles were endorsed by the Pinochet regime. Competition and trade principles were introduced even into areas such as labour relations, pensions, health and education, areas which were traditionally and which should have been under the control of the government.

The Savage Detectives is the novel which introduces visceral realism to the world. While reading the biography of Roberto Bolano one could find that he was pro Salvador Allende and anti Pinochet. Indirect reminiscence of these historical elements can be found in the novel. Arturo Belano and Ulises Lima are the protagonists of the novel while Juan Garcia Madero, a young aspiring visceral realist is the narrator in some parts of the novel. The Font family, Joquin Font, Maria and Angelica Font, the poet Cesarea Tinajero also considered the mother of Visceral realists, Lupe a young prostitute who is fond of Juan Garcia Madero, Alberto a gangster and Pimp form some of the important characters of the novel if one has to analyse the characters, not to leave out Octavio Paz. Other than these characters there are more than forty narrators who form the titular second section of the novel.

The visceral realists Belano and Lima are against traditional or the existing form of poetry. According to them organized poets including Octavio Paz are representatives of the government who are in turn representatives of the neo-liberal principles. In the university they disrupt the poetry workshop organized by Julio Cesar Alamo in the literature department. “I’m not sure why they were there. It was clearly a hostile visit, hostile but somehow propagandistic and proselytizing too... . The visceral realists questioned Alamo’s critical system and he responded by calling them cut-rate surrealists and fake Marxists...” (pp 5)

The visceral realists are seen as drifters throughout the novel because that is what they can do in the neo-liberalistic world. They do not complete their course in the University. They do not have a regular job and they keep moving from place to place. Cesarea Tinajero who is believed by the visceral realists as the founder of visceral realism is literally moved to the fringes of the society. She is found hardly making a living in the Sonora desert. The Sonora desert may be seen as a metaphorical representation of the world. The world that would be, if it is run by multinational companies.

The Sonora desert also plays a significant part in the novel 2666. “The Part about the Crimes’ is the fourth chapter of the novel. The chapter is a record of the murder of 112 women in Santa Teresa from the year 1993 to 1997. The desert Santa Teresa represents Ciudad Juarez in Mexico where multinational companies from all over the world establish their work stations because of the availability of cheap labour. It is in this place where the unaccounted femicides takes place.

“In Ciudad Juarez, 913 women have been reported murdered since 2010, and 3000 women have gone missing since the mid – 1930s. In 2017 alone, 86 femicides were reported, up 34% on 2016. Many now see this as an uncontrolled pandemic in the city and a central issue for social justice and human rights in Mexico.” (María López Web)

In 2666 Bolano has presented similar instances. Bolano wanted to publish each chapter of the novel 2666 as a separate novel. In fact, “The part about the crimes”, would have been a perfect novel by itself. “This happened in 1993. January 1993. From then on, the killings of woman began to be counted. But it’s likely there had been other deaths before. The name of the first victim was Esperanza Gomez Saldana and she was thirteen. Maybe for the sake of convenience, may be because she was the first to be killed in 1993, she heads the list.” (pp 353)

All the five parts of the novel, “The Part about the Critics”, “The Part about Amalfitano”, “The Part about Fate”, “The part about the Crimes” and “The Part about Archimboldi”, and all the principal characters like the critics Jean-Claude Pelletier, Piero Morini, Manual Espinoza and Liz Norton who search the elusive novelist Benno von Archimboldi, Oscar Amalfitano (professor), Oscar Fate (journalist), Klaus Hass (femicide suspect), all revolve around the Sonora desert.

In *The Savage Detectives* the protagonists Lima, Belano and a prostitute named Lupe run to the Sonora desert in order to escape from the pimp Alberto and a corrupt Mexican Cop. The visceral realists who are against neo-liberalization are fervently trying to escape from the corrupt cop and the pimp who commodifies the female body, representatives of neo-liberalism. A thorough reading of the chosen texts and

the historical events and instances happening through the world only prove that neo-liberalism is driving man towards destruction, savagery and death.

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