

Alejo Carpentier that great Cuban Novelist once commented that Latin American literature is so fascinating because we live in countries where prodigy has become a everyday experience. Annoyed at critics who ~~have~~ ^{praised} ~~praised~~ Garcia Marquez Nobel Literature Laureate ~~in~~ (1982) for his imaginative writing, the Colombian ~~writer~~ ^{author} ~~reply~~ responded that he was really a journalist who described what went on about as faithfully as possible. Both writers thereby underline what one of the basic perceptions of Latin American reality which we emigres find so exhilarating. The contrasts, the interlacing of myth with reality, of philosophy with ~~radio~~ ^{Radio} ~~talk~~ ^{talk} shows, of politics with religion and whose political spectrum goes from Fidel Castro across the board of ideology to Augusto Pinochet ~~proposes~~ ^{proposes} acoustions one to live with the unpredictable.

However as I sat last week in a Buenos Aires courtroom where three former Presidents and some six other high-ranking military officers are being tried for crimes which go from ^{political} ~~murder~~ to illegal arrests & the torture of thousands of people, I really had to knock my head ~~at~~ ^{several} ~~few~~ times to convince myself it was not all a ~~some~~ dream. For once ~~that~~ ^{Latin} ~~Justice~~ ^{Justice} was making a come-back or really her debut in modern Argentina and indeed it is probably the first time since the Spanish Rebellion revolted against Spanish Rule some 150 years ago that military dictators are being held accountable.

ble for these crimes. Public trials are practically unknown in this part of the world and ~~most of all~~ indeed ~~are~~ ^{are} anywhere a public trial where the accused ~~were~~ are former Presidents of the country.

How this trial came about? Is it really a farce? Will they repeat themselves in other countries?

This historic trial whose similitude with the Tokyo and Nuremberg Tribunals some 40 years is unmistakable is the final move which Alfonsín, Argentine ^{elect} ~~former~~ President had to make in the intricate chessboard of returning to democratic rule and putting the military in their place.

The human Rights movement had become powerful in protesting thousands of 'disappeared' under the military regime as people were furious at the ~~past~~ officers handling of the Marín - Falkland affair. Raúl Alfonsín had scarcely seated himself in the Presidential Chair when he issued a decree charging the ~~the~~ former military junta members with numerous ~~at~~ crimes.

However he put one reservation - they would be tried by a military & not civilian Tribunal. Time was also ~~allowed~~, ^{graciously} allowed if they wished to leave the country ~~and~~ and just one chief General Enrique Massera

known as Sam in Argentine torture centres. He was for many years the nexus between the High Command and the death squads. As former president of Argentina's National petroleum company he had little problem getting to Venezuela, where he is reported still to be.

The rest - Vilela, Viola, Galtieri, Meneses & the other less known sat it out in Buenos Aires. The Argentine Parliament approved Alfonsín's action & indicated that the only way the civilian courts could ~~be~~ judge the military would be on appeal.

The military tribunal was obviously reluctant to sit in judgment on their ~~other~~ colleagues and finally after much nudging came to its sentence. The accused were all innocent & in fact national heroes. The case ~~of~~ against them was totally prefabricated as the families of the disappeared had supposedly conspired in their testimonies.

The public outcry at the military's verdict ~~was~~ was tremendous so the attorney lodged the case against ~~an~~ appeal to the Criminal appeal Court -

This court in fact has its own peculiarities. It is formed by 6 judges who reside in the chamber. The procedure is oral & public. These judges had been quietly appointed by the supreme court (during

the two years previous

some day they may have to judge the military. Their average age is 40 years and had been chosen both for their competence & independence of political influence.

or prosecution

The attorney's task fell to Cesar Strassera a little known legal specialist but has since carved himself in the star of the trial. His legal strategy, his handling of witnesses, his wit and absolute dedication has meant this gay suited man is welcomed as a public hero wherever he goes.

His task is no easy one. He has to prove to the court beyond reasonable doubt the participation of the accused in the crimes they are charged with. The military largely used the tactic of 'disappearing' political opponents in order to guarantee ~~their~~ ^{their} anonymity. ~~It is a~~ ^{It is a} ~~very~~ ^{very} ~~difficult~~ ^{difficult} ~~task~~ ^{task} ~~to~~ ^{to} ~~prove~~ ^{prove} ~~their~~ ^{their} ~~participation~~ ^{participation} ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~crimes~~ ^{crimes}.

so it is normally very difficult to know what has happened.

Strassera decided to shut that some 700 cases with numerous witnesses in each case in order to ~~show~~ ^{show} give the military no escape from their defense. Most cases ~~illustrate~~ ^{illustrate} the participation of different military groups operating over large areas of the country.

The accused have nominated some 21 defense

lawyers in all, Videla been the only ^{one} not to nominate any so he has had to content himself with a court appointed lawyer.

Their strategy has been to save their ^{own} clients' ^{name} ~~in fact~~ if ~~they~~ necessary push the responsibility over to another of the accused. In fact that line of defense has served the prosecution's case very well. It seemed at one stage the Air Force who had redeemed themselves by their performance in the Falklands might get away until ~~the~~ ~~for~~ Strassera called in some witnesses who began to speak of a country mansion that the Air Force had converted into a torture centre.

The day previous to my visit, Jimmy Carter's Human Rights Assistant Patricia Devine was in the witness box and she entered the court all the defense lawyers left to talk some coffee they alleged but it was obvious they were protesting. They are allegedly been paid thousands of dollars for their work but to date the defense's case is in total disarray.

Alejo Carpenter that great Cuban novelist ^{and} commented that in the Latin America we live with prodigality as an everyday experience ~~occurrences~~ ^{events} they totally unexpected and incredible things happen ~~something which is not conceivable in~~ ^{everyday} ~~everyday~~

Certainly last week I had to ^{much} ~~turn~~ ^{turn} my head several times ~~in~~ in order to convince myself that I wasn't dreaming as I sat in the front seats of the courtroom in Buenos Aires where ~~the~~ Nine military commanders - three of them ~~former~~ ^{under public will} presidents are ~~been~~ ^{under public will} tried. Videla, Viola and Galtieri, had all ~~devoted~~ ^{distinguished} themselves with the Presidential ~~office~~ ^{office} in ~~good~~ ^{good} ~~and~~ ^{and} ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ ~~order~~ ^{order} to ^{guarantee} protect the security of the country and the survival of western civilization.

There was some kind of divine mission which came to them in the officers' mess as they commented with their colleagues the onslaught of communists, Marxists, guerrillas, and liberals on Argentina's traditional life-style.

Armed with a fascist ~~understanding~~ ^{understanding} Revising Fascism and armed with a ~~blatant~~ ^{blatant} religion close to the middle ages ~~than~~ which served the IN ~~Director~~ ^{Director} well

The Argentine military took over the country
in 1976 and began to routinely abduct, torture
& murder anyone they considered an enemy.
It became so pathological at the end that they
decided