

MARIO VARGAS LLOSA'S THEORY OF THE NOVEL AND ITS APPLICATION IN CRITICISM

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Mario Vargas Llosa, born in Peru in 1936, is one of the contemporary Peruvian and Spanish-American novelists who elaborates a theory of his work and vocation and applies it in practice as a critic of literature. It is the objective of this paper to present a description of some of the main points in his theory and to relate them to other aesthetic theories or movements in literary criticism in order to discern some contrasts and similarities between them. Another important objective is to point out some of the problems which arise when Mario Vargas Llosa puts his theory into practice, not as a novelist, but as a critic of other novelists. Here as well a presentation of his points of view will be accompanied by contrasting commentaries and references to different schools and tendencies in Spanish-American literary criticism and history of literature.

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A NOVELIST IS BORN AND TALENT IS PRODUCED

Mario Vargas Llosa has made numerous statements about what causes a person to start writing novels. The first incitement to become a novelist is a basic feeling of conflict with the world, the novelist is a dissident, an outsider who does not accept the world as he perceives it.¹ In response to this existential situation he starts writing novels, not in order to change the world nor to change himself, but rather in order to fill the vacuums and bridge the gaps between the individual and the world, and heal the wounds that have been opened in the individual. Thus the novel makes the world richer and more complete, as well as more acceptable and bearable, and the writer may feel more at ease because the novel has made it possible to live an alternative life or alternative lives.

From a general description of what might be a common experience Vargas Llosa concludes with a particular reference to the birth of the novelist. But some people become writers and others do not. Some writers become poets, dramatists, essayists and, some, novelists. From the beginning, then, there might be some implications of hierarchies between people, between literary genres, and between sub-genres and Vargas Llosa almost always argues in favour of one type of novel.

The emphasis on the individual in relation to the world and life leads Vargas Llosa to state that novelists construct their novels from the only raw material that they possess, their personal experiences. A novelist does not invent his themes. Reality provides him with crucial experiences which are deposited in his mind like haunting evil spirits, and the writer seeks to relieve himself of them in a process of exorcism, the writing of novels. Personal experiences, "demonios", force a person to become a writer of novels.²

Writing is also seen as a process through which the writer tries to recapture past personal experiences that have turned him into what he is or feels he is. Writing is a search for the roots of dissatisfaction and an attempt to reintegrate into the society from which he feels excluded. According to Mario Vargas Llosa, the writing of *La ciudad y los perros* relieved him of the traumas created by experiences in the military college of Leoncio Prado, and the writing of *La casa verde* from the traumas left by childhood experiences in Piura and by short visits to the jungle regions of Peru.³ Writing at this stage is primarily a therapeutic process, of importance only to the novelist himself, and Vargas Llosa centres part of his poetics or aesthetics on a preoccupation with the author in a way that reminds one of Romanticism and the nineteenth century rather than of most literary criticism in our century.

The importance of personal experience excludes commitment to any other extra-artistic/extra-literary activity. Crucial experiences rule over the novelist, and his task

is to let them flow without channelling them according to moral or ideological precepts. In the type of novel championed by Vargas Llosa there is a limitation to autobiographical motivation and this factor significantly strengthens the reference to an implied hierarchy and governs or limits the function of the reader: he should read only to get to know the author. Thus the author is in complete control of the novel and the reader: they both are secondary at the service of the author himself. This attitude to the importance of the author as the only really active component in the production of meaning projects the novel as a monologue flowing from the Master's voice. The importance of rational control as well as the importance of the final message of the novel as closed coherent sense governed by authorial intention are reduced. The role of the author is that of a medium, and neither the meaning of the novel nor the consumer and realizer of this meaning, the reader, seem to exert any kind of influence on the novelist.⁴ But the novelist does not exist in a void, the reader is part of the market mechanism as a consumer and he is, in some way, included in the structure of the text.

While the first incitement to become a novelist is an unconscious compulsion governed by autobiographic circumstances, the second incitement is described as a conscious choice of vocation or profession. Writing does not bridge the gaps between the individual and the world, it does not heal the wounds, and it does not reintegrate him into the society from which he feels excluded. But exercising the literary profession or vocation, the repeated attempts at writing become a fundamental task which fills the voids and become his principal reason for being. Writing is an exclusive vocation which demands complete dedication from the novelist. Literature is his only Master.

Literature, or rather the novel cultivated by Vargas Llosa, helps him overcome the problems of the alienated individual and helps him survive, because in his writing he can be free and live what he could not live in life. Literature thus acquires a secondary but vital function: it is a secluded realm where the author can retire to lick the wounds inflicted upon him by a hostile world. This posture, it seems, borders on radical individualism and amounts to a coherent defence of the independence and the liberty of the writer in relation to ideology, morality or faith. His only commitment is, apparently, an aesthetic one, to literature, to the novel, to one particular type of novel. Some hierarchical notions now emerge with greater distinction. The *good* novelist is the one who is able to dedicate all his energy to writing a specific type of novel. Other writers, perhaps the majority of Latin-American writers, who are writing part-time and who may be engaged in political activities and who may be cultivating other sub-genres of the novel, will be classified as bad novelists. However, if the novel and its sub-genres are not only formal categories but also carriers of ideological meanings, the novelist cannot escape the ideological sense latent in formal category by formal

choice and dedication to literature.

In the Romantic vision of the writer as an inspired genius the mystique surrounding the writer and the process of writing reaches a climax. The writer is seen as a superhuman being, apart from this world, visited by mysterious muses, creating in solitude. In contrast to the idea that he is chosen by his *demonios* and forced to become a writer, Vargas Llosa states that his vocation does not depend on the muses, nor on some Holy Spirit. The vocation is chosen as a necessity, and, having accepted this necessity, the writer has to work like a peon. Talent is seen as a result of patience, willpower and a touch of madness. In discussing what is innate and what is learned, Vargas Llosa claims: "What could be termed his genius is not innate and it does not come by illumination. It is produced in front of us in a process in which human faculties like willpower and perseverance intervene decisively."⁵ To a metaphysical and idealist notion of genius, talent, inspiration and creation, he here opposes a materialist notion of art as a result of hard work, patience, willpower and perseverance. The insistence on vocation and hard work links Vargas Llosa to Flaubert, and he repeatedly refers to self-discipline and hard work in his daily routine.⁶ One of the reasons for his admiration for other writers, for example Carlos Fuentes and Julio Cortázar, is their capacity for hard work, and he comes to advocate exile, in Europe, for the Latin-American writer, because in Europe he will find a rich and intense cultural atmosphere that will stimulate him to rigorous work, and it will also enable him to reach a vaster reading public in Europe and Latin America.

In the theory of Vargas Llosa the author does not have to work with contents because they are supplied by the world through personal experience, and so, after having admitted the vocation of the writer and the necessity of hard work: with what does he have to work? The answer is that he has to work with formal problems: "Technique is the basic tool of any writer. Literature, art in general, is, fundamentally, technique, procedure, use of the word". Here, content is considered as secondary and relegated to a position in which it has little importance for the quality of the work, whereas form, the ways in which content is treated, is foregrounded and described as essential for the quality of the work. This leads Vargas Llosa to maintain that a novelist should not be called to account for his *demonios* because he does not choose them, but he should be made responsible for the manner in which he arranges the materials delivered.⁷ Here the dichotomy between form and content appears and seems to be carried to an extreme. The writer is in complete control over the formal procedures, and in his choices the author enjoys complete freedom and sovereignty. Vargas Llosa seems to limit the function and the object of literary criticism to one of formal issues only, as if he were promoting an image of the reader/critic that corresponds to a representative of the Anglo-Saxon school of New Criticism.

Is there no limit to the freedom of the author over formal procedures? On the formal level, a distinction is introduced between tradition and innovation. The distinction applies to language, which pre-exists as a system realized by the speaker. Tradition is seen as some kind of established order reaching back from the present to the past. The writer is seen moving among past and present formal possibilities for literary expression, and freedom of innovation is possibility of modifying certain traditional lines. Genius, originality and talent, the result of rigorous work, is now a formal problem in a relation between tradition and the individual writer.

Such a posture, naturally, raises many questions. One could ask if there is only one tradition or if we would have to consider several traditions. If there is only one, how did it come into existence, by what type of criteria, and selected by whom? Because there must be a selective activity behind the formation of a tradition that does not include everything. There is also the problem of historicity, if this tradition is supposed to exist regardless of history, historical constellations and change. It seems just to argue that for Vargas Llosa tradition is a selection of formal procedures from the present and the past that enables him to compose the type of novel that he is promoting and cultivating.

To answer the question of what intervenes to unite content and form, the unconscious and the conscious, the irrational and the rational, Vargas Llosa uses expressions like "the intervention of an irrational factor", "the effect of unconscious mechanisms", "the uncontrollable and spontaneous power", "intuition and imagination", and what had been explained earlier as conscious effort and hard work now appears as "the highest and most mysterious human faculty: the power of creation." This tendency to idealize the process of uniting content and form is seen in his long essay on Gabriel García Márquez in which the writer is constantly termed "creator", "supplanter of God", and the final product is referred to as "creation".⁸

Again we have a Romantic notion of the writer and the process of writing. Coleridge explained this process by insisting on "imagination" which, as opposed to "fantasy" gave "organical" as opposed to "mechanical" unity. Benedetto Croce explained the process by referring to "intuition" that combined both elements, form and content, in an inseparable unity, which, in his opinion, did away with the dichotomy and its necessity. When Vargas Llosa refers to "imagination" and "intuition", he evokes Romantic and idealist traditions in aesthetic theory, which contrast sharply with his own markedly materialist concept of the writer as worker and producer. His attitude to aesthetic tradition is comparable to his attitude to literary tradition: they are pre-existing systems that co-exist synchronically and the writer and theoretician are seen to move freely and eclectically, selecting the elements that they find necessary for the construction of a theory.

Against this idealization and mystification of the process of uniting form and content, it seems valid to argue that content and form must ultimately be united and serve to realize the author's ideal of the novel. If the various categories of the novel can be said to carry ideological meanings, then the category chosen by a given author is not "innocent" and "untainted" by ideology. Then the unifying factor of the author's world-view is decisive in his choice of novel. My argument is that the category chosen among existing categories is of primary interest in the formation of the novel and the problem is different from the one posed by Georg Lukács: "What determines the style of a given work of art? How does the intention determine the form?... It is the view of the world, the ideology or *weltanschauung* (sic.) underlying a writer's work that counts. And it is the writer's attempt to reproduce this view of the world which constitutes his intention and is the formative principle underlying the style of a given piece of writing". My argument is more "formalist" in the sense that I stress that the category or sub-genre, the "tradition" (to use Vargas Llosa's expression), chosen by the author, may intervene as a "mediator" between original intention and final product and thus "reveal" not only a unitary and coherent organic whole, but also "what the author did not want to say". In my view, the role of the reader is a much more active and creative one than that proposed by both Vargas Llosa and by Georg Lukács.⁹

THE TOTAL NOVEL

In addition to his many statements on the making and the role of the novelist, Vargas Llosa also gives much thought to the final product, the novel itself. In his essays, interviews and other statements he repeatedly uses the concept of the "total novel".

In an article, he refers to two categories of novels, the "total" and the "totalitarian". The former gives us the impression of "taking in all reality, of discovering reality in its most hidden manifestations". The most representative writers of this category are Cervantes, Balzac and Tolstoy. The second type "universalizes" one aspect of life and reduces reality to one of its innumerable components/ingredients, and becomes "unilateral" or "partial". Kafka, Sartre and Robbe-Grillet are representatives of this category. The first kind of novelist, according to Vargas Llosa, is not interested in "serving a society or a revolution", they are rather at the service of the writer.

Vargas Llosa opts for the first category, and makes of this an elaborate standard for his own novel. He is particularly interested in the idea of inclusiveness, and the ideal is "to write a book that embraces the totality of reality and appears to be, like reality, inexhaustible." The idea is to "compete" with reality, to incorporate everything that exists in man's life and fantasy, and give the novel status as a "parallel crea-

tion", as multiple as reality itself. The continuing insistence on quantity enables him to maintain that no theme is unsuitable for the novel, and he likens the writer to the "vulture that feeds on social carrion". In this concept of reality, there is no seeming division between objectivity and subjectivity, between external and internal reality. They are both regarded as inseparable components of reality, and this is what the novelist tries to capture in all its facets. The result should be a novel that is "fantastic", "historical", "military", "social", "erotic", "psychological", a "verbal object that communicates the same impression of plurality as reality". And this is "total realism".

It seems just to argue that Vargas Llosa here presents restatements of ideas stated by other critics on the realist novel, e.g. Georg Lukács. If the idea is to bring the concept of "mimesis" to its extreme in order that art should represent "nature" completely, without any selection or ordering, then the concept of realism needs to be redefined. In his use of the metaphor of the writer as a vulture that feeds on social carrion Vargas Llosa refrains from any kind of specification, leaving the writer free to decide on what or where is the "social carrion" that he wants to feed on. On his listing of ingredients that belong in his "total novel" he makes use of some of the terms that are normally employed in definitions of various possible sub-genres of the Spanish-American novel. But he then goes on to "reverse" these terms and employ them in his definition of reality, as "not less or more than reality". Problematic categories from the history of literature are intended to hold water in a definition of reality. An important implication of Vargas Llosa's view is an argument against the purity of genre and for a mixture of a great number of sub-genres. An argument that seems to be about content is really an argument about literary form, or "tradition" in Vargas Llosa. The "total novel" can, then, be understood as a combination of "partial novels", and thus the concept of "totality" in Vargas Llosa seems to be different from the one used by Lukács: "The ideal of totality in art can never, of course, be more than a guiding principle, applied to a particular section of life; it can never be more than an approximation to totality." The observation made by Lukács can also be made to bear on Vargas Llosa in that different elements, manifestations or ingredients in reality have to be presented in a novel by a narrator, from a perspective, and he might find difficulties in presenting all with the same kind of justice or completeness.¹⁰

THE AUTONOMOUS NOVEL

The insistence on the "total novel" is balanced in articles and essays by an equal insistence on the "autonomous novel". The quality of the novel does not depend on whether it expresses external events in a truthful way, but rather on its interior

coherence, on the way men and acts adapt to the laws peculiar of the novel as an autonomous creation. The novel is "life", an "organism", a "living body". It develops and is transformed according to its own interior mechanisms and is the literary genre that is most suited to offer the perspective of an "autonomous universe". The autonomy of the novel is elaborated by the novelist, and the treatment of time is important in achieving this effect. When the temporal succession is reorganized or reordered by the novelist, this serves to furnish the novel with a time of its own, different from real time. Circularity is then presented as the time of the autonomous novel because it renders a sense of a self-sufficient entity, of "sovereign reality". Circularity is an important formal factor in creating the "autonomous novel", but it always has to develop inside a "rigid structure". This "rigid structure" is not defined in his articles and essays, but seems to refer to the "structure" of the category chosen by the author, i.e. the sub-genre of the novel. Another important requirement for the realization of the "autonomous novel" is that the author disappear from the work. There is a necessity, then, to create narrative procedures or techniques that serve to eliminate and rub out the traces of the creator. The key words for the narrative techniques are: "objective", "impersonal", "disinterested", "impartial" and "neutral".¹¹

When Vargas Llosa apparently refers in a general way to "all novels", "the novel" and "the realists", he is actually speaking of the genre of the novel cultivated and advocated by himself. He does not show any interest in or respect for any other development in the novel, any other tradition in narrative literature. There is a certain lack of flexibility in the presentation of only *one* novel as the *good* novel. From this point of departure, strong hierarchies are established, and they will govern his practice as a reader of Spanish-American novels. But other sub-genres of the novel also have their "laws", their "life", their "organism", and the question of literary taste is tinged with great doses of relativity and this also applies to "realists" different from Vargas Llosa.

It is also important to try to observe what kind of autonomy it is that Vargas Llosa is seeking. The French writer, Gustave Flaubert, once wrote that "... what I should like to do is to write a book about nothing, a book with no reference to anything outside itself, which would stand on its own by the inner strength of its style, just as the earth holds itself without support in space, a book which would have hardly any subject, or at any rate one that is barely perceptible, if that were possible."¹²

The Anglo-Saxon school of "New Criticism", bracketed the literary text off from the novelist and from society and offered the text to an intimate kind of communication with a postulated perceptive reader who should indulge in the pleasure of "close reading" in order to incorporate all its elements into a coherent reading of its organic unity. Vargas Llosa has a different view. He definitely excludes the reader, consider-

ing him a factor of no importance to his theory. He apparently includes society through his notion of the "total novel", but he also tries to eliminate its importance with the notion of the "autonomous novel". He both advocates the disappearance of the author, and firmly anchors the motivation and his fundamental themes in personal experiences. His defence of the "autonomous novel" is, in reality, an ardent defence of the liberty of the author, the "vulture that feeds on social carrion". This is what gives unity to all the complexities of contradictions, metaphors, and paradoxes found in articles and essays, and gives coherence to the apparent discrepancies between the profession of the writer and socio-political practice, a discussion that surfaced in the current debate between Vargas Llosa and Gunther Grass, about "literatura y compromiso" ("literature and political engagement").

THE ADDED ELEMENT

The apparent opposition between "total novel" and "autonomous novel" may be regarded as a reformulation of the opposition between content and form. The question is now how the two components are united in the novel as a work of literature.

At least since 1964, Vargas Llosa has been referring to what we may call "the implied author" as a "presence" in the novel. Since 1971, moreover, he seems to have grown more and more specific in his declarations, and in some articles published in 1985, as well as in a lecture in Lima in December 1985, he attaches much significance to this point. In the novel defined as "parallel creation", there is a "God", a "Creator", and this entity, it is stated, is present in all parts of the novel but visible in none. This is also what is alluded to in his recurrent metaphor of the writer as a "stand-in" for God. In order to become a realist novel of the type that Vargas Llosa advocates, the novel must be different from a historical or journalistic description of the world. The literary version will always be different from its model, because it is an interpretation as much as a description.

In order to describe this relationship between the novelist and his novel, Vargas Llosa introduces the notion of the "added element". It is this element which elevates the novel to a "work of creation", and this is where the originality of the novelist is to be located. It consists, he states, in an "order", a "coherence", a "system", a "point of view", which renders complex reality simple and comprehensible. It has to do with content, then, but this statement is balanced by constant references to narrative techniques. The writer always expresses his meanings, but they will always be "disfigured", masked by an appearance of objectivity achieved through technique.

The contrast between the "autonomous novel" and the "added element" is a comment on the dilemma between the theory and the practice of realism in the novel.

In his description of the "objective" and "impersonal" novel he emphasizes the necessity of the author's disappearing from the literary universe, whereas in his discussion of the "added element" he defends the presence, in this universe, of the ordering principle of the "implied author". He does not try to present the novel as "unmediated reality", but he tries hard to mask the mediation and to communicate it, as it were, "through the back door", in a way which might be described, with Wayne C. Booth, as "subjectivism encouraged by impersonal techniques."

Also important at this point is the idea that the writer must not be ideologically or politically committed in his novel. It may be difficult to understand how the writer, in his "added element" can manage to suspend his own, personal commitments as a living historical being. Vargas Llosa might have encouraged the reader to identify the autobiographic elements deposited in the texts as residues of personal "evil spirits", and he might have tried to discourage any attempt at defining ideological attitudes and postures implicit in the texts. Vargas Llosa, however, emerges as a non-committed writer in the sense that he does not indicate any direct solutions to the problems that he raises, and he does not adhere openly to any political group or organization in his novels. But he does claim extreme freedom and independence for the writer, giving him the role of "seer" and "prophet", and a "God" standing above his fellow beings.

While defending the theory of objectivity in the novel, in a traditional sense on the technical level, Vargas Llosa rejects the results when this theory is carried further by the representatives of the French New Novel. These, especially Alain Robbe-Grillet and Nathalie Sarraute, are rejected for being too objective, a development that he is afraid might result in "formalism". Worse off, still, are other realist writers who cultivate other sub-genres of the novel and who tend to be ideologically and politically committed in a much more explicit way.¹³

THE PRESENCE OF THE READER

The reader has been assigned different positions by different schools of thought. The reader may be considered as important as the author in parts of contemporary reception theory. The reader is a necessary factor in the establishment of the meaning of the novel, in an active and creative process in which not only the conscious intentions expressed by the author come into play, but also all kinds of unconscious, unintended meanings inherent in the text. There is further no *one* reader, but many readers who are conditioned socially, politically and historically, by the context in which they live.

Whether the writer intends it or not, it is possible to trace in the text some image or other of the projected or "implied reader" deposited by the language and the techniques employed in the text: the imaginary person towards whom the writer directs his work even if he tries to minimize his importance like Vargas Llosa has often done. There is an opposition between the little interest Vargas Llosa has shown in this factor in theory, and the strong presence of an expected reader, the "implied reader" in his novels.

Vargas Llosa sometimes refers to his own taste in his selection of novels and films, and he emphasizes that the novelists that he rereads are not those who ask him to be an admirer from a distance. They are, rather, those who captivate him and install him in their world and thus allow him to discover his own world. In novels and in films, he has to believe in the stories, and he has to play the game, if not, they do not interest him. This game is possible, in his opinion, by persuasion and collaboration, and there is a strong desire for illusion through power of persuasion. He therefore sometimes maintains that the only criterion for authenticity and truth in fiction is its power of convincing the reader. The power of persuasion, he says, depends on technique, not on what is told but how it is told. Convincing the reader of the possibility and the truth of what is narrated is, then, a formal problem, and the reader must be so enchanted by this power of persuasion that he abandons his conscious judgement and plunges himself into fiction.

Although Vargas Llosa has repeatedly stated that he has no interest in the reader of his novels, that he does not think about him, he has sometimes found it necessary to clarify his position. He then stresses the necessity of the reader's "complicity" to get him to "believe in a different world", and he also underlines some kind of didactic function when stating that the readers are going to "discover their own faces, the vices and defects and also the beauty and success created in the world, and, accordingly, they can proceed to transform or modify the world, they can act." In this case, the writer is a "subversive agitator" who prevents the reader from "succumbing to self-satisfaction" and "spiritual paralysis" and he rather helps them to come to a "closer understanding of and to formulate their own contradictions, bitterness and rebellion."

Again, the emphasis might be said to be more on the function of the author than on that of the reader. The writer is the "visionary", the "seer", the "prophet", who is able to assist the reader in discovering and defining himself, the world, and possible action. There is a change, then, from the emphasis of writing as therapy for the individual writer, to writing as prophecy for the readers. The function of the writer is presented as active, creative, important, valuable and rebellious in complete freedom and independence. The image of the reader is that of a passive receiver of some for-

mulated message that is delivered and has to be decoded. His only function is to decipher the message intended by the writer and then, if he does so properly, be able to proceed to some kind of action. There is no mention here of the fact that a novel might be a contradictory, paradoxical and confusing document, open to a variety of discrepant readings independent of authorial intentions. Vargas Llosa's insistence on the importance of the way in which something is narrated above what is narrated and the moral quality of what is narrated, reveals a great confidence in the writer's power of manipulation in the work of fiction. Imagine, however, a reader as "competent" as the author himself. They would come to constitute a "guild" of competent author-readers, some kind of "superreaders" not comparable to other "pedestrian" or normal readers of literature, and this is what might have happened in the formation of the famous "boom" in the Spanish-American narrative in the early sixties. There is again a strong implication of hierarchy of competency in this presentation of the function of the reader.

There is a contrast between his conscious description of the function of the reader, and the image of the "implied reader" deposited in some of the novels by Vargas Llosa, for example *La ciudad y los perros*, *La casa verde*, *Los cachorros*, and *Conversación en la Catedral*. Most critics point to the feeling of freedom and independence of the novels and most regard this "open function" as a positive quality and not as a weakness. This "openness" is somewhat narrowed in from *Pantaleón y las visitadoras* and this kind of narrowing in reaches a climax with *Historia de Mayta*.¹⁴

OTHER CRITICS' ATTITUDES TO VARGAS LLOSA'S THEORY OF THE NOVEL

Generally speaking, the thoughts and ideas presented by Vargas Llosa did not attract special attention until the publication of Oviedo's study of Vargas Llosa in 1971 where the subtitle, "la invención de una realidad", is a central metaphor in Vargas Llosa's aesthetics. Oviedo presents a short description of Vargas Llosa's theory of the novel, and afterwards proceeds to apply it, in an uncritical fashion, in his description and evaluation of the novels written by the Peruvian author up to 1969. Until 1971 the metaphors and other figurative language used by Vargas Llosa were accepted by the great majority of critics and readers in their most "positive" signification, i.e., in a "progressive" or "radical" interpretation. The only exception to this rule, as far as I know, was the criticism expressed by the *Narración*-group in Lima.

In 1968, after the Soviet invasion in Czechoslovakia, Vargas Llosa expressed his disagreement with Fidel Castro. In the period between 1968 and 1971 the so-called "Padilla-case" caused confusion inside and outside Cuba, and it was brought to a

head in 1971 with the imprisonment of Padilla. Together with many other intellectuals Vargas Llosa signed an open letter to Fidel Castro, published in *Le Monde*, 9 April 1971. Padilla was released from prison on 27 April when he also delivered his speech of self-criticism at the UNEAC (The Cuban Association of Writers and Artists). This again caused the intellectuals in Paris to publish an open letter to Fidel Castro and to Vargas Llosa's breaking off relations with Cuba. In the period 1968-1971, the debate on the role of the intellectual in society was central, in and outside Cuba, and Vargas Llosa was very often a victim of attacks, even physical attacks, from persons who gave their approval to Fidel Castro and his politics.¹⁵

Among literary critics, especially Angel Rama and Carlos Rincón, a change in attitude to Vargas Llosa may be observed in 1971-72. They discuss the problems of critical principles in two long essays written by Vargas Llosa before 1971, on *Tirant lo Blanc* and on Gabriel García Márquez, where they make some valid critical points. In spite of their valuable observations and clarifications, however, the articles are harsh, unfriendly and antagonistic, conditioned, no doubt, by the "climate" created by the "Padilla-case".

In the seventies, after the publication of Vargas Llosa's essay on Flaubert, Carlos Peregrín Otero and Malva E. Filer seem to follow the path opened by José Miguel Oviedo. They present a positive and sympathetic survey of the main points of his theories and of the theory applied to some of the favourite novelists and novels selected by Vargas Llosa.¹⁶

The harshness of adverse criticism, and the hostile climate of opinion against Vargas Llosa may indicate some irritation and even surprise on the part of the observers and critics who turned against him. However clear and simple the theory of the novel presented by Vargas Llosa might appear, as for example when outlined by José Miguel Oviedo, the stylistic procedures employed like contradiction, paradox, metaphor, etc., serve, to create a great space for ambiguity which leaves the reader in a need for interpretation and clarification, and, more interestingly, they leave the author as well as the critics with a great space of liberty for changing interpretations with changing circumstances, a space where critics could play their interpretative games. My impression is that the ideas and opinions expressed by Vargas Llosa in the material referred in this paper, form a coherent view of the writer and the position of the intellectual in relation to society, in the sense that they present, through repetition, reformulation, contradiction, paradox, metaphor, ambivalence and ambiguity, a coherent defence of the freedom and independence of the writer in relation to politics, morality and faith. Since this liberty and independence is central, the choice of literary categories or forms is a choice conditioned by the artist's need for optimal realization of the liberty argued for in theory.¹⁷

VARGAS LLOSA AS CRITIC OF SPANISH AMERICAN FICTION

There exists a large body of critical appraisal of Vargas Llosa's novels and several critics refer to and describe his theory of the novel. What is common to Rincón, Rama, Filer and Peregrín Otero is the fact that they concentrate on essays written by Mario Vargas Llosa on some of his favourite novels/authors who form part of Vargas Llosa's "tradition" and are some of the "selected few" worthy of critical acclaim. The essays are not exactly literary criticism. They are, rather, practical exercises in the application of personal theory to works by other authors, and, as much, they reveal the applicability and the weaknesses latent in the theory. Of great interest, however, for a clarification of Vargas Llosa's theories as well as his critical practice are the essays where he applies his aesthetics to authors and novels other than the chosen few.

What is interesting and stimulating in theory becomes a problematic critical practice when Vargas Llosa's hierarchies of values become patent and explicit in criticism. These critical attitudes may be observed in his literary essays and book reviews of the sixties and seventies and they surface again in the eighties in his debate with Gunther Grass which started at the Pen Club meeting in January 1986. At the center of the critical problems we may observe in these statements are the issues that emerged in the debate on the role of the intellectual in society in the period 1968-71.¹⁸

In the theory Vargas Llosa shows a great understanding for literary forms and expressions, while in his practice as a critic of Spanish-American novels he takes an exclusivist stand and rejects many of the literary forms which collaborate in the creation of variety and complexity. When reading and evaluating contemporary Spanish-American narrative literature, Vargas Llosa bases his method on exclusion, not on inclusion, and this exclusiveness is anchored in the presupposition that his own kind of novel is the "good" one, often referred to as "Literature", "the novel", "Art", etc., and from this top of the pyramid hierarchies are constructed.

In an article titled "Primitives and Creators", the authors termed "creators" escape criticism and are rather treated in an apologetic, always sympathetic and exclusively understanding manner, and their positive qualities are highly praised. These are the "selected few" from different Spanish-American countries and they are presented as the makers of a Spanish-American "tradition" in which Vargas Llosa includes very few and from which he excludes many. The only Peruvian novelist worthy of inclusion is José María Arguedas (1911-69), but the critic's acclaim is mainly based on *Los ríos profundos*. In his longest essay so far, on García Márquez, we can observe Vargas Llosa at work as critic of one of the "selected few". Here we may observe the novelist at work reading his ideas, ideals and norms into the work of the Colom-

bian author, finding his own image of the *good* novelist and the *good* novel reflected in the short stories and novels published by García Márquez. Vargas Llosa acts according to some implicit norms or standards for the "good reader", and this ideal seems to be a "submissive reader" who capitulates to the novel and gets submerged in the process of reading as an experience similar to the contemplation of the universe and of the creative power of God. The serious problem in this type of literary experience and literary appreciation is that it may turn out to be impressionist and subjective, even if it be dressed in some form of critical metalanguage that is chosen eclectically from a great variety of schools of literary criticism.¹⁹

The "creators" have been selected from among a multitude of novelists and writers who have emerged at different points of time, in different countries, in various genres and sub-genres, with personal styles and intentions that have called for attention and interest from literary critics and historians from Spanish America and from the rest of the world. A short article in a literary review cannot, of course, be expected to include everything. The exclusion from Vargas Llosa's canon, however, may seem patriarchally unjust, since he does not include one contemporary Spanish-American woman writer among the ones deserving positive judgement.

In "Primitives and Creators", Vargas Llosa presents his vision of the development of the Spanish-American Novel from José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi (Mexico, 1776-1827), by Jorge Isaacs (Colombia, 1837-1895), to Alberto Blest Gana (Chile, 1830-1920), and Ricardo Palma (Peru, 1833-1919). Vargas Llosa characterizes their work as a "derivative phenomenon", and his main objections are formal in that the novels have not "enough power of verbal persuasion to strike the reader as an autonomous creation", and "lack a point of view of their own". Therefore they "tell us more about what the author have read than about what he saw, more about the cultural vacuums of a society than about its concrete problems". And they are negative comments, given Vargas Llosa's point of departure that "all novels are autobiographical" and stem from personal "evil spirits". He disregards, however, the important question of genre and sub-genre as well as the situation of the writers in the socio-economic structures of their countries at the time. A European literary critic, Jean Franco, has characterized the situation of Spanish America by 1830 as "disastrous": "nearly every part of the sub-continent presented a spectacle of civil war, violence or dictatorship", and this led to the few writers and intellectuals being "either tossed to one side or forced into battle. Complaints that the pursuit of art was impossible abound in the early nineteenth century." It is necessary to see the responsibility of the individual writer/intellectual in a wider context. It is also necessary to emphasize that one of Vargas Llosa's conditions for the possibility of "good" novels, the writer's freedom to choose writing as his "vocation" and dedicate all his energy and life to cultivating literature, is simply not there for most writers in the

period. It was not until the beginning of our century, with the *Modernismo* movement, that we can notice the beginning of a possible emancipation of writers aiming at establishing a "guild" of professionals claiming social and political recognition and economic remuneration and independence.²⁰

Equally problematic is Vargas Llosa's account of a long series of Spanish-American novelists from the end of the nineteenth century and well into our own. Their works are labeled "primitive", and again the objections are chiefly of a formal character, as for instance in the comment, "the author interferes and ventures his opinions among the characters paying no heed to the notion of objectivity in fiction and thereby trampling (sic.) on the varied points of view" and, therefore, "the author does not attempt to show as much as to demonstrate."

But the claim for the "objective novel" is, historically, a relatively recent development and there have been, historically, different tendencies and periods in the development of Spanish-American literature, as normally understood and described for example by Fernando Alegría. The authors treated by Vargas Llosa as "primitives" have claimed, and continue to claim, interest in their own right, regardless of the important "boom" in Spanish-American fiction from about 1960. They, too, were part of a "boom" in their own period, nationally and internationally, and the new Spanish-American novel, represented among others by Vargas Llosa and his "selected few", is, in this perspective, one of the latest "booms" in a series of "booms" in the Spanish-American novel, experienced at different moments in the history of Spanish-American culture and literature.²¹

Another problem not directly mentioned by Vargas Llosa, is the question of the existence, in Spanish America, of national literatures. To describe the development of the Latin-American novel, or part of it, as if it were one coherent whole, is a problematic posture. It poses innumerable questions of theory and methodology to the student of literature. In particular, it presents a problem when critics claim the existence of a Chilean, Peruvian, Colombian and Mexican literature, and even more so with those who insist on the existence of Mexican or Peruvian *literatures*, because they observe the existence of *nations*, not *one* nation, inside the boundaries of these countries. It is also a posture which collides with the concepts of "Mexicanidad", "Argentinidad", etc., where the national literatures are important to the establishing of an image of national characteristics different from other nations and cultures.

Although most of the criticism of the "primitive" novel seem to be formal and aesthetic, Vargas Llosa also argues with the content of the novels. In reality we meet another kind of exclusion, the exclusion of the "committed" novel and the "committed" novelist, and especially, "socialist realism". Militant revolutionaries and revolutionary leaders, he said in Paris in 1970, think that a writer can transport his

political convictions in a coherent and logical form to his works of literature, and they, therefore, propose certain rules and norms for artistic and literary creation. These rules and norms, according to Vargas Llosa, pretend to eliminate spontaneity in literary creation, "the factor that may intervene and that may contradict orthodox revolutionary ideas about progress and change." "Socialist realism" is, in his opinion, an example of the intention to resolve the problem of the possible divorce between the man of the left and the writer and to establish unity between the two. He also thinks that the results, in the case of "socialist realism", have been deplorable.²²

We have observed earlier how Vargas Llosa establishes his set of flexible "rules" and "norms" for his own literary production. As a critic of other novelists his "rules" and "norms" give no room for relativity or flexibility, and he does not concede any quality or value to the sub-genres he rejects. In this kind of criticism there is a dogmatic rejection of the totality of a long serie of novelists and novels in Spanish America and elsewhere, and Vargas Llosa shows no inclination to consider the possibility that "socialist realism" may be a tendency in a process of evolution over some period of time.

The opposition between content-criticism and formal criticism is also present in Vargas Llosa's rejection of another sub-genre of the novel that he calls the "pseudo-novel". These are "folkloric" or "pedagogical" novels which pretend to be an "objective testimony" of reality. These are not regarded as "literature" because they lack the "added element" that gives the work autonomy, its own life. The writers mentioned as representatives of this kind of works are Oscar Lewis and Miguel Barnet, and their works are, according to Vargas Llosa, valuable in a comparison with reality, but they are not "literature", they are, in fact, subordinated to reality, and this is contrary to what happens in a "work of literature". Vargas Llosa's "pseudo-novel" is the novel that is normally termed the "sociological" or "anthropological" novel. An early instance is Ricardo Pozas Arciniega, and it has been developed by Oscar Lewis, Miguel Barnet, and by writers in Peru, Bolivia and Guatemala. As far as I understand the intention in Oscar Lewis and Miguel Barnet, their main objective is to try to give an authentic representation of and by the people involved in the experiment. Thus the "added element", to adopt for a minute the term of Vargas Llosa, does not belong to the anthropologist or sociologist. He "retires", so to speak, and leaves the field free to the narrator who can "colour" the narration with his or her vision of the world, of man, and of literature, or with the absence of such visions. It may be, therefore, a valuable and interesting sub-genre in a continent where so many groups of people have been and are separated from the literary institution. This sub-genre has also been treated in more positive terms, by literary historians and critics, and Seymour Menton maintains that at least two books by Miguel Barnet have been

as important for the development of the Cuban novel as the works of José Lezama Lima.²³

Vargas Llosa seems, then, to leave us with four kinds of realist novels: the "creative", the "derivative", the "primitive", and the "pseudo-novel". Of these categories only one is worthy of the highest acclaim and is placed at the top of a hierarchical pyramid together with their authors. Vargas Llosa's criticism rejects the heterogeneous plurality in the development and present situation of Spanish-American fiction, and, by exclusion and limitation, one sub-genre is chosen as "Literature", as "Novel" and as "Art". After having rejected the sub-genres that are normally associated with commitment, Vargas Llosa states that all "good literature" is "revolutionary" and that all "good literature" favours "change", "progress", "what is human".²⁴

There seem to be two problems of clarity in the statement. First, there is "good literature" which is, in appearance, a broad and general term but which is, in reality, limited to the "creative" novel cultivated by Vargas Llosa. Second, there is the term "revolucionario" which is a socio-political term of radical implications which refers to a radical transformation of society. Vargas Llosa, however, qualifies the term with words like "change", "progress" and "what is human" and the term "revolutionary" becomes relative and apolitical and open to redefinitions and restatements whenever the novelist might find it necessary.

There is, then, in our author, a necessity to defend his writing as "revolutionary" but, then, and more important, there is also the necessity to defend the liberty and independence of the writer, of his profession and vocation, in any kind of society possible. And Mario Vargas Llosa also claims for himself this liberty and independence when he functions as reader of literature and as literary critic. In a statement in 1972, he makes an interesting distinction between the "critical critic" and the "practising critic". The first one has to aspire to objectivity, whereas the second one, the case of the author-critic, is free to be subjective in his judgements and evaluations.²⁵ This is an interesting distinction because, while consciously reducing the importance of the "implied reader" in his novels, and consciously reducing the role of the "critical critic", he at the same time coins a term for himself, the "practising critic", and fills it with all the freedom and independence that he might need to be subjective as a reader and critic of literature. There is a strong defence of subjectivity in the writer when he acts as a critic of literature, and this, definitely, places the writer in a very special and selective position in relation to other critics and readers of literature who are relegated to other, secondary or tertiary positions in the hierarchies of readers and critics. This selected position of author, novel and writer-critic is the one Mario Vargas Llosa reserves for himself and a few other persons.

CONCLUSION

This paper has pointed to some of the central elements in Mario Vargas Llosa's theory of the novel and some of the problems in its application in criticism. When Vargas Llosa writes about his own work as a novelist and establishes a theory of his work, it is interesting and inspiring to the reader and student of literature as an introduction to his method of production, as most critics have observed. When, on the other hand, he applies his theory as a critic of the work of other authors, he finds himself in the necessity of creating at least four categories of realist novels and at least two categories of critics and two sets of norms for critical practice. He generally reserves, for the author, a maximum degree of liberty, not available to other beings, and this idea corresponds to his central idea of the author that permeates the whole corpus of his theoretical writing. From this elevated position, novelists and novels, periods and movements are evaluated in a way that serves, again, to present his favourite novels in a superior category as *good* literature. In the lack of flexibility, then, and in the subjective and impressionist criticism that follows, justice is not done to periods, genres, novelists and novels which collaborate to create and present Spanish-American fiction as heterogenous and complex traditions.

NOTES

1. Vargas Llosa uses the terms "vacíos y deficiencias", without specification or definition in articles and interviews and they may refer to any political, social, economic, religious, cultural, literary, psychologic, familiar, sexual or other problems in the relationship between the individual and the world. The terms, then, have a figurative metaphoric function and imply more than they immediately signify.
2. The metaphor of the "demonios" is undefined in articles and interviews until his discussion on Gabriel García Márquez, in 1971, when he specifies different categories of "demonios personales", "culturales", "históricos", "literarios", etc.
3. Mario Vargas Llosa (1971 A). The problems of uniting this theory with his own practice will, of course, be more noticeable in the cases of *La guerra del fin del mundo* and *Historia de Mayta*.
4. Direct statements to this effect or with similar implications have been recurrent in Vargas Llosa at least since 1966, the year of his famous "La literatura es fuego"- speech in Caracas on receiving the Rómulo Gallegos' literary prize. See E., 10 June 1966; C., no. 359, Vargas Llosa, (1970).
5. Ricardo Cano Gaviria, (1972), p. 63.
6. O., no. 177.
7. Mario Vargas Llosa, S., 27 July 1969.
8. Mario Vargas Llosa (1970), p. 82, E., 3 October 1965, E., 9 January 1966, (1971 B). Elena Poniatowska (1969), p. 51.
9. Georg Lukács (1962), p. 19.

10. Mario Vargas Llosa, E., 12 December 1965, E., 27 March 1966, E., 9 March 1965, (1971), p. 177, (1969), p. 20; G. Lukács, (1962), p. 100.
11. Mario Vargas Llosa, E., 19 and 26 August 1964, E., 29 September 1964, E., 3 October 1965 (1969), p. 20. (1971), p. 286 and pp. 264-65, R. Cano Gaviria, (1972), p. 64.
12. Gustave Flaubert in letter to L. Coulet, quoted in M. Allet, (1968), p. 242.
13. Mario Vargas Llosa, E., 1 July, 19 and 25 August and 30 October 1964, S., 27 July 1969; C., no. 372; (1969), I, p. 20, p. 23; (1971), p. 60, p. 286, pp. 564-565, p. 570; El P., 25 July 1984; "El oficio del escritor", lecture, Lima, 20 December 1985; R. Cano Gaviria (1972), p. 64, pp. 70-71. Wayne C. Booth, (1961), p. 77 pp., and p. 83.
14. Mario Vargas Llosa, Co., 27 February 1970, C., no. 359; id., E. (1970), and (1971), p. 87, E., 12 December 1965, E., 28 November 1965, C., no. 368, Casa de la Cultura del Perú (1969), p. 162; Luis Harss (1969), p. 439; Ricardo Cano Gaviria (1972), p. 103 and 105.
15. Documentation on the "Padilla-case" in Lourdes Casal (n.d.); *Vinduet*, no. 4 (1969) and nos. 3-4 (1971); Seymour Menton (1978), pp. 136-155; Guillermo Cabrera Infante (1981). This documentation shows the repercussion, on an international level, caused by the "Padilla-case".

Vargas Llosa published the first article expressing his disagreement with Fidel Castro in Lima in September 1968. In 1971, besides signing the open letters to Fidel Castro, he also exchanged correspondence with Haydee Santamaría. In a letter dated 5 April 1971, he withdraws from the board of editors of *Casa de las Américas*, where he had been a member since 1965, and he turns down an offer to visit Cuba as a lecturer in January 1972. The reply from Haydee Santamaría, dated Havana, 14 May 1971 and published in *Casa de las Américas*, no. 67, pp. 140-142, gives a good indication of the "climate" in which Vargas Llosa would find himself after spring 1971.

One example of the debate about the role of the intellectual in society is to be found in Oscar Collazos, Julio Cortázar, Mario Vargas Llosa (1970).

Antagonistic attitudes to Mario Vargas Llosa were easily observed in the conference arranged in August 1971 at Huampaní, outside Lima, by the Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana. Coinciding with the lecture delivered by Mario Vargas Llosa, a declaration of support to Fidel Castro and Cuba was discussed and approved in the conference. The same autumn, Mario Vargas Llosa was expected to assist at the Segundo Encuentro de Narradores Peruanos in Cajamarca. He had been a "star" at the first "Encuentro" in Arequipa in 1965. He did not turn up. The same autumn he got a rough and unfriendly reception at the Festival of Theatre in Manizales, Colombia.

16. José Miguel Oviedo (1971); Carlos Rincón (1971); Angel Rama (1972); Carlos Peregrín Otero (1976); Malva E. Filer (1983). Mario Vargas Llosa (1969), (1971), (1975).
17. Angvik (1972) discusses this point. It remains the only description and evaluation of this implication of "openings" in the theory.
18. Mario Vargas Llosa, C., nos. 556, 558, 562, 1979; Mario Vargas Llosa, Oscar Collazos, Julio Cortázar (1970); Q., no. 42, pp. 76-86, for a presentation of the Grass-Vargas Llosa controversy.
19. Mario Vargas Llosa, (London 1968).

The same "submissive" attitude is present in the essays on *Tirant lo Blanc* and on Flaubert. The problems of the "subjective" vs. the "objective" critic and the choice of critical terms and metalanguage in Mario Vargas Llosa has been discussed by Carlos Rincón (1971), but Rincón, in his turn, seems too

biased against Mario Vargas Llosa to be able to judge and evaluate objectively.

The "creators" were: Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986), Argentina; Alejo Carpentier (1904-1980), Cuba; Juan Carlos Onetti (1909), Uruguay; José Lezama Lima (1910-1976), Cuba; José María Arguedas (1911-1969), Perú; Julio Cortázar (1914-1984), Argentina; Juan Rulfo (1918-1986), Mexico; Carlos Fuentes (1929), Mexico; Gabriel García Márquez (1928), Colombia.

20. Mario Vargas Llosa (1968); Jean Franco (1970), pp. 12-13.

21. Fernando Alegría (1974).

Jean Franco demonstrates that many of the authors listed by Vargas Llosa escape the inclusion in one critical category only and that, instead, they have to be treated as complex structures under a variety of categories.

22. Mario Vargas Llosa (1970), and in R. Cano Gaviria (1972).

23. R. Cano Gaviria (1972), p. 52. Oscar Lewis (1959) Spanish translation, (1961), pp. 16-32; Miguel Barnet (1970), pp. 125-150; Seymour Menton (1978), p. 90.

24. R. Cano Gaviria (1972), p. 52.

25. R. Cano Gaviria (1972), pp. 22-25.

In 1971, Carlos Rincón published his article with criticism of the theoretical and methodological implications in Mario Vargas Llosa's article on *Tirant lo Blanc*. In 1972, Angel Rama published his article criticizing Mario Vargas Llosa as a literary critic on Gabriel García Márquez. It is a possibility, then, that the distinction introduced by Mario Vargas Llosa in 1972 has been provoked by strong and adverse criticism.

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Abbreviations:

C. (*Caretas*), Co. (*Correos*), El P. (*El País*), E. (*Expreso*), O. (*Oiga*), Q. (*Quehacer*), S. (*7 Días*).

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