

MARIO VARGAS LLOSA AND THE POLITICS OF LITERATURE

By

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INTRODUCTION

Mario Vargas Llosa's socio-political concerns are woven into the fabric of his creative narratives; nevertheless, the writer-politician has been clear in his assertion that the creative process must remain independent of political agendas. Throughout more than a half-century of writing, therefore, Vargas Llosa has struggled to reconcile his views on literary creation and political activism. His outspoken nature and world renown as a writer has produced an impressive corpus of criticism on both his literature and his political activities. Distinct from studies that address political themes in his writing, this investigation approaches the topic from a new perspective. In my dissertation, I evaluate Vargas Llosa's extensive literary *oeuvre* with the intent of comprehending the evolution of the writer's concept of literature from revolutionary agent to keeper of cultural memory. Vargas Llosa's literature is central to this process, but it becomes the means of my study and not the end. As I focus on the writer's literary theories, I argue that his earliest descriptions of literature as a rebellious instigator of revolutionary action have been replaced by more recent commentaries on literature as secondary to direct political intervention. Revisions to Vargas Llosa's views on the function of literature are both underrecognized and essential to the analysis of the novelist's past and future narratives. As scholarship has thoroughly demonstrated, Vargas Llosa based his initial concept of literature as revolution on his dedicated readings of the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. I contend through my research, however, that the closer Vargas Llosa comes to politics in his personal life, the more his literature diverts from his original notion of its function in society. Stated differently, one might conclude that his explicit political

activities, including his presidential campaign in 1990, occurred as a result of his doubts regarding the potential of literature to combat the socio-political abuses that he witnessed throughout his life. Further disappointments with the political process also caused the novelist to adopt a pessimistic view regarding the potential betterment of the human condition. I argue as my primary thesis, therefore, that these literary and political disillusionments resulted in a significant transition in Vargas Llosa's concept of literature from its original revolutionary character in the 1960s to a more subdued role at present as the guardian of cultural memory.

My approach to Vargas Llosa's concept of literature is unique in that it uses the Peruvian's literature, essays, and life history as the mode of comprehending his definition of literature and its role in society. Using Vargas Llosa's own metaphor for the writing process as a reverse strip tease, I "dress" the novelist's concept of the writer's vocation at various stages of his career with layers of clues that he leaves in his extensive creative *oeuvre*. As this is not a strictly literary study, I intentionally omit some important characteristics of his narratives that do not pertain to the character and socio-political influence of literature. Similarly, when relating the historical circumstances that are the background for Vargas Llosa's narratives, I am consciously selective in only choosing details that are essential to my dissertation's thesis. Given the similarities between Vargas Llosa's earliest concept of literature and the theories of Jean-Paul Sartre in the 1940s and 50s, I have further focused my commentaries by identifying four basic criteria for the evaluation of the Peruvian's novels in terms of his concept of literature. Each of these four Sartrean standards are critical to understanding Vargas Llosa's adherence to the writings of Sartre throughout the formative stages of his career, his struggles with the

supposed impotence of his literature, and his temporary departure from his creative writings to participate in professional politics. These categories include: (1) the utility of literature, (2) writing as a conscious choice, (3) committed literature as contemporary and regional, and (4) the presentation of society with its own negative image. I describe the significance of these categories in detail throughout each of the dissertation's five chapters. Though each of Vargas Llosa's novels provides evidence of his shifting concept of literature, some texts are more fundamental than others in our discussion of the writer's evolving literary theories. For this reason, I provide evaluations of all sixteen of Vargas Llosa's novels, but give them unequal attention. Through the interpretation of these texts within their respective historical, socio-political, and cultural contexts, I contend that Vargas Llosa conceptualizes his literature as a revolutionary force in the formative stages of his career, but concedes a new politics for his writing as he experiences a series of personal disillusionments that cause him to doubt and reconceptualize his own creative theories.

One of the advantages and challenges of this study is the reality that “[d]e los muchos escritores latinoamericanos del llamado ‘boom’ el que más ampliamente ha expresado sus ideas sobre la literatura, concretamente sobre el género novela, es el peruano Mario Vargas Llosa” (Standish 305). Indeed, as Myron I. Lichtblau has also noted: “[f]ew writers are as candid about their work [. . .]; even fewer are as perceptive” (ix). Vargas Llosa's literature is at once enriched and complicated by his essays on the construction and function of his own literature, including commentaries on the controversial socio-political contexts that inspired them. Throughout his extensive career, the writer-scholar has published several critical volumes on literature and politics. These

works become as essential as his novels in deciphering his evolving concept of literature. As I evaluate Vargas Llosa's commentaries on his own writing, I give credence to the author's interpretations without being bound by them. Even Vargas Llosa confesses that his self-criticisms are not to be considered definitive statements on his creative narratives. He explains:

The rational factor is something of which the writer is not totally aware. And so when a writer gives testimony about his books, he does it in a particularly subjective way. He gives a clear picture of only what he wanted to do, which rarely coincides with what he actually did. That is why a reader is sometimes in a better position to judge what a writer has done than the writer himself. (*Writer's Reality* 39)¹

I do not claim that my critical perspective is superior to the copious commentaries that Vargas Llosa has offered to his readers; however, I do challenge at times his descriptions of his own concept of literature. During some of the more distressing moments of his career as a writer and political activist, contradictions in his writings evidence a concept of literature in constant movement. Vargas Llosa in his earliest years as a novelist is perhaps best described by the words of Captain Garrido in his first novel: "Usted es joven e impulsivo. Eso no está mal, incluso puede ser una virtud" (*Ciudad* 256). Vargas Llosa's revolutionary passions informed both his literature and his political concerns. Throughout the years, however, his concept of writing has transitioned from a literature that alters the present to one that remembers the past. As I describe this evolution, several literary and political trends emerge that not only elucidate Vargas Llosa's literary theories, but also

¹ Vargas Llosa's *A Writer's Reality* (1990) provides one of the most comprehensive, retrospective looks at his writing from the 1960s to its date of publication. The essays within the collection were originally presented in English as a series of lectures at Syracuse University. Consequently, *A Writer's Reality* is one of the few works from Vargas Llosa to be published in English without a Spanish counterpart. As the work provides valuable insights regarding the construction of several of his earlier novels, I use *A Writer's Reality* as a supplemental resource throughout the dissertation, whereas most of Vargas Llosa's literary, political, and critical works are addressed in chronological order.

suggest the need to revisit his extensive creative canon with his ever-changing concept of literature as a theoretical frame.

In the first chapter, I describe the influence of Jean-Paul Sartre on Vargas Llosa's earliest concept of literature. As a university student, Vargas Llosa read Sartre with intense interest and patterned his notion of literature as a direct means to socio-political change after the French philosopher's *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (1947).² As Vargas Llosa consumed the writings of Sartre, the consequences of the Algerian War for Independence (1954–62) were also a central concern. In this foundational chapter, I read Vargas Llosa's first two novels (*La ciudad y los perros* and *La Casa Verde*) as narratives that strictly adhere to the Sartrean concept of literature. Certainly, these are two of Vargas Llosa's most canonical publications, and each served to establish a tone and style for his earlier writings. Besides an analysis of these works, I also evaluate the development of Vargas Llosa's own concept of literature, built upon but nonetheless independent from Sartre's theories. Sartre's commentaries on writing during the Algerian War explicitly expressed his disillusionments with his own concept of literature. Vargas Llosa, who based his writing upon these theories, was understandingly disenchanted with his creative mentor. I argue in this chapter, however, that this distancing from Sartre's new views ironically strengthened his resolve to adhere to the former Sartrean precepts outlined in *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*. As a conclusion to this chapter, I describe Vargas Llosa's rhetoric-intensive speech "La literatura es fuego" (1967) as a reaction to Sartre's new literary theories, which, perhaps unwittingly, defends the Frenchman's earlier conception of the writer's vocation. Several scholars have noted the similarities between Vargas

² Although I use English translations for all foreign-language works, with the exception of Spanish and Portuguese, throughout my dissertation I refer to the titles of works of literature, philosophy, and criticism in the language of original publication.

Llosa's speech and Sartre's writings from the 1940s and 50s. Resemblances aside, the Peruvian's speech has remained the standard for his independent concept of literature for decades. Though Vargas Llosa's concept of literature has diverted significantly from "La literatura es fuego," the speech nonetheless provides a concise account of his literary theories during the 1960s. Chapter one introduces the essential elements of Vargas Llosa's concept of literature in order to evaluate in subsequent chapters those events that caused him to gradually adopt literary theories that resemble the same views that he once described as Sartre's betrayal of the writer's vocation.

Chapter two addresses Vargas Llosa's passion for socialist revolution in Spanish America and, specifically, the impact of the Padilla affair on the writer's concept of literature. During the 1960s, Vargas Llosa's writings and the Spanish American intellectual scene revolved around the Cuban Revolution. Vargas Llosa's vision for Cuba included a political atmosphere wherein literature could criticize openly without socio-political restrictions. It is not surprising, therefore, that his condemnation of censorship consumed his essays and literature at the time. As a proponent of the Cuban Revolution, Vargas Llosa sought to couple his concept of literature with political structures that would ensure critical tolerance. He believed that Castro's Cuba was the means to this end, but the imprisonment of Heberto Padilla (1932–2000) in 1971 for his creative criticisms of the Revolution becomes Vargas Llosa's first serious confrontation with his own literary theories after his disillusionment with Sartre. This experience solidified Vargas Llosa's position that politics and the creative process should not converge; however, it also introduced new concerns relative to the writer's ideals for his literary vocation. Vargas Llosa became an open critic of Castro's regime in the late-1970s, but

some of his concerns surfaced even before the Padilla Affair with the novelist's most structurally complex narrative, *Conversación en La Catedral*. Published in two parts in 1969, the novel is central not only to this second chapter of my dissertation, but also to understanding the conclusion of what Efraín Kristal has described as Vargas Llosa's socialist stage. A close reading of the narrative in the context of his essays and the political atmosphere of the moment reveals that his novel corresponds intimately with the theories on literature that he articulated two years earlier in "La literatura es fuego." *Conversación en La Catedral* also addresses the author's extraliterary concerns through the severe disillusionments of several of its characters. Despite critical claims to the contrary, Vargas Llosa's exposé of Peruvian society under the Odría regime is not a suggestion that perpetual corruption is inevitable. According to his literary theories at the time, to create such dissatisfactions through his fictions served as an invitation for the reader to alter the histories depicted. Though Vargas Llosa eventually experienced disillusionments analogous to several of his protagonists in *Conversación en La Catedral*, his confidence in the possibility of a Spanish American socialist revolution was paramount in his novel's construction. Vargas Llosa's attraction to and subsequent disenchantment with the Cuban Revolution would be an early indication that his literature, while inherently rebellious, could not be a sufficient deterrent to socio-political corruption. Furthermore, the sometimes severe criticisms from Castro and others within Spanish American intellectualism caused Vargas Llosa to reconsider his basic concept of literature and his political persuasions. Superficially, Vargas Llosa's denunciation of the Cuban Revolution seems to demonstrate an uncompromised commitment to his literature. Nevertheless, the 1970s exposed his serious doubts regarding the power of the written

word to actually save the world from its own devices. I contend in this chapter that Vargas Llosa begins to question his own ideals for literature as he participates in the affairs of the Cuban Revolution. As the Padilla Affair occasioned the division of Spanish American intellectual support for Castro's Cuba, it also signified the entrance of Vargas Llosa into a new stage for his writing. Indeed, the 1970s would be a transitional decade for the novelist, one that further distanced his novels and concept of literature from their former revolutionary character.

Chapter three introduces a new trend in Vargas Llosa's writing: "intermediary" narratives that have permitted the writer to express doubts about and reconceptualize his literature through the act of writing. Following Vargas Llosa's disillusionment with the Cuban experiment, he entered a transitional period in his writing. During the 1970s, both metafiction and autobiographical writing become increasingly important to Vargas Llosa's novelistic ventures. *Pantaleón y las visitadoras* (1973) and *La tía Julia y el escribidor* (1977), two novels which were severely criticized for their departure from Vargas Llosa's former concept of literature, commenced and epitomized these new creative tendencies. Though these narratives introduce to Vargas Llosa's literature important aspects of humor and popular culture, *La guerra del fin del mundo* (1981) deviates most significantly from his Sartrean concept of literature. Criticism on the novel has been abundant; however, the significance of Vargas Llosa's first historical novel as a clear break from his former concept of literature remains undercommented. Perhaps one of the reasons for this neglect is the tendency for scholarship to only read *La guerra del fin del mundo* as compared to Euclides da Cunha's *Os sertões* (1902). Vargas Llosa wrote his novel after an intense reading of the Brazilian masterpiece; however, the novel is

markedly distinct from Cunha's account of the backlands rebellion. I also analyze the two works, but I do so from a unique perspective. More than a comparative study between the two narratives, I am interested in Vargas Llosa's experience as a *reader* and his solidarity with the writer Euclides da Cunha. Vargas Llosa's reading of *Os sertões* provided more than the raw material for what some have considered the Peruvian's masterpiece narrative. Canudos also challenged Vargas Llosa's previously held conviction that literature was revolution and that ideas could actually shape the world's character. Canudos, then, was for Vargas Llosa what Algeria was for Sartre. For this reason, *La guerra del fin del mundo* does not celebrate the potential of literature, but rather exposes its impotence amidst the violence of competing ideologies. As Vargas Llosa started to abandon his previous views on the revolutionary potential of his literature, he found that his literary theories led to perplexing Borgesian labyrinths. The writer's conundrums also introduced new literary examples, specifically the esteemed master of Croisset. Gustave Flaubert became Vargas Llosa's most significant influence during the 1970s, a period defined by literary and political crises. *La orgía perpetua* (1975), a critical study devoted to Flaubert and his most memorable temptress, was published four years after Sartre wrote his own critical work on the author of *Madame Bovary*. Chapter three considers this critical work as an essential response to Vargas Llosa's former Sartrean concept of literature. With Flaubert as a posthumous companion, Vargas Llosa was able to respond to Sartre's theories as he began to rearticulate his concept of literature. During the 1980s, Vargas Llosa's readings of Isaiah Berlin and Karl Popper, among others, likewise entrenched the novelist in political positions that he previously denounced. These transitions—both literary and political—set the stage for Vargas Llosa's entrance into the

political arena and brought him a step closer to embracing a literature of collective memory. During the 1970s, literature turned in on itself for Vargas Llosa; his self-reflective mode also resulted in a new concept of the writer's vocation. More than the end of ideologies, therefore, *La guerra del fin del mundo* and the narratives of the previous decade evidence the closure of Vargas Llosa's former concept of literature as a viable deterrent to socio-political abuses.

In chapter four, I study Vargas Llosa's subtle transition toward more direct means of socio-political reform as evident in *La guerra del fin del mundo* and culminating in his 1990 campaign for president of Peru. Certainly, Vargas Llosa's creative memoir *El pez en el agua* (1993) is indispensable to the discussion of this transition. Previous to the memoir and even his campaign, however, Vargas Llosa published four novels in less than five years. *Historia de Mayta* (1984), *¿Quién mató a Palomino Molero?* (1986), and *El hablador* (1987) each contribute to our understanding of Vargas Llosa's concept of literature. *Elogio de la madrastra* (1988) in combination with its erotic counterpart *Los cuadernos de Rigoberto* (1997) also demonstrate a new Flaubertian concept of literature inspired by the exaltation of pleasure and the transgression of societal norms. Following Vargas Llosa's election defeat to Alberto Fujimori, he did not return immediately to his creative narratives. Contrary to his previous notion of literature, Vargas Llosa wrote a memoir of his life and political campaign. Although an autobiography in essence, *El pez en el agua* also demonstrates structural techniques that are typical of his creative narratives. Vargas Llosa describes his entrance into professional politics as a moral decision that originated in an exceptional political circumstance. Though his separation from literature was impermanent, the novelist accurately concludes in *El pez en el agua*

that his concept of literature and his writing vocation could not be the same. This chapter couples Vargas Llosa's political obsessions with the vices of dictatorship. *La fiesta del Chivo* (2000) is a second historical novel that depicts the final weeks of the thirty-one-year dictatorship (1930–61) of Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic. Several critics received the narrative as the awaited return of Vargas Llosa's concept of a revolutionary literature. *La fiesta del Chivo*, however, is far from a creative recapitulation of "La literatura es fuego." Despite abundant political implications, the novel more accurately combines Vargas Llosa's former concept of literary rebellion with its new role as the guardian of cultural memory. As first demonstrated in *Lituma en los Andes* (1993), Vargas Llosa's commission to investigate the murder of eight journalists in the Andes seems to have initiated a new place for violence in his writings. Despite the writer's numerous denunciations of indiscriminate violence, Urania Cabral, one of the central protagonists in *La fiesta del Chivo*, personifies the same post-colonial theories that Frantz Fanon proposed in his theories on violent revolution. I certainly do not make absolute claims regarding Vargas Llosa's conscious use of Fanon's words in the development of his text or his protagonist; nevertheless, I do contend that the theories that Fanon describes in *Les damnés de la terre* (1961) and the attitudes of Urania are often the same. The intentionality of Vargas Llosa's use of Fanon's notion that literature finds its place in society in post-revolutionary settings is less important than the fact that one of his fiction Storytellers espouses these ideals. To claim that Vargas Llosa's theories have come full circle is imprecise, as his theories on literature are distinct from the notions that he embraced during his socialist period in the 1960s. Chapter four does suggest, however, that the post-colonial theories that Vargas Llosa criticized in Sartre's supposed betrayal

of literature could become an essential component of the writer's forthcoming commentaries in the character and function of his literature. As Urania recasts Dominican history through her role as a post-revolutionary Storyteller, she evidences a transition from her author's concept of literature as a revolutionary force to one that finds its place in a post-dictatorial circumstance, one that supports the shaping of the future as it remembers the disappointments of the past.

The conclusion of my dissertation outlines the most salient characteristics of several periods in Vargas Llosa's writing as it makes predictions for his concept of literature in the years to come. Similar to previous decades, wherein a series of "intermediary" novels focused the construction of Vargas Llosa's more substantial narratives, two of his recent novels, *El paraíso en la otra esquina* (2003) and *Travesuras de la niña mala* (2006) clearly evidence that his concept of literature continues to adapt with the character of his writings. *El paraíso en la otra esquina* demonstrates a new level of experimentation with regard to the use of time and space and *Travesuras de la niña mala* can be read as a comprehensive metaphor for the writer's concept of literature. Moreover, Vargas Llosa continues to reveal his literary preoccupations throughout critical writings on other authors, most recently Victor Hugo. Beyond literary criticism, however, the once-presidential candidate has increased significantly the number of essays dedicated to political themes, including a book-length work on his position on the Iraq War. Commentaries on Vargas Llosa's forthcoming novel on the British-born Irish nationalist Roger Casement are pure speculation at this point, but the insights that the author has provided can whet our appetites for the moment. According to Vargas Llosa, Casement's experiences in the Congo, perhaps not unlike Sartre's in Algeria, "changed

him and made him a critic of empire, and an Irish nationalist” (qtd. in Hamilos). The 74-year-old novelist was intrigued to the extent that he traveled to the Congo to conduct research for the narrative. A writer as diverse as Vargas Llosa, the most recent Nobel laureate, cannot be constrained by speculative criticism. Based upon his renewed interest in Hugo, his reflections on literature in *Travesuras de la niña mala*, and the selection of his new literary protagonist, however, we can safely anticipate that Vargas Llosa’s new narrative (*El sueño del celta* [2010]) will be a powerful major work that will reflect upon the political and literary transitions that this dissertation evaluates. Vargas Llosa’s novelistic canon has become so extensive that a comprehensive literary biography is as daunting as it is overdue. While my dissertation does not provide such a study, it does trace one of the writer’s central preoccupations—the role and function of literature—throughout more than fifty years of creative writing and political activity. Doing so not only demonstrates a clear transition from a revolutionary literature to one of cultural memory, but also substantiates several important trends in his literary endeavors that provide additional insights into Vargas Llosa’s past and future literature. “Mario Vargas Llosa has imagined an entire narrative universe” (Davis 518), and one that will undoubtedly continue to expand in the years to come. This dissertation serves to point criticism toward the future of Vargas Llosa’s creative narratives, as it also seeks to extend and even challenge the parameters of extant scholarship. Similar to Vargas Llosa’s conclusion that Sartre “había vivido todo un proceso de decepciones de sus propias ideas” (qtd. in Forgues, *Escritor* 627), I argue that Peru’s most prolific and celebrated writer has experienced a similar process.

CHAPTER I

A LITERATURE OF FIRE

A discussion of Mario Vargas Llosa's earliest novels is not complete without recognizing the influence of the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–80). During the 1950s and 60s, Sartre maintained an explosive intellectual presence in French criticism and throughout the world; certainly, the intellectual scene of Spanish America was no exception. As a student and developing writer, Vargas Llosa read Sartre with a voracious interest and his dedication to Sartrean concepts of literature in his formative years is not difficult to detect. Despite Vargas Llosa's outward praise of Sartre, however, the emerging writer became disenchanted with the established philosopher during their involvement in the Algerian War for Independence. Both were supportive of Algeria's desire for liberation from French colonialism; however, when Sartre commented that literature was impotent in the struggle for independence, Vargas Llosa experienced extreme disillusionment with his creative mentor. Though he rejected Sartre's new position on writing, this moment also served as an ironic impetus for Vargas Llosa's resolute defense of Sartre's earlier theories on the socio-political function of literature as a revolutionary force. Specifically, Vargas Llosa rearticulated Sartre's language from *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (1947) to denounce what he considered to be the Frenchman's betrayal of his own creative fictions. Consequently, Vargas Llosa solidified his own ideals for the written word as a powerful agent of change in the world. Throughout subsequent decades, however, he experienced a series of personal

disillusionments that seduced him to embrace conclusions similar to those that he openly criticized in Sartre. Vargas Llosa's attempts to reconcile his earliest concept of literature with these disillusionments did more than amend his definition of the socio-political function of his writing. The novelist's struggle with his own literary idealism also produced some of his most complex and enduring creative narratives and critical essays. The following sections outline salient points of contact between Vargas Llosa's and Sartre's concepts of literature; the former's disenchantment with Sartre's statements on writing during the Algerian War for Independence; and the development of Vargas Llosa's own concept of the writer's vocation as demonstrated in his literature, essays, speeches, and political tracks during the formative stages of his career.

Qu'est-ce que la littérature?

Perhaps no single work synthesizes Vargas Llosa's earliest concept of literature more completely than *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*. Sartre's treatise on literature is a theoretical attempt to answer the basic questions that define the function and character of writing and the creative process. Whereas the first chapters address more general questions related to (1) the role of literature in society, (2) the responsibility of both authors and readers, and (3) the impact of literature on the world, the concluding chapter is specific to its moment of publication; the essay explicates the socio-political significance of writers in 1940s and 50s. For Vargas Llosa, Sartre's words became a veritable handbook for his own theories on literature. Furthermore, the theoretical concepts proposed in *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* were those that also informed the crafting of the Peruvian's earlier novels, specifically *La ciudad y los perros* (1962), *La*

Casa Verde (1967), and *Conversación en La Catedral* (1969). Given Vargas Llosa's strict adherence to Sartre's definition of writing, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* is a suitable standard through which to measure Vargas Llosa's own concept of literature. Several aspects of Sartre's theories are applicable to a discussion of Vargas Llosa's literary and political ambitions; however, the categories described below are most central to the construction of his earliest narratives. These criteria are likewise invaluable when discussing his departure from such theories in subsequent decades. Vargas Llosa's literary influences during the 1950s and 60s were as diverse and they were abundant, but Sartre was especially critical to the development of his earliest views on literature's role in society. Consequently, I use Sartre's *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* to evaluate the development of Vargas Llosa's concept of literature as well as his creative narratives throughout five decades of prolific writing.

Similar to Vargas Llosa, Sartre sought a definition of literature that would strike a balance between his dual and at times conflictive roles as intellectual and political integrant. While Sartre was drafted into and fought as a member of the French army during World War II,¹ he was also one of France's most severe critics, especially during the Algerian War for Independence.² A philosopher, novelist, moralist, playwright,

¹ Sartre identified this period of his life as a significant turning point in relation to his writings and conception of socialist principles. Specifically, the philosopher's seven months spent as a prisoner of war in "Stalag XXI D" on the hills above Trier gave Sartre, in his own words, "a form of collective existence I hadn't had since l'Ecole Normale" (qtd. in Lévy 382). Simone de Beauvoir further comments that "his experience as a prisoner left a profound mark on him [and] taught him the meaning of solidarity" (qtd. in Lévy 383). Bernard-Henri Lévy aptly notes a distinct transition in Sartre's thinking from this point onward, one that would also dictate his new perspective on literature in *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*.

² Vargas Llosa commented: "También a Sartre le importó un camino 'desprestigiado' a Francia, durante la guerra de Argelia, acusando al Ejército francés de practicar la tortura contra los rebeldes, o ser considerado un antipatriota y un traidor por la mayoría de sus conciudadanos, cuando hizo saber que, como la lucha anti-colonial era justa, él no vacilaría en llevar 'maletas con armas' del FLN (Frente de Liberación Nacional Argelino) si se lo pedían" ("Moral").

essayist, and political activist, Sartre retains a permanent place in the pantheon of world literature and intellectual thought, and, undoubtedly, his influence on Vargas Llosa was enormous. Working as a sixteen-year-old journalist,³ Vargas Llosa was first exposed to Sartre's writings in the summer of 1952 when a coworker at *La Crónica* presented him with a copy of *La Nausée* (1938), an epistolary novel that which dramatizes Sartre's notions of existentialism (Coaguila 28). The following year, as a freshman at San Marcos University in Lima, Vargas Llosa read the Spanish translation of *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*,⁴ and, according to the novelist's own words, "Durante diez años, por lo menos, todo lo que escribí, creí y dije sobre la function de la literatura glosaba o plagiaba a este ensayo" ("Los otros" 324). Drawn to the potential of combining his political ambitions with his vocation as a writer, Vargas Llosa identified Sartre as his primary influence to the point of near obsession. Indeed, it was something more than causal association that prompted Luis Loayza to endow his friend with the nickname of "sartrecillo valiente." Beyond the profound impact of Sartre's creative narratives on Vargas Llosa's novels, the philosopher's concept of literature also directly shaped his literary theories. Despite the many studies that mention Sartre as a primary influence on Vargas Llosa, comprehensive investigations comparing their respective concepts of literature are surprisingly deficient. Scholarship has traditionally characterized Vargas Llosa's "La literatura es fuego," for example, as strictly Sartrean without adequately

³ Juan Gargurevich writes: "Para Mario Vargas Llosa, primero fue el periodismo. Así comenzó su incursión en el reino de las letras, apartándose a veces de las redacciones y los géneros periodísticos para escribir novelas de gran éxito que lo han elevado a la fama mundial" (9). Several authors associated with the Spanish American Boom were also at one time or another involved in journalistic pursuits. Specifically, Gabriel García Márquez has articulated his debt to his experience in journalism, stating in an interview with Marlise Simons, "The key is to tell it straight. It is done by reporters and by country folk." For these authors, as well as numerous others, the art of storytelling and the straightforward concision of journalism were interconnected.

⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *¿Qué es la literatura?*, trans. Aurora Bernández (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1950).

considering the contextual complexities of this apparent relationship. Comprehending both the similarities and differences between the respective literary theories of these writers establishes a critical backdrop through which to evaluate Vargas Llosa's commentaries on the character of literature in the 1960s and throughout the next several decades. I introduce these basic characteristics through the subsequent subsections of this chapter, but they also resurface throughout my dissertation as a critical guide to our evaluation of Vargas Llosa's evolving concept of literature.

The Utility of Writing

In the opening chapter of *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*, Sartre makes a clear distinction between prose fiction and all other forms of creative art. While a painter is capable of presenting an image, Sartre affirms that “[t]he writer *can guide you* and, if he describes a hovel, make it seem the symbol of social injustice and *provoke your indignation*” (10; emphasis mine). More than art-for-art's-sake, which Sartre describes as “deplorable” (284), the writer's pen endows the text with not only images, but also interpretation. For Sartre, “consciousness, being-for-itself, is defined by its intentionality, by the fact that it is consciousness *of* an object” (Bell 28). Given this definition of prose writing, Sartre emphasizes the responsibility of the writer to be committed to the cause of freedom and to *use* writing as a tool to promote a socialist vision. Other artistic genres, proclaims Sartre, do not need to maintain such a commitment, as he believes that they cannot effectively do so. Sartre considers prose writing within the context of literature's “usefulness” to the societies depicted in fiction. He is clear to make the distinction between the utility of literature as the protestor of social maladies and the bourgeois

exploitation of writing that also *uses* literature, but to enlarge its abuses. Sartre's view must have proved irresistible to the young Vargas Llosa, who sought to combine his commitment to socialist ideals and his vocation as a novelist. From Vargas Llosa's earliest attempts at writing, his objective was not purely artistic, but rather to produce a disquieting spirit in his readers, thus transferring his own dissatisfactions with the world to the hearts, minds, and actions of his readership. Though Vargas Llosa could not accept Sartre's concept of committed prose wholesale, he did embrace most of the basic tenants that Sartre proposed, so long as literature was not slave to external ideologies, nor reduced to mere political pamphleteering.

Sartre's consideration of the general differences between literature and other artistic expressions focuses on an evaluation of prose and poetic verse. He explains that poets consider "words as things and not as signs. [. . .] The poet is outside of language" (12–13). Said differently, poets, according to Sartre, consider words as their own self-contained verbal images, whereas prose writers *utilize* words as tools for more practical socio-political purposes. Sartre states: "It is true that the prosewriter and the poet both write. But there is nothing in common between these two acts of writing except the movement of the hand which traces the letters." He concludes, therefore, that "their universes are incommunicable," and with regard to the potential for commitment, "what is good for one is not good for the other" (19). Sartre did not believe that committed literature should obscure language with "vague meanings which are in contradiction with the clear signification" (284), thus considering even poetic prose a dilution of the writer's role as a social mediator. Vargas Llosa has confessed the influence of Spanish Baroque lyric poets, such as his favorite Luis de Góngora (1561–1627); however, his own writing

is less obscure than structurally complex. As Efraín Kristal explains, “[M]ost of the apparent contradictions and deliberate ambiguities can be figured out” (48). Vargas Llosa’s earliest attempts at literature were as a poet, a practice that invoked the suspicions of his father, Ernesto J. Vargas, with regard to his masculinity. Such suspicions resulted in the fourteen-year-old Mario’s two years in the Leoncio Prado Military Academy. Vargas Llosa continued to write poetry throughout his student years, but then dedicated his life to prose. The language of Vargas Llosa’s novels possesses its own poetics, but he is first and foremost a novelist. One cannot suggest with certainty that Sartre’s writings determined Vargas Llosa’s decision to concentrate his literary energies on prose fiction. It is probable, however, that his transition was influenced to some degree by Sartre’s preference for the novelistic genre as the most apt form to produce a literature with socio-political implications.

Throughout Vargas Llosa’s extensive career, his notions regarding the societal role of the writer have evolved. Nevertheless, his preoccupation with the topic has been constant throughout a half-century of writing. Several of Vargas Llosa’s narratives evaluate the writer’s position in society through the use of writer-protagonists who dramatize their author’s most intimate concerns. Vargas Llosa believed that a committed literature would inevitably incur opposition from the socio-political structures that it opposed. It is not coincidental, therefore, that these types of conflictive circumstances are abundant in his writings. Similar to his protagonists, the novelist finds himself in a double bind: the integrated writer runs the risk of assimilation, while those who remain true to the integrity of their literature endure perpetual solitude as societal outcasts. As Sartre states, the individual who writes without being conceded a place of importance in society

is analogous to one who “aspired to see God’s face without the help of the Church” (*What is Literature?* 111). For both authors, literature had significant socio-political consequences. Sartre defended prose as “utilitarian” and the prose-writer as one who “makes use” of words that were rebellious and nonconforming by nature (19). On a theoretical level, Sartre establishes literary prose as distinct from all other forms of writing, and even art generally, to build a case for a committed literature that would serve as a permanent protester of the societies that it describes. Sartre, in short, defines prose literature in *Qu’est-ce que la littérature?* as possessing a significant revolutionary potential in the world, thus requiring that writers be responsible for the conscious *use* of their words. Though Sartre would come to doubt his own theoretical premises for such a literature, during the 1950s and 60s, this depiction of prose as inherently rebellious was essential to Vargas Llosa’s conception of the writer’s vocation and the future development of his creative narratives.

Writing as a Conscious Choice

Paramount in Sartre’s definition of committed literature is his notion that writing is a conscious choice. Contesting Jean Giraudoux’s conclusion that “the only concern is finding the style; the idea comes afterwards” (*What is Literature?* 26), Sartre retorts that ideas do not simply come, they are cognitively chosen. Sartre would undoubtedly concede that there is something spontaneous in the creation of a work of literature; nonetheless, he proposed that committed authors are ultimately responsible for the *selection* and *use* of their words. Sartre argues, however tenuously, that the reason that no writer has expressed objections to his theories on literary engagement is because there is

no counter case to be made. Vargas Llosa most clearly diverges from Sartre on this point, and, contrary to Sartre's premature contention, he has boldly articulated his claims on several occasions. Vargas Llosa agreed with Sartre's assessment that "the writer should engage himself completely in his works," but only in terms of personal dedication in the writing process. He never concurred that writing occurred exclusively as "a resolute will and as a choice" (35). Commenting on Sartre years later, Vargas Llosa would write: "[. . .] Sartre is probably one of the most rational writers I have read, rational in the sense that he exercised strict control over his material. There is no feeling of spontaneity in Sartre's novels or plays" (*Writer's Reality* 50). Opposite to Sartre's conclusion, therefore, Vargas Llosa did not believe that even committed writers should explicitly select their own themes. Rather, he described the creation process as an irrational, subconscious practice wherein condemnatory themes, born of one's personal dissatisfactions, would choose the writer.

For Vargas Llosa, literature originates in his personal dissatisfactions. "La vocación literaria nace del desacuerdo de un hombre con el mundo," he confirms, "de la intuición de deficiencias, vacíos y escorias a su alrededor" (qtd. in Oviedo, *Invencción* 61). The written word, according to Vargas Llosa's concept of the creative process, offers the author more than the mere opportunity to protest social failings. It also allows him to construct *new* realities through the modification of the world in his narratives. Dissatisfied with the conditions that surround him, Vargas Llosa challenges these realities through his fictions. The author attributes the themes of his literature to personal *demons* which he defines as "negative obsessions—individual, social and cultural—that put man so much at odds with his own reality as to give rise to the desire to subvert reality by

verbally reshaping it” (qtd. in Kristal 3). Condemned to personal torment, Vargas Llosa claims to endure the bitter-sweet conflict between his demons and the fictions he creates. He often has developed commentaries on his own literary theories through critical analyses of other authors.⁵ As part of his doctoral dissertation at the University of Madrid on Gabriel García Márquez,⁶ for example, Vargas Llosa describes the Colombian’s, and subsequently his own, literary demons as “[. . .] hechos, personas, sueños, mitos, cuya presencia o cuya ausencia, cuya vida o cuya muerte lo enemistaron con la realidad, se grabaron con fuego en su memoria y atormentaron su espíritu, se convirtieron en los materiales de su empresa de reedificación de la realidad [. . .]” (*Deicidio* 87). Despite the torment of these creative impulses, Vargas Llosa has claimed to recreate his dissatisfactions with the world in order to confront the injustices he perceives. The writer’s critical examination of society through literature serves as his individual protest against the continuing socio-political shortcomings that he openly detests in his political essays and speeches.

Despite their similarities, the theories of Vargas Llosa and Sartre diverge significantly on the former’s conception of the creative process as spontaneous. Kristal clearly explains this critical difference, when he writes: “For Sartre, an artist’s rebellion

⁵ It is probable that Vargas Llosa’s tendency to speak of his own writings through his commentaries on the literature of others is something that he learned from Jean-Paul Sartre. As Bernard-Henri Lévy notes in his extraordinary comprehensive study of Sartre’s life and writings, “[Sartre] was also ready [. . .] to penetrate the work of another, to strike up a dialogue, enter into conflict or communion with it; he was always ready, in other words, to lead us readers to the threshold of the house of enchantment; and there was, here too, an indisputable sign of generosity” (337).

⁶ Gabriel García Márquez was a significant influence in the life and literature of Vargas Llosa throughout the earlier stages of his career as a writer. This relationship concluded, however, in 1976 when Mario slugged Gabo in a Mexican movie theatre, leaving the Colombian with a black and bloodied eye. Though the source of the conflict is controversial, what is certain is that the incident commenced the now “34 years of solitude” that have seen a complete absence of contact between them. According to Rodrigo Moya, the true issue was Gabo’s attempts to console Vargas Llosa’s wife Patricia when it is rumored that the Peruvian left his wife and children for a “stunning Swedish woman” in Barcelona (Catán; Cohen). Whatever the case, this event occasioned the end of one of Vargas Llosa’s closest Spanish American associations.

is a conscious and premeditated act: a writer decides to denounce society through literature and his work counts as his decision. For Vargas Llosa, however, the writer is unaware of his artistic motives. A writer's political convictions may be reflected in his work, but that is not something he can control" (Kristal 12). As Kristal also notes, "It is not clear whether Vargas Llosa was explicitly aware of his differences with Sartre, as he did not point them out in his writings" (13). Whether due to an "anxiety of influence" of sorts, to use Harold Bloom's popularized term, or some number of reasons, Vargas Llosa articulated his own positions without explicitly recognizing these important distinctions with Sartre. Given the writer's disillusionment with Sartre in the 1960s, Vargas Llosa's adherence to the philosopher's former concept of literature can be read as its own rebellion of sorts, an ironic declaration against Sartre's new theories in support of his former views. Whereas Sartre believed that writers inevitably produced "[. . .] literature with a thesis, since these writers, though they vigorously protest to the contrary, all defend ideologies" (*What is Literature?* 208), Vargas Llosa argued that committed writing as conscious propaganda would result in poor literature, and, in the writer's mind, "La primera obligación del escritor es escribir bien [. . .]" (*Semana de autor* 54). Vargas Llosa, therefore, demanded that literary creation and political passion remain separate throughout the creative process. Despite an abundance of political themes in his creative literature, the writer claimed that these were the product of his subconscious and often masochistic drives. More than conceptualizing his views on the creative process, Vargas Llosa was also safeguarding his literature against socio-political assimilation by the oppressive societies that he sought to counteract in his fictions. Although an agonizing task, he felt that it was requisite that committed writers, though at times politically active,

divorce themselves from presupposed political agendas with the express purpose of finding their own creative animi, commonly demonic, and then fictionalize spontaneous themes through the conscious, and often laborious, imposition of literary form. Otherwise, declares Vargas Llosa, literature serves an external master, and, stated succinctly, “el escritor [. . .] vende su alma al diablo” (“Salazar Bondy” 107). Vargas Llosa, therefore, associates responsibility with the *formation* of a narrative and not the selection of themes, whereas Sartre believed that an author was entirely responsible for the themes that he or she cognitively selected. Regarding writing, Sartre concludes: “I decide to act, that is, to *risk*” (*Truth and Existence* 24). Though it is true, as Mark Poster has summarized, that Sartre believed that his literature “must be free of manipulation by the party, free to exercise his critical judgement and free to criticise the party itself” (11), Vargas Llosa believed from a practical standpoint that Sartre’s views on committed writing were incompatible with this position. Vargas Llosa might have agreed with Sartre that “[e]verything to be sure, is a message” (*What is Literature?* 208); nonetheless, for the interests of the developing novelist, that message was to be derived through subconscious and irrational means in order to depict through narrative his most troublesome dissatisfactions with the surrounding world.

Though contemporary readings clearly demonstrate discrepancies between the theories of Sartre and Vargas Llosa, these regressive evaluations must consider the Peruvian’s interpretation of Sartre at the moment of reception. Sartre is unambiguous in his assertion that individuals should be responsible for their personal *decisions* to become writers, but he also concludes: “A work is never beautiful unless it in some way escapes its author. If he paints himself without planning to, if his characters escape his control

and impose their whims upon him, if the words maintain a certain independence under his pen, then he does his best work” (*What is Literature?* 209). These comments support Vargas Llosa’s position that literature is at its best when authors submit to their creative impulses; furthermore, they complicate any exclusionary interpretation of Sartre’s notion of the writer’s commitment. Further complicating these contradictions, I also suggest that Vargas Llosa’s reception of Sartre’s words was at times selective. With reference to these serious incongruities, therefore, Vargas Llosa still could have considered even the most divergent aspects of his theories on literature intrinsically Sartrean. Notwithstanding his original readings, however, Vargas Llosa, as will be discussed in detail in subsequent chapters, eventually made a clear distinction between Sartre’s notion of committed writing and his own views on the integrity of the writing process.

Contemporary and Regional

Regarding the development of Vargas Llosa’s literature, Sartre’s notion of temporality in *Qu’est-ce que la littérature?* is as important as it is overlooked. Sartre believed that literature had an immediate impact on the psychology of its readers; simultaneously, each individual reader was a co-participant in the creative process. Commenting on temporal concerns, Sartre condemns books from the past as “[w]ritten by a dead man about dead things, [such a book] no longer has any place on this earth; it speaks of nothing which interests us directly” (28). Sartre was committed to the direct application of his writing, and, consequently, believed that committed writers had an obligation to speak to the socio-political concerns of the contemporary reader. Sartre would not have claimed an absolute absence of contemporary relevance in historical

accounts, but, with regard to literature, he was firm in his commitment to writing for the here and now. Apart from concerns with time, Sartre also believed that authors should speak to their own people. He explains that “people of a same period and collectivity, who have lived through the same events, who have raised or avoided the same questions, have the same taste in their mouth; they have the same complicity, and there are the same corpses among them” (68); therefore, literature is most capable of producing significant socio-political change when the issues addressed are directly applicable to the present concerns of its primary readership. These sentiments are expressly evident in the creative and essayistic pages of Vargas Llosa’s extensive *oeuvre*. Though the novelist demonstrated a rupture with this position when he published *La guerra del fin del mundo* (1981), throughout the majority of his career, he has concentrated his novels on the contemporary Peruvian context. The universal nature of these narratives has resulted in a positive critical reception throughout the world. For several decades, however, Vargas Llosa was dedicated entirely to Sartre’s standard that literature should dialogue with contemporary circumstances and always in a regional setting wherein desired reforms could take place.

Despite Vargas Llosa’s conviction that his writing was best suited for contemporary Peruvian settings, he nonetheless insisted that such an approach resist explicit association with regional ideologies. Vargas Llosa respected the creative talent of his Peruvian counterparts—José Carlos Mariátegui, José María Arguedas, Sebastián Salazar Bondy, among others—but he could not accept their contention that Peruvian writing should necessarily focus on indigenous concerns (see Kristal 8–12). For the novelist, literature should be regional in terms of geographical space, but should not place

boundaries around its themes. Vargas Llosa has resisted literary trends based upon ideological bents; consequently, he did not incorporate the precepts of *indigenismo* into his narratives, an otherwise prevalent trend in Peru during the 1950s and 60s. Though sympathetic to the indigenous cause, Vargas Llosa was committed to his concept of literature as independent of external socio-political agendas, even praiseworthy or well-intentioned ones. He has often lauded the artistic merit of Peruvian works on explicitly indigenous themes, and, certainly, Mariátegui and others were influential in the development of the young novelist's political persuasions; nevertheless, he likewise avoided explicit political messages in his own novels, even those that seemed to be inherently contemporary and Peruvian.

For several decades, Vargas Llosa remained faithful to this aspect of Sartre's concept of committed literature. Despite the universal appeal of his narratives, the novelist has most often been characterized as a Peruvian writer. As Teresa Toscano concludes: "El Perú, como nación, representada en su sociedad, es protagonista colectivo en la obra de Vargas Llosa" (412). Vargas Llosa made clear in his earlier novels and throughout his literary commentaries that he would address the struggles of his native Peru and within the contemporary context. Despite these regional tendencies, it would be a mistake to claim that Vargas Llosa's narratives do not contain a more global signification. As Belén S. Castañeda notes: "El escritor parte de su propia experiencia y realidad, y les añade a ambos elementos para convertir lo que anteriormente era particular y personal en una experiencia y realidad universales con las que el lector se puede identificar" (350). Certainly, Vargas Llosa's concern with the regional locale becomes more expansive in its treatment of the general human condition, as is evident in so many

of his “totalizing” narratives. These geographical and temporal parameters, however, are essential to understanding not only Vargas Llosa’s earlier narratives, but also his transition from a concept of literature that possesses revolutionary attributes to one that preserves the cultural memory of a people. In the latter case, Vargas Llosa addresses contemporary concerns, but most often does so through the recasting of the historical past. Vargas Llosa has been a citizen of the world, and, as a consequence, he has written most of his novels outside of his native Peru. Though it seems that the writer’s increasing presence in the world has occasioned comparable expansions in his novelistic landscape, the implications run deeper. Vargas Llosa’s more recent interest in the historical novel is a significant contradiction to Sartre’s insistence that creative writing should focus entirely on contemporary, local concerns, and even to his own commitment in the earlier stages of his career to write for Peruvians, about Peru, and always in the present.

The Image of Society

One of the central components of Sartre’s concept of literature as a means to socio-political change is the idea that committed literature presents society with an image of itself. “The writer is, par excellence, a mediator,” claims Sartre, “and his engagement is mediation” (*What is Literature?* 76). Such mediation occurs as writers present to readers the most negative aspects of their own societies. Sartre believed that this process should be more explicit than Vargas Llosa could accept; however, he does admit that at times, “it is masked.” Notwithstanding his concessions, Sartre remained true to his central tenant: “to name is to show, and to show is to change” (82). Both writers agreed that the function of literature was to produce disquiet in their readers to the point that they

had to necessarily confront the moral dilemmas that their fictions depicted. Essentially, both used literature to force a complicated question, should one perpetually endure life's dissatisfactions or move toward revolutionary change? Vargas Llosa's narratives often expose obscure acts that authoritative powers attempt to conceal. In other words, the fictionalization of the most deplorable acts of society serves as the writer's denunciation of these same events. As Toscano explains, Vargas Llosa has been constant in his defense of the individual who suffers "[. . .] el efecto de una injusticia social basada en un encubrimiento de la verdad" (409). These "máscaras sociales" are those that Vargas Llosa attempts to uncover as he presents to his readers *alternative* realities to those available in the real world.

As Vargas Llosa depicted a creative image of Peruvian society, he also sought to bridge the expanse between reality and fiction, a complicated balance that he addresses repeatedly in his novels and essays. Referencing Vargas Llosa's literary theories, Randolph D. Pope writes: "These two polar points—absolute truth and absolute fiction—can never be reached: the novel hovers between these extremes" (20). Vargas Llosa's version of this tight-rope act, however, is more significant than an attempt to define the parameters of his literature. More accurately, he believed that the incongruities between the real world and fictional ones could produce dissatisfactions in his readers; it was the author's intention that these sentiments of discontent would translate into some measure of revolutionary activity within their respective societies. Vargas Llosa's and Sartre's definitions of literature meant that writing had real-life consequences. Moreover, to use the words of Sartre, both the writer and the reader would be required to "bear the responsibility for the universe" (*What is Literature?* 61). Sartre's concept of literature

was more condemnatory than Vargas Llosa's version in the early 1960s; however, the Peruvian was nonetheless convinced that literature was a powerful means to change in the world. Sartre's statement that the writer's responsibility to reflect society's "unhappy conscience in our mirrors" (252) supported Vargas Llosa's conviction that literature was a persuasive mode of revolutionary action. The young novelist was certain that exposing socio-political maladies through fiction was of such import that the writer's vocation was absolute and should accept no compromise.

Sartre recognized that presenting the world to itself was not sufficient without individuals to respond to and act upon these disturbing "fictional" verities. As a consequence, the relationship between the reader and the writer becomes essential to this process. Sartre states: "To write is both to disclose the world and to offer it as a task to the generosity of the reader" (60). He also writes: "Thus, the author writes in order to address himself to the freedom of readers, and he requires it in order to make his work exist. But he does not stop there; he also requires that they return this confidence which he has given them, that they recognize his creative freedom, and that they in turn solicit it by a symmetrical and inverse appeal" (51). Far from conceptualizing literature as a self-contained medium, Sartre sought to expose his writing to reader interpretation with the expectation that said readers would act responsibly with his narratives. Vargas Llosa has described his literature as a coded testimony ('testimonio descifrado'), and, certainly, this has been the case in some of his more complex novels. The relationship between Vargas Llosa and his readers is not a casual one; he requires active reading in the interpretation of his literature. One of the defining characteristics of the Spanish American Boom, and certainly Vargas Llosa's own narratives, is the development of new expectations for

reader participation. Active readership is critical in comprehending novels such as *Conversación en La Catedral*—example *par excellence* of structural complexities—but even his first novel, *La ciudad y los perros*, which contains some twenty-four distinct narrations in both the first and third person, presents its own unique challenges to the reader (Williams, *Otra historia* 125). Though this author–reader partnership is critical to Vargas Llosa’s concept of literature, it also becomes one of his most apparent frustrations. Whereas Sartre maintained that “[. . .] the most uncultured peasant is a potential reader” (*What is Literature?* 84), Vargas Llosa has often questioned what is to be done in his native Peru where a significant portion of the population is indeed illiterate. Sartre believed, as did Vargas Llosa, that “from within oppression itself we depicted to the oppressed collectivity of which we were part its anger and its hopes” (231). Early in his career, however, Vargas Llosa came to realize that Sartre’s theories were not always compatible with the Peruvian realities that he described. Despite his own commentaries on the mirror-like attributes of literature, Vargas Llosa became increasingly suspect, and even frustrated, with this aspect of Sartre’s concept of writing. Though he still believes that one of the basic roles of his literature is to present society and his readers with a portrait of themselves, the discrepancy between theory and practice has caused the novelist to distance his definition of literature from its revolutionary character in favor of a more subdued role for writing as a social mediator and guardian of cultural memory.

Algerian War of Independence

Vargas Llosa has consistently denounced violent behavior; however, in the enterprise of emancipation, his defense of freedom has at times outweighed the vices of violence. His first true encounter with physical revolution occurred between the years of 1954 and 1962, when Algeria fought for its independence from France in the struggle known as the Algerian War for Independence, or *Guerre d'Algérie*.⁷ This moment also marks Vargas Llosa's first serious challenge to the concept of literature that he absorbed in the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre. Vargas Llosa passionately endorsed revolutionary causes, but the young novelist also trusted in the power of writing—that the pen *was* an instrument of revolution, and that through it he could actively participate in the betterment of humanity. Given his revolutionary interests, Vargas Llosa quickly lent his support—as his name was now circulating in both Spanish American and European intellectual circles—to the *Frente de liberación nacional* (FLN) in the Algerian Liberation Movement. He participated in a third cycle of courses associated with the revolutionary efforts—taught by Sorbona Lucien Goldmann and Roland Barthes—and then became dedicated to the FLN, under the direction of the French philosopher Francis Jeanson (Vargas Llosa, “La hora” 194). This period of turmoil coincided with Sartre's famous polemical exchange with Albert Camus in the 1950s. During this peripheral war of words, Vargas Llosa sided, and not surprisingly, with Sartre. Such a choice, however, ran deeper than a personal preference for the philosopher's theories on literature. Rather,

⁷ During this period Vargas Llosa would also witness the commencement of the Cuban Revolution (1959) and the inception of a revolutionary zeal throughout Spanish America that would capture his political attention and also find its way into several of his most prominent narratives and political essays.

Vargas Llosa openly criticized Camus for an absence of revolutionary zeal,⁸ especially with regard to the Algerian Nationalist Movement. Though Algeria would have an impact on Vargas Llosa, and even resurface indirectly in his novels, the revolution itself did not seem to alter his concept of literature, but rather confirmed his notion that revolutionary movements could have a sure intellectual foundation. More important to our discussion of Vargas Llosa's developing concept of literature, then, was Sartre's reaction to the revolution. Specifically, severe oppression in Algeria led Sartre to denounce explicitly literature's influence at the same time that he also began to openly favor the more direct recourse of violent revolution. Vargas Llosa described Sartre's new position as a betrayal of the writer's vocation and found himself faced with troubling questions regarding the function of literature. Curiously, these concerns at once tortured the writer's intellect and inspired his creative narratives.

Even by the time Sartre had drafted *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*, he was starting to show evidence of his gradual acceptance of violence, based upon a moralistic conclusion that "to refrain from any and all violence resulted in becoming the accomplice of the violence of others" (Anderson 136). Enrique Krauze's observation that "El poder y la violencia habían sido siempre temas centrales en la obra de Vargas Llosa" (47) is accurate. For the novelist, however, violence itself was immoral from all angles; an eye for an eye would leave the world blind. Throughout his career, Vargas Llosa has

⁸ Vargas Llosa criticized several authors for their non-revolutionary attitudes, but later made critical statements confessing his attraction to these writers. His return to the writings of Camus in the 1970s accompanied significant changes in his concept of literature. Ironically, both Sartre and Vargas Llosa came to agree with Camus that through their writings "modest reforms were the most that could be achieved" (Aronson 98). Vargas Llosa, among other Spanish American intellectuals, was also critical of Jorge Luis Borges, who once called politics *una de las formas del tedio*. Though he wrote that the Argentine writer "stood for everything Sartre had taught me to hate," Vargas Llosa writes in retrospect, "I found Borges's spell irresistible. And I would read his stories, poems, and essays in utter amazement. Moreover, the adulterous feeling I had that I was betraying my mentor, Sartre, only increased my perverse pleasure" (*Writer's Reality* 3).

attempted to uphold a set of moral absolutes, whereas Sartre was “clearly opposed to any notion which seeks to abstract [morality] from a context” (Dobson 33). Vargas Llosa’s positions on morality and violence, therefore, at times contradicted Sartre’s “attack on ethical absolutes,” wherein he believed that, according to David Detmer, “there can be no absolute prohibition against violence.” The critic continues: “Sartre seems to be arguing that the ethics of absolute nonviolence is an ethics of passivity and contemplation, not of action; it is essentially a religious morality, appropriate for heaven, not for Earth” (169). Vargas Llosa’s ample experience with misused authority in his native Peru further convinced him that violent behaviors ultimately led to a system of social structures “based entirely on a sort of total justice that extends to all aspects of life” (qtd. in Magráns 397). “[C]lass petrification,” Vargas Llosa concludes, “[...] leads to internal struggle and, sadly, to violence” (397).⁹ Before the onset of the Algerian War for Independence, Sartre defined and resolutely defended the revolutionary nature of his literature. “The writer presents [society] with its image,” states Sartre, “he calls upon it to assume it or to change itself. At any rate, it changes; it loses the equilibrium which its ignorance had given it; it wavers between shame and cynicism; it practises dishonesty; thus, the writer gives society *a guilty conscience*; he is thereby in a state of perpetual antagonism toward the conservative forces which are maintaining the balance he tends to upset” (*What is Literature?* 81; emphasis mine). Vargas Llosa subscribed to Sartre’s

⁹ Whereas I stand by the assertion that Vargas Llosa denounced indiscriminate violence, his stance on violence has been at times ambivalent. Consequently, there have been significant disparities within scholarly commentaries. For example, while Suzanne Jill Levine states, “In a long and fascinating process of soul searching, Vargas Llosa came to reject violence and revolution as legitimate means of achieving human freedom, a stance that has characterized and underscored his entire career as a writer and essayist” (118), others have noted that his position is not so clearly defined. Chapter 4 of my dissertation further complicates the question of violence in Vargas Llosa’s works, as I suggest that the novelist incorporates revolutionary theories similar to those of Frantz Fanon into *La fiesta del Chivo* (2000).

definition of literature and consequently devoted his life to the philosopher's promises; he believed that writing could instigate socio-political reform throughout the world.

Though the Algerian Revolution is significant to the relationship between Sartre and Vargas Llosa, perhaps the most notable writer to rise to prominence amidst the conflict was the French psychiatrist turned revolutionary leader Frantz Fanon (1925–61). Fanon confessed his debt to the writings of Sartre; however, during the period, it was the later who was influenced by Fanon's commentaries on social reorganization and post-colonial theory in a work that has been canonized as a revolutionary handbook, *Les damnés de la terre* (1961). Sartre expressed his support for Fanon's involvement in the revolution, and even wrote the controversial preface to the post-colonial masterpiece. Fanon dedicated an entire chapter of his treatise to the significance of cultural production in active revolution, wherein he states that a "fighting literature" finds its place in the post-revolutionary construction of nationalism, but he also confines the role of literature in the independence process to one of secondary importance in comparison with revolutionary violence. What is more, Fanon's words directly contradict—indeed, they almost respond to—Sartre's earlier statements on the power of literature to challenge unjust societies by presenting them with unfavorable self-portraits:

The native intellectual nevertheless sooner or later will realize that you do not show proof of your nation from its culture but that you substantiate its existence in the fight which the people wage against the forces of occupation. No colonial system draws its justification from the fact that the territories it dominates are culturally non-existent. You will never make colonialism blush for shame by spreading our little-known cultural treasures under its eyes. (*Wretched* 223)

Sartre's preface to the book—often interpreted and even criticized as an explicit call for violence—demonstrates his own shifting ideologies from the power of ideas to the potency of violent action. As Sartre adopted the philosophies of Fanon, he ultimately

denounced the power of his writing in favor of a new preference for this more direct path toward reform.

Sartre's preface to *Les damnés de la terre* reveals much about his position on violence and literature in the late-1950s. Under France's colonial gaze, Sartre adamantly defended Algeria's cause, warning that Europe was "rushing to her doom" (9). Given the atrocities that Sartre perceives, he concludes: "There is one duty, one end to achieve: to thrust out colonialism by *every* means in their power" (21). Interestingly, an observant reader will note that Sartre goes on to describe violence as a "creative process," using descriptions that he once reserved for his literature. "They would do well to read Fanon," Sartre admonishes, "for he shows clearly that this irrepressible violence is neither sound and fury, nor the resurrection of savage instincts, nor even the effect of resentment: it is *man recreating himself*" (21; emphasis mine). Sartre's description utilizes language from his earlier theories on literature; specifically, he reapplies such concepts as the recreation of the world through the act of writing to validate the terms of Fanon's violent revolution. Curiously, in the act of promoting a means to socio-political reform that is more direct than his former literary protests, Sartre writes of Fanon's text: "[W]hen we have closed the book, the argument continues within us, in spite of its author; for we feel the strength of the peoples in revolt and we answer by force" (24). Sartre's conclusions are, in reality, not so distinct from those that he also used previously to describe the purposes of the writer's vocation. Literature, creative or otherwise, would continue to agitate a people's collective consciousness, but Sartre had concluded that literature alone was not a sufficient deterrent for the evils of this world. For Vargas Llosa, literature remained primary. Though his reaction to Sartre's words was nominal early on, the Algerian

Revolution nonetheless marked the beginning of a division between the emerging novelist and his creative mentor.

Vargas Llosa recognized, but did not overreact to, Sartre's subtle seeds of retraction from his concept of literature as revolution. Certainly, Sartre's conclusion that violence "[. . .] can heal the wounds that it has inflicted" (*Wretched* 30) must have disturbed Vargas Llosa, but he nonetheless seemed to maintain a belief that Sartre had not completely abandoned his position on writing. As a close reader of Sartre, Vargas Llosa must have also recognized the origins of these new sentiments in the philosopher's earlier writings. Sartre explained in an earlier interview from a series of conversations with Madeleine Chapsal that the literature's capacity to change the world was not equal to the expectations that he had established in his literary theories. Responding to Chapsal's question as to whether "anything has changed because of what you have written," Sartre states, "Not a thing. On the contrary, ever since my youth I have experienced utter impotence. [. . .] After the war [WWII], we felt once more that books, articles, etc. could be of use. In fact they were of no use whatever. [. . .] That's literary endeavor for you—you can see that it doesn't produce the results you wanted it to" (21). Previous to this period, Vargas Llosa had not published extensively on Sartre's theories. Specific mentions of Sartre in the 1960s, therefore, do something more than indicate Vargas Llosa's adherence to the philosopher's concept of literature. Indeed, they also demonstrate his conscious preoccupation with Sartre, as Vargas Llosa started to recognize that he would be required to reshape his own literary theories.

Vargas Llosa's disillusionment with Sartre can be contextualized within the Algerian struggle for liberation; nevertheless, the Peruvian's separation from his mentor

is not the consequence of these revolutionary activities. As mentioned, Vargas Llosa supported Algeria's independence efforts. Despite his early repugnance for indiscriminate violence, he also has praised works such as fellow Peruvian Salazar Bondy's *Lima la horrible* (1964), for its appeal to and promotion of socialist revolution, commending it as "lucid, deeply grounded in reality, original, *Lima la horrible* is a book of constructive violence" (qtd. in Kristal 11). Furthermore, in the context of the Algerian Liberation Movement, Vargas Llosa extolled Frantz Fanon as the "gran ideólogo del Tercer Mundo" ("Los otros" 39). Vargas Llosa, in other words, was not disturbed by Sartre's associations. Rather, he was disillusioned with Sartre's explicit commentaries that literature should not be considered a revolutionary force. Specifically, Vargas Llosa cites another of Sartre's famous interviews with Madeleine Chapsal in *Le Monde*, wherein, according to the Peruvian's account, Sartre states: "He visto morir de hambre a unos niños. Frente a un niño que se muere, *La náusea* es algo sin valor" (qtd. in "Los otros" 40). Moreover, Sartre echoes Fanon in his conclusion that the most responsible course for writers involved in similar revolutions is to "renunciar momentáneamente a la literatura," thus confirming that "la mejor manera de ayudar a sus semejantes para un escritor es, en ciertos casos, renunciando a escribir" (39). Once Sartre renounced his former theories in favor of a more direct means to socio-political reform, Vargas Llosa realized that his foundation in Sartre's concept of literature supported a house of cards, one which toppled when the philosopher denied his own theories. Vargas Llosa, therefore, was forced to react to and reevaluate his relationship with Sartre. Most importantly, he was left to reassess his own concept of literature and, ultimately, to formulate his own creative theories.

Vargas Llosa wrote an essay entitled “Los otros contra Sartre” (1964), as a reaction to Sartre’s comments and the intellectual debates that resulted. Vargas Llosa was living in Paris at the time, where “por una razón o por otra la literatura siempre está a la orden del día” (38). He describes this moment as a “polémica literaria [que] opone a un hombre y a una generación, a dos concepciones de la literatura” based upon Sartre’s question: “¿Qué significa la literatura en un mundo que tiene hambre?” (38). Vargas Llosa explains that “[l]as declaraciones de Sartre han levantado una tormenta de objeciones que van desde la diatriba hasta la réplica cortés, pasando por todos los matices intermedios” (40), as he positions his own evaluation of the situation on the generous side of this spectrum. Vargas Llosa’s conclusion demonstrates his optimism that Sartre’s divergence from his former concept of literature would be impermanent.

“Tranquilicémonos, pues,” Vargas Llosa’s urges, “aunque niegue utilidad a la literatura, reniegue de ella y la abomine, Sartre, qué duda cabe seguirá escribiendo” (42). Sartre did continue to write until his death in 1980, but he also persisted in continuously evolving his stance on literature. At the outset, Vargas Llosa defended Sartre against his own words, but eventually he was forced to turn from him when he realized that in these defenses, he also contradicted his own views. Vargas Llosa, however, does not explicitly censure Sartre’s words until the 1970s, once he experiences a second disillusionment in the Padilla Affair. Commenting on rereadings of his own literature, Vargas Llosa explained in a 1975 interview, “A mí me ha pasado muchas veces que una novela que leí hace veinte años y me gustó mucho, y que no he vuelto a leer, ya no me gusta, y también a la inversa, claro. Fíjate lo que me pasa con Sartre. A mí me gustaban mucho sus novelas cuando las leí, ahora no me gustan nada, pese a que no las he releído” (qtd. in Coaguila

101). Vargas Llosa's condemnation of Sartre is even more direct in his *La orgía perpetua* (1975), wherein he writes: "[Sartre's] pronouncements concerning literature and the role of the writer, which at one time I regarded as articles of faith, seem to me today to be unpersuasive" (43). More recently, Vargas Llosa revealed in an interview with Roland Forgues in October 2001 that his disillusionment with Sartre was more complete than even his writings at the time indicate. Vargas Llosa comments:

A mitad de los años 60. Si tuviera que citar un momento en especial, diría que en 1966 ó 1967. Sartre aceptó ser entrevistado por Madeleine Chapsal en *Le Monde*. Esta entrevista tuvo para mí un efecto mortal en mi relación con él. No recuerdo exactamente las palabras que empleó, pero decía "comprendo que los escritores africanos renuncien a su vocación literaria para hacer la revolución". La revolución era más importante que la literatura. En un país africano era necesario crear primero una sociedad donde la literatura fuera posible. Y, por ello, una vocación literaria, en ese momento, en un país africano, no tenía mucho sentido. Estas afirmaciones eran para mí una verdadera traición de Sartre a sus propias ideas. Decía también: "delante de un niño que muere de hambre, *La Nausea* no da la talla". ¿Cómo era posible? Nos había enseñado que las palabras eran algo muy importante, que a través de la literatura es actuaba, se podía cambiar la historia, y ahora nos decía que solamente los países desarrollados, los países que han alcanzado un nivel de desarrollo económico, social y político pueden permitirse ese lujo: la literatura. Entonces yo, escritor de un país sub desarrollado donde todo estaba por hacerse, ¿debía renunciar a la literatura o debía renunciar a Sartre? (qtd. in Oviedo, *Escritor* 626–27)

Faced with the consequences of this critical question, Vargas Llosa rejected Sartre in favor of literature. As Ronald Aronson notes, "*What is Literature?* had taken Sartre within a step of acting" (100),¹⁰ but the promotion of violence, especially at the expense of his literature, was not a conclusive leap that Vargas Llosa was willing to make. During the 1960s, ironically, Vargas Llosa's reaction to Sartre entailed a resolute defense of the

¹⁰ One might conclude that the Algerian War for Independence provided the opportunity for Sartre to put his theories into practice in a most applicable circumstance. As John Erickson writes: "Sartre considers the African not just a revolutionary but a revolutionary *par excellence*, by his situation and history better suited than other men to serve as spokesman for oppressed humanity. Thus, between mid-1946 and 1948, Sartre's ideas with regard to the role of the African writer as revolutionary changed dramatically" (*Existentialist Politics* 183).

philosopher's earlier theories; throughout the 1970s, however, he denounced Sartre's notions on committed literature outright, as he also started to doubt the power of his own literary endeavors to effectuate considerable changes in the world. Despite Vargas Llosa's distancing from Sartre in the mid-1960s, his literature throughout the decade nonetheless conformed strictly to the philosopher's earliest concept of literature.

La ciudad y los perros

Following the publication of a collection of short stories, *Los jefes* (1959), Vargas Llosa wrote his first novel, *La ciudad y los perros* (1963). Though the narrative is not strictly autobiographical, the writer clearly incorporates his lived experiences into the characterization and actions of several of his protagonists. One common mistake in criticism is to associate one specific character with Vargas Llosa the author. More accurately, Vargas Llosa often self-fragments as he attempts to establish a “[. . .] configuración compleja de una serie de realidades a partir de ser conformadas desde la fragmentación de las experiencias” (Bracamonte 105), becoming simultaneously multiple characters and none of them. Through Vargas Llosa's totalizing narratives, therefore, the reader, and perhaps the author through a cathartic experience, receives an expansive vision of his preoccupations at the moment.¹¹ Certainly, this is the case in Vargas Llosa's first novel, where the Leoncio Prado Military Academy serves as a microcosm¹² of

¹¹ William Ralph Schroeder's summary of Sartre's theories could also be applied to the writings of Vargas Llosa: “In order to fully comprehend oneself, one must comprehend all the systems that function through one and integrate the results of all the relationships that have constituted one” (*Predecessors* 274).

¹² Frank Dauster provides an important clarification to the use of the word *microcosm* when referring to Vargas Llosa's first novel: “Students of his novels repeatedly refer to them as microcosms. It would be a serious error to regard a novel such as *La ciudad y los perros* as some sort of marvelous code which would explain for us the vagaries of things Peruvian, but the book undeniably contain much which is important in this respect: hostility toward the *serranos*, the frivolity of the bourgeoisie, urban poverty, the intransigent

Peruvian society and the cadets who occupy that space struggle with some of the same social, economic, and political concerns as their author. Written during the onset of the Cuban Revolution, Vargas Llosa's first novel becomes an intriguing piece when considering the writer's concept of literature as rebellious, revolutionary, and even subversive by nature.

Despite its relatively straightforward plotline, *La ciudad y los perros* is more structurally complex than some critics recognize.¹³ Perhaps the most important character in our discussion of Vargas Llosa's earliest concept of literature is Alberto, who, together with Jaguar, Cava, Ricardo, Teresa, Lieutenant Gamboa, and a few others, comprise the novel's central protagonists. When a group of four cadets known as "el Círculo" designate Cava to steal a chemistry exam, the innerworkings of the Academy begin to unravel. Once the authorities learn that the exam has been stolen, the investigation results in a lockdown at the school. Ricardo Arana (known as "el Esclavo" throughout the narrative)¹⁴ secretly turns Cava in so he can leave the premises and interact with Teresa, a girl who has captured the attention of at least three cadets. The social tensions at the school escalate when Ricardo is shot in the head during a training exercise. Although it is undetermined whether the incident was in fact a murder, Alberto accuses Jaguar, the

self-seeking of much of the military. These are implications for all Latin America: the rigidly defined social classes and inveterate *machismo* are only two examples" ("Aristotle" 274).

¹³ As Joseph Sommers notes: "*La ciudad y los perros* es una novela mucho más compleja de lo que muestran los estudios que se limitan a enfocar temas ya conocidas como la estructura, el ritual, el determinismo, la crítica social, la moralidad y el existencialismo" (90).

¹⁴ Commenting that "a fictional protagonist's name is the most obvious and immediate characterological feature to be perceived by a reader," Roy A. Kerr specifically notes that "[t]he power of the name in fixing one's status in the group, as well as in the determination of one's self-image, is dramatically demonstrated by Richi Arana after he has become *el Esclavo*. Having entered the military academy to become a man, he ultimately finds himself isolated and friendless. [. . .] Richi's acceptance of his nickname signals both the abandonment of any hope of successful integration into the group, and a total loss of self confidence [. . .]" (88, 89).

leader of the circle of misfits, as Ricardo's assassin in a private meeting with the authority figurehead, Lieutenant Gamboa. Similar to the students who base their conclusions upon contingencies, the authorities above Gamboa decide to save face by embracing the ambiguities that surround them. Such a position provides an interesting moment of reflection regarding the purposes of fiction, or *imagined realities*, in the real world. The investigation is not completed and the incident remains on the "official" records as an accident. Through a comparatively simple storyline, Vargas Llosa nonetheless creates a narrative that provides commentaries on a range of social, racial, and class distinctions—a striking portrait in miniature of similar levels of corruption at large in the writer's Peruvian homeland. Furthermore, through writer-protagonists such as Alberto, Vargas Llosa establishes his tendency to express insights regarding the writer's vocation through the voices and personal experiences of these fictional characters.

Apart from the novel's obvious Peruvian landscape, *La ciudad y los perros* also conforms in other respects to Sartre's injunction for writers to produce a corpus of literature that speaks to a specific geographical region. *La ciudad y los perros* was originally rejected for publication in Argentina because it was entirely too Peruvian; its eventual publication by the Spanish publishing powerhouse Seix Barral was delayed for similar reasons, after what some rumored to have been a negative review from Spanish writer Luis Goytisolo (Armas Marcelo 242–43).¹⁵ Once the novel was published, it received both Seix Barral's prestigious Biblioteca Breve award and critical acclaim throughout the literary world. Ironically, the original criticisms of Vargas Llosa's first novel as strictly Peruvian eventually became the hallmark of his earlier literary

¹⁵ Goytisolo, however, commented more than twenty-five years later: "Yo leí la primera novela de Mario Vargas Llosa, *La ciudad y los perros*, como lector de Seix Barral y mi informe fue muy favorable" (qtd. in Armas Marcelo 242; *Tribuna*, Madrid, August 20, 1990).

endeavors. Sara Castro-Klarén's description of the narrative as an "[. . .] indelible marker of his meditation on the human condition" (*Understanding* 27) clearly suggests that *La ciudad y los perros* is something more than a creative window to Peruvian politics and social concerns. Using his own experiences as a cadet in the Leoncio Prado Military Academy, Vargas Llosa transforms reality to recreate some of the most disturbing aspects of Peruvian society, but generalizes his themes for a more diverse readership. Following Sartre's guide in his readings of *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*, the young novelist becomes a sharp critic of Peruvian socio-political corruption, while also managing to extend the influence of his writing to simultaneously embrace a world readership and be enthusiastically received by the same.

Vargas Llosa's first narrative also adheres to Sartre's injunction to write in the present. The young Mario, at age fourteen, entered the Leoncio Prado Military Academy in 1950 and spent one year there before deserting his studies to pursue his literature and a career in journalism. During the subsequent decade, the developing writer produced a theatrical script entitled *La huida del Inca* (1952), several short stories, and eventually his first novel. Though *La ciudad y los perros* was published in 1963, he wrote the narrative during the 1950s, and Vargas Llosa's recent experience as a student in the Military Academy provided the raw material for the endeavor. As the novel received favorable critical attention throughout the world, it also created controversy on the Peruvian home front. Specifically, one thousand copies of *La ciudad y los perros* were burned in an official demonstration ceremony at the Military Academy (Martín 47). If Vargas Llosa's intention was to stir the conscience of his readers within the contemporary Peruvian

locale, as Sartre had claimed was the inherent function of committed writing, this reactionary protest to his debut novel is indicative of his success.

From the publication of his first novel, Vargas Llosa also established several precedents for his future narratives. Not least of these was the characterization of several of his protagonists as writer-storytellers. Often, these characters provide essential insights into Vargas Llosa's creative inspirations, or those demonic preoccupations that have caused him to embrace and abhor the writing vocation. A writer's torments, according to Vargas Llosa at the time, produce the themes of a work of literature, and thus endow it with rebellious tendencies. One of the most recurrent *demons* in Vargas Llosa's literature is the creative process itself, including his struggles to define both the role of the writer in society and the function of his literature. While some scholars have recognized in Alberto some of Vargas Llosa's real-life experiences, other characters in *La ciudad y los perros* likewise reflect their author's concerns and literary theories. Regarding the role of fiction in society, the characters known as the "Poeta," "Esclavo," and "Jaguar" are most significant. Through the characterization of these protagonists, we as readers learn something of Vargas Llosa's notion of literary commitment and the challenges that society imposes upon the fiction writer.

Besides the narratives produced by Alberto, Vargas Llosa also demonstrates that fiction is not limited to prose writing. Teresa, for example, confesses: "Cuando veo una película, me olvido de todo, me parece estar en otro mundo" (104). Other characters, such as Arana, create their own personal fictions, based upon the realities that they perceive. At various points in the novel, Ricardo displays a capacity for imagination that is representative of the Academy's multiple layers of false realities. Vargas Llosa also

recognizes the importance of the ways in which his characters *read* the societal fictions that surround them. As he had learned well from Sartre, “[T]he one who writes recognizes, by the very fact that he takes the trouble to write, the freedom of his readers, and since the one who reads, by the mere fact of this opening the book, recognizes the freedom of the writer, the work of art, from whichever side you approach it, is an act of confidence in the freedom of men” (*What is Literature?* 63). Despite imposed restraints, the freedom of creation permeates Vargas Llosa’s first novel, as many protagonists are *producers* or *readers* of fictions, literary or otherwise.

Vargas Llosa’s biography interweaves into the lives of each of his protagonists; however, Alberto’s connection to his author’s life experience is perhaps most explicit. As Alberto enters the Military Academy, he acts with confidence, but nonetheless struggles to adapt to its restrictions and brutalities. Throughout the narrative, he is referred to as “el Poeta,” although his most common “artistic” contributions are pornographic letters and stories that he sells to the other cadets. Through his writing, Alberto enters a world of transgression that he has not actually experienced in real life. As Kristal notes, “Both his failed adolescent romance and his sexual inexperience highlight the compensatory nature of Alberto’s imagination” (37). Furthermore, the depth of Alberto’s discontent is revealed in his need to create alternative realities through his writings. As the “Poeta” attempts to transform his most profound personal dissatisfactions into *new* realities, he simultaneously assuages his passions and thoroughly excites them. Similar to Alberto—who is Vargas Llosa’s first of a series of writer-protagonists—other characters in his extensive literary canon also reveal their author’s literary theories in the creation of the metanarratives that appear so commonly within his novels.

Alberto's erotic letters and stories also demonstrate Vargas Llosa's views on the influence of literature on the surrounding world. As the writer creates alternative realities in his fictions, he increases the cadets' sensitivity to the contrast between the restrictive military academy and the forbidden city outside of its walls. Such disparity is all but unbearable to the adolescent cadets, who seek to enact the sexual escapades that Alberto supplies in his stories.¹⁶ As Alberto listens to the sexual experiences of the other cadets with a new prostitute named Pies Dorados, reality-based fantasy completes his fictions.

[El] nombre de Pies Dorados comenzó a resonar en los oídos de Alberto como una música familiar. Las referencias feroces, aunque vagas, que escuchaba en boca de los cadetes, *estimulaban su imaginación*. En sueños, el nombre se presentaba *dotado de atributos carnales*, extraños y contradictorios, la mujer era *siempre la misma y distinta*, una presencia que se desvanecía cuando iba a tocarla o a desvelar su rostro, que *lo incitaba a los impulsos más extravagantes* o lo sumía en una ternura infinita y *entonces creía morir de impaciencia*. (93; emphasis mine)

Throughout Vargas Llosa's narrative, he includes code words that describe the creative process and the purposes of his literature. As Alberto's imagination is stimulated by his dissatisfactions, his internal demons also become a personal burden. Similar to his depiction of Pies Dorados, Vargas Llosa has conceptualized his narratives as always the same and yet different from the real world, a description that supported his claim that his novels were realistic but not realist.¹⁷ Comparable to his author's passion for literature, Alberto is perhaps most influenced by this own fictional eroticism. "El Poeta"

¹⁶ Sharon Magnarelli provides intriguing commentaries on the influence of women in *La ciudad y los perros*. She writes: "Once in the academy, the boys are still directly and indirectly stimulated by the force of the female figures, which not only supply the motivating force for the boys' actions but frequently inspire the males' discourse in whatever form it may take" (215). Extending these commentaries to an additional level of interpretation, one might also consider the relationship between the feminine images that Vargas Llosa often employs in his essays to describe his relationship with literature and the fictional narrations—which Magnarelli identifies as male discourse—that are abundant throughout the narrative.

¹⁷ As Standish has observed: "La palabra 'realismo' quizás lo sustituyamos por 'verosimilitud' pues no se trata en la obra del peruano de alcanzar una suerte de representación fotográfica como lo querían algunos escritores del siglo pasado: es otra clase de realismo" ("Acotación" 310).

characterizes the role of personal discontentment in the creative process and literature's capacity to incite its readers to the actions that would to make real its creative alternatives.

Alberto era uno de los que más hablaba de la Pies Dorados en la sección. Nadie sospechaba que sólo conocía de oídas el jirón Huatica y sus contornos porque él *multiplicaba las anécdotas e inventaba toda clase de historias*. Pero ello no lograba desalojar cierta *desagrado íntimo de su espíritu*; mientras más aventuras sexual describía antes sus compañeros, que reían o se metían la mano al bolsillo sin escrúpulos, más intensa era la certidumbre de que nunca estaría en un lecho con una mujer, salvo en sueños, y entonces *se deprimía y se juraba* que la próxima salida iría a Huatica, aunque tuviese que robar veinte soles, aunque le contagiaran una sífilis. (93–94; emphasis mine)

As Vargas Llosa develops his literary theories through the sentiments of his protagonist, he also demonstrates that the character and function of his literature is to disquiet the spirits of his readership and both dishearten these individuals and enthuse them toward revolutionary action. Beyond the case of Alberto, the entire plotline of *La ciudad y los perros* revolves around a decision made by the “Esclavo” to enact his sexual fantasies at the expense of the other cadets. Besides the fictional stories that drive his passions, even his love interest is a fiction, as he hardly knows his beloved Teresa, except through responses to letters that Alberto composes. Though the influence of Alberto's writing is not readily apparent at first reading, it demonstrates Vargas Llosa's insistence on the need for individuals to create alternative realities in their lives and the effect of these fictions as a writer bridges the gap between reality and fantasy.

Alberto exhibits some of the creative theories of his author, but the character is also one of the most disappointing of the novel. Regarding Vargas Llosa's notion of literary commitment, Alberto's failure is complete. Throughout the narrative, Alberto is portrayed as a sell-out, one who uses his creative talents solely for personal gain. The

protagonist's definition of success is *bourgeois* by nature, as it is based solely in production: "Alberto echó una ojeada a las hojas cubiertas de palabras azules; en menos de dos horas, había escrito cuatro novelitas. Estaba bien" (125). Sartre's conclusions regarding capitalist societies could be applied to Alberto's character, as he writes: "We have created this variety of men who have no meaning except as artificial products of a capitalist (or feudal) society, whose only reason for existing is to serve as scapegoat for a still prelogical community" (qtd. in Flynn 191). Alberto contradicts Sartrean standards for literary commitment, as he also demonstrates one of the Vargas Llosa's earliest retractions from Sartre's theories. While the Frenchman describes the literary vocation as a conscious choice, Vargas Llosa delineated between two distinct phases in his writing: (1) the irrational selection of themes and (2) the conscious imposition of form. During a conversation between Alberto and Ricardo, the following exchange occurs:

—Escribir una carta es muy fácil —dice Alberto—. Lo más fácil del mundo.
—No. Es fácil saber lo que quieres decir, pero no decirlo.
—Bah —dice Alberto—. Puedo escribir diez cartas de amor en una hora. (129)

As Ricardo admits that themes and form are distinct aspects of the writing process, he confirms Vargas Llosa's notion that the success or failure of literature depends entirely "de su forma, no de los 'temas'" (*Deicidio* 101). Furthermore, Vargas Llosa's comment that "ante su vocación [el escritor] es un esclavo" ("Salazar Bondy" 95) contrasts Alberto's apathy with the character known as "el Esclavo" who wants to write but lacks the talent. This first writer-protagonist is not dissimilar from others in subsequent novels; indeed, most of these characters abandon their literary ambitions due to societal pressures. Alberto's philosophy "O comes o te comen, no hay más remedio. A mí no me gusta que me coman" (*Ciudad* 23) directly contradicts his author's explanation that "Ser

escritor implica que al joven se le cierren muchas puertas, que lo excluyan de oportunidades abiertas a otras; su vocación lo condenará no sólo a buscarse la vida al margen de la literatura, sino a tareas mal retribuidas, a sombríos menesteres alimenticios que cumplirá sin fe, muchas veces a disgusto” (“Salazar Bondy” 94). Under pressures from the Military authorities, Alberto concludes: “Sí, es lo mejor. Echar tierra a todas estas fantasías” (303). His condition is also generally representative of the cadets who aspire to certain vocations and then are persuaded otherwise by the conditions of reality. As Vargas Llosa demonstrates the failures of noncommitment to literature, he simultaneously implies the need for such devotion. He commonly presents negative examples in order to unrest his readers and persuade them toward dissimilar decisions. Ultimately, Alberto is faced with a moral dilemma that is analogous to others that Vargas Llosa would encounter. As the Military establishment threatens to expose Alberto’s pornographic writing if he continues with his accusations against Jaguar, Vargas Llosa demonstrates his own concerns at the time with the pressures that he recognized in Peruvian society as a threat to his literary ambitions.

Despite the failures of Alberto, the only explicit writer-protagonist of the novel, Vargas Llosa demonstrates throughout his narrative both the influence of fiction and the role of the reader in the coproduction of literature. Alberto writes for money and favors; nevertheless, his literature is still influential. Even as the Colonel condemns Alberto, he confesses: “Las anécdotas son muy interesantes. Las hipótesis nos demuestran que usted tiene un espíritu creador, una imaginación *cautivante*. —Se calló y repitió, complacido:— *Cautivante*. Ahora vamos a revisar los documentos. Déme todo el material jurídico necesario” (335–36; emphasis mine). As the Colonel relishes the word *captivating*, it is

not certain whether he refers to Alberto's theories regarding the murder of Ricardo or the pornographic stories that he also mentions. His pleasure with either of these fictions, however, is counterpoised against his insistence that Alberto and the Academy return to the realm of documentation, the only reality that he deems truly *necessary* in the real world. Such a contradiction between official histories and fictional alternatives would eventually become a critical component of Vargas Llosa's concept of literature.¹⁸

Apart from its explicit and implicit commentaries on literature, *La ciudad y los perros* is also deeply committed to the dual Sartrean ideals of social responsibility and criticism of corrupt socio-political structures. "When the cadets try to imitate the officers' behavior," Vargas Llosa explains of his own novel, "those rituals become distorted, transformed into something different, into a kind of caricature." As the cadets' actions are reflections of the officers in the academy, so too is the school a microcosm of Peruvian society wherein it is necessary for "the boys to become different as a measure of defense in life" (*Writer's Reality* 53, 54). It is this appeal to reality that Vargas Llosa calls "the most Sartrean aspect of the book" (53). As Jaguar ponders, "¿Qué les aprovecha tener plata si aquí andan tan fregados como cualquiera?" (228), other characters have similar anxieties regarding race, gender, sexuality, etc. Through a concentrated forum, the Leoncio Prado Military Academy, Vargas Llosa attempts to create a comprehensive picture of the abuses of Peruvian corruption. By the end of the novel, nearly all of the

¹⁸ Vargas Llosa has often warned against the potential dangers of official histories, and has even called them antithetical to fiction. He comments: "What is the difference, then, between fiction and a newspaper article or a history book? Are they not all composed of words? Do they not imprison within the artificial time of the tale that boundless torrent that is real time? My answer is that they are opposing system for approximating to reality. While the novel rebels and transgresses life, those other genres can only be its slave. The notion of truth or lies functions in a different way in each case. For journalism or history, truth depends on the comparison between what is written and the reality that inspires it. The closer the one is to the other, the more truthful it is; the further way, the more deceitful" ("Truth of Lies" 323).

characters have buckled under the pressures of society, except perhaps Jaguar and Lieutenant Gamboa. Although Alberto claims, “No creo que exista el diablo pero el Jaguar me hace dudar a veces” (141), the rebellious leader of “el Círculo” is more celebrated than despised in the narrative.¹⁹ As he exclaims, “Me enferman lo cobardes que son” (311), he also reveals his own courage to stand for his convictions. While the text leaves his confession ambiguous, Jaguar’s willingness to admit to the murder of Ricardo in order to save Lieutenant Gamboa from an undesirable transfer to a remote posting in the Andes²⁰ is evidence of his respect for the only other protagonist who does not submit to his superiors in exchange for their favors; indeed, Gamboa also demonstrates a level of integrity that is nearly absent in Vargas Llosa’s depiction of other military characters. As Gamboa stands his ground regarding his suspicion that Arana’s death was indeed a murder, Vargas Llosa seems to indicate that fiction is larger than literature and that commitment in Peruvian society is lacking at multiple levels.

La ciudad y los perros provides a wealth of possibilities pertaining to Peruvian society during the 1950s. The title’s duality establishes a contrastive relationship between a Peruvian capital that “parece tener conciencia de sí mismo” (Vidal 18) and the inhabitants trapped within its synthetic walls. As Alberto comments, “Los perros son bien fieles, más que los parientes, no hay nada que hacer. La Malpapeada es chusca, una mezcla de toda clase de perros, pero tiene un alma blanca” (173), he not only references

¹⁹ Though it is possible that the reader cast judgment upon Jaguar for his rough character, Vargas Llosa skillfully creates a paradigm shift when the reader realizes at the conclusion of the novel that the seemingly impenetrable character is also the nameless first-person narrator who reveals some of his deepest sentiments throughout the narrative. In this sense, Jaguar is also like Lieutenant Gamboa, “concebido como uno de los más odiables del libro resultó uno de los más simpáticos” (Vargas Llosa, *Historia secreta* 57).

²⁰ Lieutenant Gamboa is transferred to Juliaca in southeast Peru. According to an online travel site, the city “probably is the most unattractive city in Peru. Most of the buildings in the city are unattractive and they appear to be under a constant status of ‘under construction’. The cold evening wind also makes walking on the streets at night almost unbearable” (“Peru Travel and Tours”). The region, intentionally chosen, becomes a symbolic and literal punishment for the Lieutenant’s boldness.

through metaphor the numerous races and social classes in the military academy, but also provides a contrast to the novel's repeated description of Peruvian society as a dysfunctional family. Besides these social commentaries, one of the Major's questions, "¿Cómo ha podido dar crédito a esa historia fantástica?" (276) can be considered a central theme of Vargas Llosa first novel, as fiction (broadly defined) and societal pressures constantly collide. Apart from the stylistic, structural, and thematic achievements that have been explored in an impressive corpus of scholarly criticism, *La ciudad y los perros* should also be revisited as the first of many dramatizations of Vargas Llosa's theories on the creative process, the influence of literature, and the commitment required of the writer's vocation.

La Casa Verde

Following the success of his first novel, Vargas Llosa extended the complexity and reach of his second creative narrative. Though *La Casa Verde* is not nearly as challenging for the reader as Vargas Llosa's third novelistic venture, *Conversación en La Catedral* (1969), neither is it as simple structurally as *La ciudad y los perros*. The bar/prostitute house known as the "Casa Verde" provides a focal point for several distinct, yet interrelated, storylines. Whether it be Lituma's return to Piura and his struggles to accept the changes that have occurred in his absence, the Japanese-Brazilian Fushía's conversations with Jum, an Aguaruna Indian, regarding the illegal trade of rubber, or Don Anselmo's establishment of the original Casa Verde that burns to the ground after Padre García condemns the house as a temptation to the community, the events of one story correspond with those of another. Through the use of multiple names

and nicknames for his characters, Vargas Llosa is able to tell his tale chronologically, while maintaining the ambiguous nature of each storyline until later in the novel. Though Gerald Martin warns readers in an early review of novel that “the first hundred pages of *The Green House* [are] initially a hard read [. . .]” (309), most of the mysteries are resolved by the conclusion of the narrative. Although the histories of Lituma, Fushía, Jum, Don Anselmo, and Padre García, among others, are each essential to the continuation of the plot, Bonifacia’s transition from jungle inhabitant to indoctrinated Christian to brothel prostitute is perhaps most important to the basic themes of the narrative. Through Bonifacia’s troubled life experience, Vargas Llosa once again comments on the complexities of a Peruvian society that is complete with various levels of civilization, barbarism, and socio-political abuses.

Though Vargas Llosa confines his first novel to an intentionally limited temporal and geographical space, his second, *La Casa Verde*, “recoge una gran riqueza de experiencias humanas y abarca un tiempo mucho más largo y un espacio geográfico más vasto” (Enkvist 83). More complex in its form and thematics, *La Casa Verde* is Vargas Llosa’s first true attempt at creating what he and others have termed as a total narrative.²¹ As he employs multiple perspectives, Vargas Llosa portrays the echelons of exploitation that he reveals as a depiction of contemporary Peruvian society. Peter Standish also observes Sartrean echoes in Vargas Llosa’s experimentation with diverse approximations of reality: “Al proponer una multiplicidad de perspectivas sobre la realidad Vargas Llosa sigue las exigencias del J-P Sartre, que en su *Qu’est-ce que la littérature?* habla de la

²¹ One of the earliest commentaries on Vargas Llosa’s totalizing tendencies in his narratives comes from novelist Carlos Fuentes in his attempt to produce a concise description of the Spanish American new narrative in *La nueva novela hispanoamericana* (1969).

necesidad de presentar en la novela una perspectivas múltiples y cambiantes” (307). Apart from this connection with Sartre, *La Casa Verde* is also an impressively regionalist narrative that presented challenges to its earliest readers and continues to intrigue scholarship at present. With regard to the novel’s regional language, María Rosa Alonso confesses: “Estoy segura de que la lectura de *La casa verde* ha sido de cierta dificultad para el lector español de la Península, aun para el lector culto, si quiere ser sincero” (16). Citing the novel’s “impresionante selva lingüística” as the principle source of reader frustration,²² she also recognizes the writer’s incredible capacity for language. Vargas Llosa, once again, is able to incorporate his life experience in Piura and his visits to the Peruvian interior to endow his characters with authentic local speech and experiences, as his novel simultaneously speaks to his native Peru and a world readership.

One of the reasons why Vargas Llosa subscribed so faithfully to Sartre’s notion that literature should speak to a writer’s own people is language-based. Vargas Llosa has avoided the mimesis of reality—he has purported to recreate reality, not mirror it—but his concern with a high level of verisimilitude based in the dialogues of his characters has been constant. For this reason, the novelist made a special return trip to the Amazon before the publication of *La Casa Verde* to ensure that he had captured the language, practices, and general culture of the region. Furthermore, language itself is an important theme within the narrative. Vargas Llosa’s introduction of Anselmo’s character provides an emblematic example:

²² Some of these native Peruvian words include: *achiole, aguajales, akitai, calatos, cachaco, cocha, curare, chabelo, chacritas, chamira, chambiras, cholo, chucha, chulla-chaqui, chúcaro, chunchos, churres, huaynitos, huiro, jebe, jevenes, miéchica, pachamanca, paiches, pongos, pucunas, pusangaa, sajino, tocuyo, tondero, totuma, virotas, yarinas*, etc. (Alonso 17).

Se llamaba Anselmo y decía ser peruano, pero nadie logró reconocer la procedencia de su acento: no tenía el habla dubitativa y afeminada de los limeños, ni la cantante entonación de un chiclayano; no pronunciaba las palabras con la viciosa perfección de la gente de Trujillo, ni debía ser serrano, pues no chasqueaba la lengua en las erres y las ese. Su dejo era distinto, muy musical y un poco lánguido, insólitos los giros y modismos que empleaba y, cuando discutía, la violencia de su voz hacía pensar en un capitán de montoneras. (54–55)

While the careful reader will eventually recognize that Anselmo is most likely from the Peruvian interior, the mysterious nature of the protagonist resides in his capacity to incorporate himself into mainstream Peruvian society without suffering the prejudices ascribed to other native Aguarunas.²³ Comments from La Madre Superiora to Bonifacia reveal this contradiction in the former's declaration: "A las madres les importa tu alma, no el color de tu piel ni el idioma que hablas" (86). Certainly, this is not a reality for Bonifacia or others in the Peruvian racial minority. Vargas Llosa's concern with language in the narrative is dual. As the novelist incorporates realistic native speech into his novel, he produces an authentic depiction of a Peruvian society that also *uses* language to establish a hierarchy of socio-political status and privilege.

While not readily apparent at the onset, Vargas Llosa's novel is also highly autobiographical. Gratefully, the author has provided extensive commentaries on the life experiences that produced *La Casa Verde* in a speech at Washington State University²⁴ in 1968 that was later published as *Historia secreta de una novela* (1971). As an

²³ Later in the novel we read that Anselmo's assimilation into society was complete: "Pronto aprendió las fórmulas del lenguaje local y su tonada caliente, perezosa: a las pocas semanas decía 'Guá' para mostrar asombro, llamaba 'churres' a los niños, 'piajenos' a los burros, formaba superlativos de los superlativos, sabía distinguir el clarito de la chichi espesa y las variedades de picantes, conocía de memorial so nombres de las personas y de las calles, y bailaba el tondero como los mangaches" (55).

²⁴ Vargas Llosa was a writer-in-residence in 1969 at Washington State University (Pullman, WA). His years at that and other academic institutions provided the writer with the opportunity to produce extensive literary criticism while continuing to write his novels. Besides his extensive collections of lectures, many of which were in English, his course notes as a professor (archived in the Special Collections of the Firestone Library at Princeton University) provide valuable insights regarding his engagement as a reader and critic of world literature.

introduction, he describes the creative process through the metaphor of a literary reverse strip-tease:

Escribir una novela es una ceremonia parecida al strip-tease. Como la muchacha que, bajo impúdicos reflectores, se libera de sus ropas y muestra, uno a uno, sus encantos secretos, el novelista desnuda también su intimidad en público a través de sus novelas. [. . .] Escribir una novela es un strip-tease invertido y todos los novelistas son discretos exhibicionistas. (7–8)

The writer then offers to guide his audience through this process, thus revealing “los hechos que fueron las raíces de esa novela” as well as “el curioso modo en que estas experiencias, ocurridas en distintos períodos y circunstancias, convergieron, se mezclaron, se transformaron mutuamente y, en cierta manera, se emanciparon de mí en una historia verbal” (8). Through the “discrete exhibition” of his literary secrets, Vargas Llosa does something more than reveal the biographical aspects of his narrative; he also details the process of converting the raw material of his life into a creative work of literature. Specifically, the text exposes Vargas Llosa’s most basic literary concepts, including (1) the transformation of lived experience into literary themes, (2) the function of demonic muses, and (3) the commitment required to produce a rebellious literature. Through the development of each of these topics, among various others, Vargas Llosa provides his first significant, independent description of the writing process, using his own literature as an example. As he does so, the novelist further clarifies his developing concept of literature and the basic characteristics that define the writer’s vocation.

Lived Experience and Literary Themes

Similar to Sartre’s notion that literature should speak to a writer’s immediate temporal and geographic circumstances, Vargas Llosa also maintained that lived

experience should provide the raw material that would eventually be transformed into the themes of one's literature. Numerous scholars have noted the autobiographical nature of most of Vargas Llosa's narratives. During this period, however, he would not have described his literature in this way. The novelist has even defined works that are as explicitly autobiographical as *La tía Julia y el escribidor* in terms of his previous fictions.²⁵ According to Vargas Llosa, personal experiences cease to be strictly historical as they are transformed into a literary creation. As is the case in *La Casa Verde*, Vargas Llosa's objective in his fictions was to enter his texts and then disappear as he wrote himself out of them. His purpose was to ensure that his fictional modifications of the real world and his own lived experience would be a coded testimony that could resemble reality at the same time that it retained its independence.

Vargas Llosa's second novel takes place in two distinct regions, which represented for the author an ongoing struggle between civilization and barbarism in his native Peru. "Había decidido escribir dos novelas," explains Vargas Llosa, "[. . .] una situada en Piura, a partir de mis recuerdos de esa ciudad, y otra en Santa María de Nieva, aprovechando como material de trabajo lo que rememoraba de las misioneras, de Urakusa y de Tushía" (51). Distinct from his depiction of Piura, where he spent a significant portion of his childhood, Vargas Llosa had to take various trips to the Peruvian interior²⁶

²⁵ It is precisely with *La tía Julia y el escribidor* that Vargas Llosa makes significant transitions in his concept of literature regarding the use of autobiography in his creative narratives. For this reason, the writer contradicts himself often when describing his novel, at times stating that insertions of his life history were "more inventions, distortions and exaggerations than memories and, when I wrote them, I never intended to be anecdotally faithful to events and people that preceded or were outside the novel" ("Truth of Lies" 321) and at others: "I have tried to be totally truthful in writing [*La tía Julia*], in which I have tried not to invent but to remember and report my recollections objectively" (*Writer's Reality* 110). For a more complete discussion of this transition, see chapter 3 of this dissertation.

²⁶ Vargas Llosa's recounting these trips becomes a sort of travel monologue that possesses attributes of an adventure novel. Realizing that a mere novelist would not be permitted to enter certain portions of the Peruvian Amazon, and given his negative relationship with the military after the controversial publication

to be able to describe to his satisfaction the traditions, practices, and culture of the native peoples who inhabited the region. Regarding Piura, Vargas Llosa recalls: “No tenía la menor dificultad en evocar Piura. Me bastaba cerrar los ojos para ver sus calles angostas, sus veredas altas, sus casas de anchas ventanas enrejadas, y para oír el cantito tan saltarín y pegajoso, algo parecido al de los mexicanos, de su gente. [. . .] Todo estaba allí, en mi memoria, palpitando indemne” (60). On the other hand, in the Peruvian Amazon, Vargas Llosa confesses that he discovered “un rostro de mi país que desconocía por completo [. . .]” (25). At first, he tried to separate these competing worlds, attempting to construct two distinct novels, but soon found it nearly impossible “tener a cada cual separado y soberano en mi mente.” Ultimately, Vargas Llosa made the decision to “fundir esos dos mundos, escribir una sola novela que aprovechara toda esa masa de recuerdos” (51). Through the process of combining the sum total of his experiences into one totalizing narrative, he fulfills one of his standards for the creative process, as he proceeds to incorporate important scenes from his real life story into the pages of his fictions.

One of the central themes of *La Casa Verde* stems from Vargas Llosa’s combination of his experiences in Piura and Santa María de Nieva. Civilization and barbarism is a recurring concern in his works, and the writer’s second novel is no exception. Vargas Llosa seems especially concerned with the fate of Bonifacia, a native-born Aguaruna, who is educated by nuns at a mission in Santa María de Nieva, and, ultimately, becomes one of the prostitutes in the reconstructed Casa Verde. Though

of his first novel, he and an anthropologist named José Matos Mar came to the following determination. “Discutimos el asunto y, por fin, decidimos convertirnos en dos ingenieros comisionados por el presidente de la República para estudiar las posibilidades agropecuarias en la región del Alto Marañón. Nos presentamos en la Comandancia General del Ejército, en Chiclayo, y el oficial que nos atendió quedó impresionado con nuestras explicaciones. Dispuso de inmediato que nos prestaran un jeep y un chofer para que nos llevara hasta Bagua y, luego, al campamento militar de «Montenegro» que era hasta donde había llegado la carretera, cuya construcción, por lo demás, corría a cargo del Ejército” (*Historia secreta* 69–70).

Bonifacia's story is fictional, her character is based upon a real Aguaruna child named Esther Chuwik,²⁷ who was stolen from her parents and taken to Lima. Vargas Llosa laments that this type of situation "no era excepcional, el rapto de niños ocurría con frecuencia en la selva" (34). The writer concludes from his observations that real-life Aguaruna women, those whom Bonifacia represents, are condemned to one of two typical destinies: "[O] regresaban a morir de hambre en el bosque o partían a la «civilización» de sirvientas de los cristianos" (72). Vargas Llosa's concern with the clash between civilization and barbarism, as introduced in *La Casa Verde*, has continued throughout nearly five decades of writing. Aquilino's demand to Fushía, "Anda, cuéntame de una vez cómo fue que te escapaste" (22) is juxtaposed with society's position that "ya está, se le escapó el animal, hay que cogerlo" (77). Personal experiences had convinced Vargas Llosa that Don Fabio's claim to Don Julio and La Madre Superiora that his personal interest "[. . .] era que ellos ayudaran a las madres a incorporar al mundo civilizado a esas niñas" (117) was something less than sincere. Similar to Bonifacia, numerous and diverse protagonists from Vargas Llosa's extensive literary universe would express frustration with their entrapment within Peruvian society.

Another socio-political concern expressed in Vargas Llosa's novel is violence at all levels of Peruvian society. Given his early concern with indiscriminate violence, it is not surprising that Sartre's support of violence as a deterrent to oppressive socio-political

²⁷ Vargas Llosa recounts: "En otro pueblo aguaruna donde estuvimos una noche, conocimos a Esther Chuwik. Era una niña de unos diez o doce años, alta, enclenque, de ojos claros y voz suave. Hablaba algo de español y pudimos charlar con ella, durante una fiesta que los aguarunas habían organizado en nuestro honor. Como otras niñas de la selva, había sido raptada unos años atrás. Sus raptos los llevaron primero a Chiclayo y luego a Lima, donde la tenían de sirvienta. Morote Best, cuando era coordinador del Ministerio de Educación en la selva, llegó un día a Chiclayo y el maestro de la tribu le mostró a una pareja de indios que lloraba. Eran los padres de Esther Chuwik. Morote había seguido la pista de los raptos y consiguió rescatar a la muchacha y devolverla a su pueblo. [. . .] Por una Esther Chuwik que había conseguido localizar, Morote había fracasado en decenas de otros casos" (*Historia secreta* 33–35).

structures was troublesome to Vargas Llosa. Once again, the theme of violence stems from Vargas Llosa's experiences, specifically his travels to the Peruvian interior. As a visitor among the Aguaruna tribes, Vargas Llosa was disturbed by the mistreatment of the native peoples within their own communities and from those who exploited their labor from the larger cities. During his various trips to the Peruvian Amazon, Vargas Llosa witnessed manifold social, physical, sexual, and economic abuses that led him to conclude that for these native groups "la violencia y la injusticia eran allí la ley primera de la existencia" (25). The novelist also concludes that these experiences "serían un recuerdo tenaz de ese viaje por la selva" (35) that would become essential to the construction of several of his future narratives. True to his writings on reality and fiction, these scenes would be fleshed out in *La Casa Verde*—as Jum, Fushía, Bonifacia, and others are some of the many protagonists to be based upon the indelible, real-life acquaintances of their author.

As Vargas Llosa used his biography to create his earliest and subsequent fictions, he also learned that the application of his own creative theories were at times burdensome. Though he believed that literature was free and even required to distort an author's experiences to produce alternative realities, Vargas Llosa soon discovered that this process was impossible to control. "[L]o sospechaba," he confesses, "pero entonces lo supe de manera flagrante y carnal: la «verdad real» es una cosa y la «verdad literaria» otra y no hay nada tan difícil como querer que ambas coincidan" (66). However difficult to realize in practice, the distinction between reality in the real world and the fictional verities that Vargas Llosa created in his novels was something that he viewed as essential to the creative process. Vargas Llosa's struggles with this divide would resurface in more

than a few of his novels, and would also produce some of his most substantial essays, several of which comment on the role of fiction in expressing truths that reality cannot. Said differently, Vargas Llosa has contended throughout his career that there is something powerful about expressing the truth of lies through the distortion of his real-life experiences.

Demonic Muses

As part of *Historia de un deicidio*, Vargas Llosa organized and articulated his theories regarding literary *demons*, or those negative obsessions that remain with an author until he or she exorcises them through the writing process. What is more, Vargas Llosa has noted on several occasions that the demons that inspire his literature are not always evident to him until a work is complete. For this reason, he was convinced that the creation of literature was a spontaneous endeavor driven by a writer's deepest internal passions. Throughout the 1940s and 50s, Vargas Llosa had numerous experiences that became material for his novelistic pursuits. While some of these “[. . .] se fueron apagando con el tiempo,” others intensified with the passing of time until they were “inseparables compañeras” (11). Vargas Llosa notes that *La Casa Verde*, for example, was not his first creative depiction of his experiences in the Peruvian Amazon. Previously, he wrote a narrative that one of his friends read and rejected as a mere copy of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). Vargas Llosa recalls that his reaction to this early review of his work was extreme:

No había sospechado ni remotamente, mientras trabajaba ese texto, que repetía a Hawthorne. Y como la novela de éste, en efecto, me había impresionado mucho, pensé que tenía pocas esperanzas como escritor. Furioso conmigo y con todos, hice pedazos el manuscrito y olvidé «la casa verde», las habitantas y los

mangaches. Creí que los olvidaba. Lo cierto es que seguirían allí, tercos hirientes, en el fondo de mi memoria. (*Historia* 23)

Vargas Llosa's confession that he could not cleanse his memories of the experiences that comprised the material for this early narrative speaks more to his concept of demonic muses than to the discarded manuscript. According to Vargas Llosa's concept of literature, creative demons from the past could continue to haunt a writer for years and even perpetually,²⁸ as apparently was the case with *La Casa Verde*. Distinct from Sartre's notion that a writer selects the subjects of his or her literature, Vargas Llosa claimed that his literary themes—inspired by his deepest, personal preoccupations—most commonly chose him.

Perhaps the most intriguing commentaries in *Historia secreta de una novela* are those that reveal the discoveries that led Vargas Llosa to formulate his concept of literature during the 1960s. The young Vargas Llosa started to conceptualize his theories on the writer's vocation as early as the 1950s; however, he did not provide significant commentaries on these theories until the mid-to-late 1960s. Given Vargas Llosa's relative silence regarding his concept of literature during his earliest years as a writer, subsequent observations from the novelist regarding the development of these theories are invaluable. Commenting on his preoccupation with civilization and barbarism, for example, Vargas Llosa also supplies some of his first explanations on his concept of writing and the creative process:

Ahora lo entiendo mejor, pero hace algunos años me avergonzaba confesarlo. De un lado, toda esa barbarie me enfurecía: hacía patente el atraso, la injusticia y la

²⁸ Vargas Llosa's concern with the native peoples of Peru would continue throughout his entire career. Such concerns would become an important impetus for his essays and several of his creative narratives, the most explicit reflection on the conflict between modernity and the safeguarding of indigenous culture being his tale of a social outcast named Saúl Zaratas who becomes a Machiguenga storyteller in *El hablador* (1990).

incultura de mi país. De otro, me fascinaba: qué formidable material para contar. *Por ese tiempo empecé a descubrir esta áspera verdad: la materia prima de la literatura no es la felicidad sino la infelicidad humana, y los escritores, como los buitres, se alimentan preferentemente de carroña.* (46; emphasis mine)

Apart from Vargas Llosa's description of the writer's vocation as one driven toward despair by his or her personal demons, he also provides a time frame—between 1962 and 1965, as he wrote *La Casa Verde*—for the development of these theories. Furthermore, Vargas Llosa notes the spontaneous nature of the negative impulses that inspired his writing during this same period: “[C]omprobé otra vez que una cosa es la novela proyectada y otra la novela realizada.” And then he continues: “Fue por esta época que descubrí que las novelas se escribían principalmente con obsesiones y no con convicciones, que la contribución de lo irracional era, por lo menos, tan importante como la de lo racional en la hechura de una ficción” (57). With these statements, Vargas Llosa clarifies his concept of literary demons, and, perhaps more importantly, establishes a clear distinction between his concept of literature and the one that Sartre had proposed in the previous decade. Specifically, Vargas Llosa explains that literature is not premeditated propaganda, but rather the spontaneous expression of one's deepest and most disturbing concerns.

Commitment to the Writer's Vocation

Whereas *La ciudad y los perros* is replete with references to the socio-political function of literature, specifically the capacity of fiction to momentarily release an individual from repressive circumstances, *La Casa Verde* seems less concerned with these themes at first reading. Throughout the novel, however, some of the most important characters and scenes are laced with literary implications. Once again, Bonifacia's story

is especially relevant. As she attempts to defend her decision to allow some of the Aguaruna students at the convent to escape, the Sisters angrily respond: “Es lo mejor que haces tú [. . .]. Contar historias. ¿Qué más Bonifacia?” (88).²⁹ As Bonifacia’s realities are incessantly berated as mere fictions, Vargas Llosa once again exposes society’s suspect of fictional creation as well as its power to challenge the *statu quo*. Bonifacia’s eventual habitation, as a prostitute in the Casa Verde, also becomes a fertile locale for regional fictions. Through the rumors of the locals with regard to Anselmo and his brothel, the actual history of the Casa Verde is confused in and perhaps enriched by fictional ambiguities. As Anselmo assumes a new identity as a harp player at the reestablished Casa Verde, he insists: “No hubo ningún incendio, ninguna Casa Verde [. . .]. Invenciones de la gente, muchachos” (228). These and other lies are fundamental to the maintenance of societal norms and the suppression its taboos. As Vargas Llosa demonstrates in this and other novels, the multiple faces of fictional creation are not only evident but are also challenged at all levels of society. For this reason, the novelist has repeatedly emphasized literary commitment, especially within societies that would restrict the free expression of the diverse fictions that encompass all civilizations.

Although *La Casa Verde* does not provide its readers with an explicit writer-protagonist, Vargas Llosa’s own descriptions of the novel’s construction serve a similar purpose, as *Historia secreta de una novela* is dedicated almost entirely to the definition of the creative process and commitment to the writer’s vocation. Despite the importance

²⁹ Vargas Llosa often inserts clues into his narratives as code words that enrich the text with additional interpretive meanings. As the Sisters criticize the supposed fictions that Bonifacia produces, they also refer to her as being possessed by a demon. Similar to Madre Angélica’s assertion: “Pero ya eres demonio” (86), La Madre Superiora questions the relationship between Bonifacia’s *story* and these demonic spirits: “[¿]Y qué tiene que ver eso con el demonio?” (87). While authorial intent is difficult to determine, Vargas Llosa seems to make a subtle connection between the demonic muse and the creative of fiction.

of this second theme, Vargas Llosa also concedes the impracticality of the task in developing countries such as his native Peru. He writes:

Es muy difícil pensar en «ser un escritor» si uno ha nacido en un país donde casi nadie lee: los pobres porque no saben o porque no tienen los medios de hacerlo y los ricos porque no les da la gana. En una sociedad así, querer ser un escritor no es optar por una profesión sino un acto de locura. (23–24)

Vargas Llosa experienced these challenges firsthand as he attempted to write part-time while pursuing more stable careers, such as journalism, academia, and even law. During his studies in Madrid, and after reading stacks of “novelas de caballerías,” he declared his quixotic ambition to be “un escritor y nada más que un escritor.” Vargas Llosa recounts: “Ni abogado, ni periodista, ni maestro: lo único que me importaba era escribir y tenía la certidumbre de que si intentaba dedicarme a otra cosa sería siempre un infeliz” (47).

Despite his resolution, the novelist is also clear to explain:

Que nadie deduzca de esto que la literatura garantiza la felicidad: trato de decir que quien renuncia a su vocación por «razones prácticas», comete la más impráctica idiotez. Además de la ración normal de desdicha que le corresponda en la vida como ser humano, tendrá la suplementaria de la mala conciencia y la duda. (48)

With regard to the construction of *La Casa Verde*, Vargas Llosa confesses that after his first attempts to write the narrative: “[M]e sentí enfermo, disgustado de la literatura” (50).

At other occasions, he has expressed through diverse rhetorical modes the love–hate relationship that he maintains with his creative narratives. Despite his frustrations—or perhaps because of them—Vargas Llosa passionately reiterated the imperative of total commitment to the writer’s vocation throughout the 1960s and 70s. Sartre’s renunciation of literature in support of more immediate modes of revolutionary action further stimulated Vargas Llosa’s concern with the topic; indeed, these preoccupations would come to the forefront in his polemical and most famous speech, “La literatura es fuego.”

“La literatura es fuego”

Vargas Llosa’s “La literatura es fuego” (1967) is one of the most important and misread of his statements on literature. Similarities between Sartre’s definition of literature and that of Vargas Llosa seduce the reader to conclude that “La literatura es fuego” is a mere rearticulation of Sartre’s earlier comments. Given the novelist’s earliest dedication to the words of Sartre, it should not be surprising that most scholars have concluded that it contains “todas las huellas de Jean-Paul Sartre aún coleando en el eco más profundo del texto” (Armas Marcelo 59). The speech was originally presented in Caracas, Venezuela, as Vargas Llosa’s acceptance of the prestigious *Premio Nacional de Literatura Rómulo Gallegos*, which recognized the author’s second novel *La Casa Verde*. “La literatura es fuego” has become the standard statement on what some have classified as Vargas Llosa’s uncompromised position on the function of literature. The speech is often read as a bold acceptance of a politically charged literature—comparable to the one proposed in Sartre’s *Qu’est-ce que la littérature?*. Notwithstanding similarities, a close reading of the text and context of Vargas Llosa’s words suggests that the speech is more accurately a reaction to the writer’s disenchantment with Sartre. Vargas Llosa uses Sartre’s own language to defend the concepts of literature that the philosopher renounced during and after the Algerian War for Independence. Indeed, even Vargas Llosa’s emphasis on the dedication required of writers seems to reference Sartre’s apparent abandonment of the same. Though he does not make specific mention of Sartre in the speech, his commentaries, when read in the context of *Qu’est-ce que la littérature?* and the liberation struggles in Algeria, are certainly indicative of his concerns at the moment. At the conclusion of the speech, Vargas Llosa transitions into a discussion on the Cuban

Revolution, which he believed would provide literature with the freedom to develop more completely its revolutionary capacity. Vargas Llosa's adamant defense of literature, coupled with revolutionary rhetoric, has caused significant confusion and debate with regard to the interpretation of his speech. Read against the grain of criticism, which generally concludes that Vargas Llosa proposed a committed literature, "La literatura es fuego" actually exposes an anti-Sartrean strain in the Peruvian's writings.

Vargas Llosa was the first to receive the Rómulo Gallegos prize, and from the hand of its namesake, the famed author of *Doña Bárbara* (1929). José Miguel Oviedo—in his seminal examination of the life and literature of Vargas Llosa—describes the event as “una realidad despertada por su persona y su obra, pero también era el signo de toda una nueva situación de la literatura en América Latina y de una distinta relación entre el escritor y su público.” Gabriel García Márquez had recently published *Cien años de soledad* (1967)³⁰ to the acclaim of readers and critics, and Spanish American literature rested at the apex of the period of unprecedented critical attention known as its Boom. García Márquez did not speak at the conference; nevertheless, his presence contributed to the excitement and anticipation of Vargas Llosa's words. “[Todo] Caracas,” observes Oviedo, “pendía de un hilo esperando las palabras del autor tras la ceremonia, porque se suponía, con fundada razón, que no serían un convencional agradecimiento de ganador sino—otra vez, como siempre—un documento polémico, contradictorio, irritante.” Oviedo notes that while the boisterous crowd and the incessant cameras seemed to overwhelm Vargas Llosa at first, in the moment of the speech's presentation “[. . .] es el público el que sufre el impacto y el deslumbramiento” (*Invencción* 42). Throughout the speech, Vargas Llosa ensures the impact of his words through the use of bold and

³⁰ Gabriel García Márquez was awarded the Rómulo Gallegos Prize for *Cien años de soledad* in 1972.

absolute language. Despite the temptation to consider his rhetoric as a demand for a politically committed literature, Vargas Llosa, on closer examination, calls for a literature at the margins of society and distanced from socio-political ideologies.

Sabine Köllmann offers the clearest approximation of the powerful use of language that tends to confuse Vargas Llosa's otherwise clear position on politically committed writing. She recognizes that the "provocative and polarizing" rhetoric of the novelist's speech "makes it very difficult to look at the basic ideas of his literary theory and judge them according to their contents, not their wrapping." Köllmann, who views this rhetoric as the central point of critical confusion with regard to the speech, suggests that the content is in reality "much less radical than their rhetorical formulation would have us believe" (45). Throughout the speech, Vargas Llosa entraps his audience through absolute statements that eliminate room for alternate interpretations. In a separate essay, he defended his own rhetorical devices in this confession on Spanish American writing: "The genius of the Spanish writer has always flourished through excessive rhetoric, which expresses a fundamental element in our nature and in our culture" (*Writer's Reality* 10). Certainly, the essayistic genre—especially when expressed as oratory—has always been an intellectual dagger. While the speech was intended for the moment, it also has received significant scholarly attention as a written document. Read outside of its context, it can be confused as a recapitulation of Sartre's earliest comments on "commitment" as the foundation of revolutionary literature. Vargas Llosa's words, however, are to be taken as a powerful reaction to his disillusionment with Sartre, and not as the blatant promotion of literature as a platform for politics.

Vargas Llosa initiates his acceptance speech of the Rómulo Gallegos prize with an invocation to an anonymous poet that he later reveals as Carlos Oquendo de Amat (1905–1936). “Convoco aquí esta noche,” states Vargas Llosa, “su furtiva silueta nocturna, para aguar mi propia fiesta [. . .]” (132). As is generally the case in the writings of Vargas Llosa, meaning resides in the details. The writer’s own reception of this award marks the immediate setting of what he calls “mi propia fiesta”; however, viewed in a more expansive context, Vargas Llosa seems also to reference the subtle dangers of the positive critical reception of the Spanish American Boom, in which writers of such renown as Gabriel García Márquez, Julio Cortázar, Carlos Fuentes, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, and, certainly, Mario Vargas Llosa, were members. During the 1960s, Spanish American literature reached the pinnacle of its production and critical reception, within Spanish America and beyond its borders. Publishing houses flourished and critics worldwide took an interest in the development of a literary tradition previously under-recognized. An avid supporter of the Cuban Revolution in its formative phases, Vargas Llosa also viewed the rise of socialism in Cuba as the realization of a dreamlike escape from the horrors of Spanish America’s historical past. In the reception of the Boom, however, both within and outside of Spanish America, Vargas Llosa detected a subtle and serious danger to the future of the writer’s vocation. For the novelist, writing was a means of rebellion, and a defiant literature, distinct from Sartre’s opinions, could not accept social or political compromise and retain its critical function.³¹ During a time of

³¹ Vargas Llosa’s insistence that the dedicated writer cannot accept social compromise provides an interesting contrast to Frantz Fanon’s statement that “If need be the native can accept a compromise with colonialism, but never a surrender of principle” (*Wretched* 143). Vargas Llosa would suggest that these two acts are, in reality, one and the same. See chapter 4 of this dissertation for a more complete analysis of Fanon’s possible influence on Vargas Llosa’s future creative narratives, specifically *La fiesta del fin del mundo* (2000).

unparalleled critical reception, Vargas Llosa boldly reinstates his position that the Spanish American novelist must not receive the guarantees of modern societies. Literature, in other words, must not risk its own social consumption in the ideological pitfalls of privilege. Vargas Llosa's reference to Oquendo de Amat, therefore, provides his audience with a reflective moment within the positive reception of the Boom, which, of course, includes his own narratives.

Oquendo de Amat was a Peruvian poet who endured exile and social oppression. While the poet published no more than one nearly forgotten work, *5 metros de poemas* (1927), he wrote with the passion and absolute conviction that characterizes Vargas Llosa's concept of the writer's vocation at the time. One cannot be certain that Vargas Llosa specifically choose a poet as a challenge to Sartre's notion that poetry was not a "committable" genre; nevertheless, his emphasis on the devotion of Amat to his poetry, despite external pressures, certainly contrasts Sartre's commentaries that a writer's circumstances dictated one's mode of rebellion, whether through prose writing or otherwise. Whatever the case, Vargas Llosa dedicates several paragraphs to the deceased poet as a synecdoche of sorts, demonstrating the required dedication of Spanish American writers in the face of two principle threats: (1) the hostile socio-political conditions that have discouraged the dissemination of their literature and, perhaps the more serious concern for Vargas Llosa and the Boom novelists, (2) the debilitating entanglement of the writer's vocation into ideological snares. Vargas Llosa believed that the Cuban Revolution would grant the writer a place of social importance; however, he

remained tentative in accepting such a pedestal, as, historically, these “social contracts” most frequently exchanged comfort for conformity.³²

Throughout the initial portion of the speech, Vargas Llosa recognizes that Spanish American writers have faced extreme opposition in societies that have not recognized the critical function of literature as a means to social progress. “Como regla general,” Vargas Llosa declares, “el escritor latinoamericano ha vivido y escrito en condiciones excepcionalmente difíciles, porque nuestras sociedades habían montado un frío, casi perfecto mecanismo para desalentar y matar en él la vocación” (133). Although he admits that “[. . .] no todos pudieron ser matados de hambre, de olvido o de ridículo,” the novelist also states that these individuals comprise the rare exception. Given such obstacles, Vargas Llosa reminds his audience that “[. . .] nuestros escritores se han frustrado por docenas, y han desertado su vocación, o la han traicionado, sirviéndola a medias y a escondidas, son porfía y sin rigor” (134). His condemnation of some Spanish American writers is double: more intolerable than authors who abandon their vocations under socio-political demands are those who continue to write without complete devotion. Using the case of Oquendo de Amat, Vargas Llosa demonstrates a “commitment” to literature that opposes Sartre’s view that “committed” literature must

³² I have not read an explicit commentary from Vargas Llosa on the words of Jean Jacques Rousseau in his *Social Contract*, but the following is an apt description of the Peruvian’s political desires, which he believed would come to fruition through socialism revolution: “The problem is to find a form of association which will defend and protect with the whole common force the person and goods of each associate, and in which each, while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain as free as before” (xxxv). Vargas Llosa would become pessimistic about the possibility of a political system that could balance equally among the interest of the collective and the freedom of the individual after his disappointment with the Cuban Revolution. Similarly, Wilfrid Desdan observes that for Jean-Paul Sartre: “Unity was seen to be the result of *common* free choice. It will be Sartre’s constant worry to qualify the two terms *common* and *free* and to distinguish between the inertia imposed by the group and the free acceptance of the individual, who is *free common* agent” (*Marxism* 150).

serve an agenda to become useful. Conversely, the Peruvian demands that Spanish American writers endure societal pressures to ensure the integrity of their respective fictional writings.

Vargas Llosa recognizes in his speech that some writers have been able to overcome “la hostilidad, la indiferencia, el menosprecio de nuestros países por la literatura, y escribieron, publicaron y hasta fueron leídos.” Nevertheless, he also readily confesses the concealed perils of prosperity. “Pero es cierto,” he continues, “que en los últimos años las cosas empiezan a cambiar. Lentamente se insinúa en nuestros países un clima más hospitalario para la literatura. Los círculos de lectores comienzan a crecer, las burguesías descubren que los libros importan, que los escritores son algo más que locos benignos, que ellos tienen una función que cumplir entre los hombres” (133). Certainly, the balance between Vargas Llosa’s desire for social recognition—according to the novelist, writers should occupy an important critical space in society—and his suspicion of these same societies is delicate. He clarifies:

Pero entonces, a medida que comience a hacerse justicia al escritor latinoamericano, o más bien, a medida que comience a rectificarse la injusticia que ha pesado sobre él, una amenaza puede surgir, un peligro endiabladamente sutil. Las mismas sociedades que exiliaron y rechazaron al escritor, pueden pensar ahora que conviene asimilarlo, integrarlo, conferirle una especie de estatuto oficial. (“Fuego” 134)

Although this statement demonstrates Vargas Llosa’s caution, he does not propose that literature should have no interaction with society, nor that it should not demand its own social importance.³³ He believed, however, that it should retain its distance from the

³³ Vargas Llosa continues to struggle with the place of literature in society. One of his more recent declarations on this specific subject occurred in Lima on April 3, 2001: “There is another reason to give literature an important place in the life of nations. Without it, the critical mind, which is an engine of political change and the best champion of liberty that we have, would go into irremediable decline. Because

social and political pressures that would become its master and distort its true function—to criticize relentlessly. Vargas Llosa expresses his concern that the desired positive reception of literature at times results in a socio-political circumstance wherein authors become apathetic to the mistreatments that surround them.

Vargas Llosa's response to this second and more seductive threat to literature is articulated in a series of powerful and even threatening images:

Es preciso, por eso, recordar a nuestras sociedades lo que les espera. Advertirles que la literatura es fuego, que ella significa inconformismo y rebelión, que la razón de ser del escritor es la protesta, la contradicción y la crítica. Explicarles que no hay término medio: que la sociedad suprime para siempre esa facultad humana la sociedad suprime para siempre esa facultad humana que es la creación artística y elimina de una vez por todas a ese perturbador social que es el escritor, o admite la literatura en su seno y en ese caso no tiene más remedio que aceptar un perpetuo torrente de agresiones, de ironías, de sátiras [. . .]. Las cosas son así y no hay escapatoria: el escritor ha sido, es y seguirá siendo un descontento. (134)

Vargas Llosa's quasi-militaristic reaction to cultural assimilation advocates a commitment to literature that does not conform to negative or positive pressures. The conclusion of the author is stated in absolute terms: "La literatura es una forma de insurrección permanente y ella no admite las camisas de fuerza. Todas las tentativas destinadas a doblegar su naturaleza airada, díscola, fracasarán. La literatura puede morir pero no será nunca conformista" (135). Despite their Sartrean overtones, Vargas Llosa's premises were distinct; for the writer, commitment was not to any socio-political cause, but rather to his literature.

Vargas Llosa does not explicitly describe the consequences of exile in his speech, but the implications of marginality demand recognition of his commentaries on the topic. Months after his Rómulo Gallegos acceptance speech, Vargas Llosa wrote and presented

all good literature asks radical questions of the world we live in. Every great literary text, often without the writer's intention, has a tendency towards sedition" ("Literature and Life" 142).

in London, “Literatura y exilio” (1968). The speech can be read as a companion to “La literatura es fuego,” as it clarifies his concept of literature at the same time that it distances his theories from those of Sartre. Throughout the speech, as well as in other writings, Vargas Llosa offers extensive commentary on the significance, advantages, and dangers of exile. Although the author bases most of his novels in the contemporary Peruvian setting, he has spent much of his life and has done most of his writing outside of his native Peru.³⁴ In response to the criticism he often receives for these departures,

Vargas Llosa explains:

Las respuestas de los escritores a la infalible pregunta suelen ser muy variadas: vivo lejos de mi país porque el ambiente cultural de París, Londres o Roma me resulta más estimulante; o porque a la distancia tengo una perspectiva más coherente y fiel de mi realidad que inmerso en ella; o simplemente, porque me da la gana. [. . .] En realidad, todas las respuestas se pueden resumir en una sola: porque escribo mejor en el exilio. (145)

Vargas Llosa goes on to clarify that “mejor” does not necessarily refer to the quality of the work produced, but rather to his ability to create fictions at a reflective distance and without social constraints. “*Mejor*, en este caso,” the novelist clarifies, “es algo que debe entenderse en términos psicológicos, no estéticos; quiere decir con ‘más tranquilidad’ o ‘más convicción’” (145). In other words, Vargas Llosa is able to remain true to his vocation as a writer more fully at the margin of society than incorporated within its restrictive frameworks. Once more, he does not present committed literature in the traditional sense, and certainly not in terms of Sartre’s original theories. Rather, he advocates a commitment to writing that, at times, requires self-imposed exile. Vargas Llosa recognizes the need for writers to return to their native countries, as he has done

³⁴ Vargas Llosa has described Barcelona as “la cuna de publicación de todos mis libros” (*Historia secreta* 48), as Seix Barral is arguably responsible for the young writer’s entrance into the mainstream of world literature.

often, so as not to lose contact with their roots of origin. Far from a call for the detachment of Spanish American authors from their immediate circumstances, Vargas Llosa's notion of exile is deliberate displacement from society in order to produce criticism at a distance from the socio-political threats which, according to the author, render the purposes of his literature impure.

Multiple are the examples of Spanish American writers who have produced their most enduring works in exile for one reason or another: Vargas Llosa specifically mentions César Vallejo, Andrés Bello, José Martí, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, and Julio Cortázar, among others. Extending beyond the literal exile that these and other writers have experienced, Vargas Llosa also proposes an internal exile from the influences of exterior ideologies, which, paradoxically, include his own personal biases. Only in this manner, he explains, does literature become the untainted internal expression of those secret preoccupations that reveal themselves through the creative process. As Vargas Llosa submits to his subconscious obsessions, creative demons, or "fantasmas," as the writer has also identified them, he claims to distance his writing from even his own political ideals. Vargas Llosa's reference to Oquendo de Amat as a "fantasma" at the beginning of his speech, therefore, is likely intentional. Following a long line of writers—Goethe, Hugo, Flaubert, Moro, Bataille, among others (Kristal 3)—who have confessed demonic muses for their literature, Vargas Llosa believed that truly dedicated authors must submit entirely to their deepest dissatisfactions. "La vocación literaria nace del desacuerdo de un hombre con el mundo," Vargas Llosa confirms, "de la intuición de deficiencias, vacíos y escorias a su alrededor" ("Fuego" 135). As mentioned previously, this concept is the most significant distinction between Vargas Llosa's theories and those

of Sartre. Personal exile, furthermore, is perhaps the Peruvian's most contested and confused solution to the threat of cultural assimilation, as it seems to contradict his definition of literature as a writer's individualized creative protest. Dissimilar to Sartre's concept of literature as a conscious, even calculated, act of rebellion, Vargas Llosa defines revolutionary literature as a *creative deicide*, wherein the writer discards the real and strives to create new worlds, not through the cognizant expression of socio-political concerns, but in the re-creation of reality itself through the negation of society, politics, and even one's personal ideologies.

Vargas Llosa is clear in "La literatura es fuego" that exile—whether literarily or literally—from socio-political influences does not indicate the detachment of literature from its critical social functions.

Ella contribuye al perfeccionamiento humano impidiendo el marasmo espiritual, el reblandecimiento intelectual o moral. Su misión es agitar, inquietar, alarmar, mantener a los hombres en una constante insatisfacción de sí mismos: su función es estimular sin tregua la voluntad de cambio y de mejora, aun cuando para ello deba emplear las armas más hirientes. ("Fuego" 135)

As Vargas Llosa recognizes that his narratives inspire social change, he explains that the purpose of literature is to disquiet his readers and move them toward new critical attitudes. His call for "las armas más hirientes" refers to the use of words as weapons, but also seems to call into question the use of force in the defense of freedom. Sartre's declaration that "Freedom is precisely the nothingness at the heart of human reality which constraints it 'to *make itself*, rather than to *be*'" (qtd. in Jeanson 177; emphasis original) included violence as a legitimate recourse. Vargas Llosa certainly respected those who created circumstances amenable to the promotion of freedom through their honorable involvement in politics, but nonetheless declared that the intermixing of political

activities and literary creation would produce degenerative compromises in both ambitions. Vargas Llosa believed that his writing vocation was a severe master, and only total commitment to literature, not a committed literature, could engender the critical temperament necessary to produce writing with revolutionary implications.

One of the central purposes of “La literatura es fuego” was to establish Vargas Llosa’s own concept of literature, independent of Sartre’s theories. Nevertheless, he also used his platform to broadcast his perception of the Cuban Revolution at the time. Though I provide more details regarding the importance of Castro’s revolution on the speech in the subsequent chapter, it is important to note here that throughout the 1960s socialism was at the heart of the Peruvian’s political discussions and literary aspirations. Throughout the final portion of “La literatura es fuego,” therefore, Vargas Llosa is explicit in his call for socialism throughout Spanish America. Similar to many other intellectuals at this time, the writer saw in the Cuban Revolution a hope for a rupture from Spanish America’s perpetual cycle of political abuses. He expresses his optimism in this commonly cited declaration:

Pero dentro de diez, veinte o cincuenta años habrá llegado a todos nuestros países, como ahora a Cuba, la hora de la justicia social y América Latina entera se habrá emancipado del imperio que la saquea, de las castas que la explotan, de las fuerzas que hoy la ofenden y reprimen. Yo quiero que esa hora llegue cuanto antes y que América Latina ingrese de una vez por todas en la dignidad y en la vida moderna, que el socialismo nos libere de nuestro anacronismo y nuestro horror. (135)³⁵

³⁵ Vargas Llosa’s son Álvaro included his citation in a collection of Latin American quotes entitled *Manual del perfecto idiota latinoamericana* (1999). Regarding his inclusion in the work, Vargas Llosa good-heartedly concludes: “Nadie está exento de sucumbir en algún momento de su vida a este género de idiotiez (yo mismo aparezca en la antología con una cita perversa)” (qtd. in Köllmann 42n3). More than a humorous aside, Vargas Llosa’s statement demonstrates the radical change in his political and even literary philosophies over the past several decades.

Vargas Llosa's confidence in Cuba's socialist revolution exceeds the realm of politics. He also envisioned a political system that could embrace the fictions that would correct, agitate, and even at times directly oppose its structures. Despite Vargas Llosa's eventual discontent with Castro's Cuba, it is certain that, as Oviedo recounts, "[. . .] la Revolución Cubana fue transparente en cada una de sus declaraciones sobre el tema; después de que sus relaciones con la posición cubana se hicieron insostenibles y terminaron violentamente, no ha dejado, sin embargo, de rescatar de ese proceso político lo que todavía le parece rescatable, ni de proclamar su fe en el socialismo" (*Invencción* 37). Vargas Llosa's political attitudes have shifted drastically since these observations. At the moment of his acceptance of the Rómulo Gallegos prize, however, confidence in Cuba was primary in Vargas Llosa's speech and throughout the Spanish America.

Though Vargas Llosa realized that the Revolution was not without its complications, he nonetheless viewed in socialism the optimal atmosphere for Spanish American politics and the future of his literature. Vargas Llosa summarizes:

Yo quiero que esa hora llegue cuanto antes y que América Latina ingrese de una vez por todas en la dignidad y en la vida moderna, que el socialismo nos libere de nuestro anacronismo y nuestro horror. Pero cuando las injusticias sociales desaparezcan, de ningún modo habrá llegado para el escritor la hora del consentimiento, la subordinación o la complicidad oficial. Su misión seguirá, deberá seguir siendo la misma; cualquier transigencia en este dominio constituye, de parte del escritor, una traición. ("Fuego" 135–36)

At the conclusion of "La literatura es fuego," Vargas Llosa is careful to situate his literature within the context of the Revolution, but only in terms of its influence and not its production. Certainly, the success of the Revolution depended upon its intellectual support, and the Peruvian was one of its most devoted proponents. Although enthusiastic about the Cuban experiment, he was also guarded when securing a place for literature.

“La literatura es fuego,” for example, is clear in its stance against the dangers of conformity, even of the socialist persuasion. “Dentro de la nueva sociedad,” Vargas Llosa concludes, “y por el camino que nos precipiten nuestros fantasmas y demonios personales, tendremos que seguir, como ayer, como ahora, diciendo no, rebelándonos, exigiendo que se reconozca nuestro derecho a disentir, mostrando, de esa manera viviente y mágica como sólo la literatura puede hacerlo [. . .]” (136). Vargas Llosa reminds his audience, and perhaps assuages his own preoccupations with regard to his disillusionment with Sartre, that there will always be a demon to protest, and, therefore, a constant need for the corrective function of literature. Although Sartre once wrote: “The writer’s success was built upon [. . .] misunderstanding; as he rejoiced in being misunderstood, it was normal for his readers to be mistaken” (*What is Literature?* 135), misinterpreting Vargas Llosa’s “La literatura es fuego” creates a significant obstacle to the interpretation of his narratives, at least in terms of the writer’s notion of literature’s socio-political function. Despite its rhetorical tendencies towards Sartrean referents, Vargas Llosa’s polemic speech does not promote Sartre’s version of committed literature as numerous scholars have been swift to conclude. Conversely, he distinguishes his concept of committed literature from Sartre’s at the same time that he responds, clearly albeit subtly, to what he considers the philosopher’s betrayal of the writer’s vocation. Certainly, his view that socio-political interpolation has no place in the creative process is explicit, a radical divide from even Sartre’s earlier writings. Despite the challenges that the Spanish American writer confronts, Vargas Llosa’s response throughout the speech is constant: “Nuestra vocación ha hecho de nosotros, los escritores, los profesionales del descontento, los perturbadores conscientes o inconscientes de la sociedad, los rebeldes con causa, los

insurrectos irredentos del mundo, los insoportables abogados del diablo” (136).

Following his disillusionment with Sartre, Vargas Llosa boldly defended the rebellious tendencies of literature that Sartre had recently negated. Although he does not directly address these extratextual concerns, Vargas Llosa’s disillusionment with the mentor who had such a significant impact on his earliest works and thoughts should not be disassociated from the boldness in his declarations. “No sé si está bien o si está mal,” Vargas Llosa concludes, “sólo sé que es así. Ésta es la condición del escritor y debemos reivindicarla tal como es.” One *re-vindicates* that which has been rendered valueless on some occasion. Vargas Llosa’s renunciation of Sartre required that he search his own creative conscience. Such a search resulted in his powerful declaration of literature’s corrective function in “La literatura es fuego.” Vargas Llosa denounces the subtle encroachment of an ethics of ease that centers in social privileges, a recurring motif that shaped his third novel. He also confirms the need for Spanish American writers to remain distanced from these threats. “La literatura es fuego,” then, is most acutely anti-Sartrean in its depiction of literature as a spontaneous act that accepts no compromise from external persuasions. Furthermore, the novelist’s explicit denunciation of Sartre’s theories in the 1970s is consistent with his own developing theories on literature. Sartre, to use Vargas Llosa’s phraseology, became one of his most intimate demons, at once an internal preoccupation and a potent creative impetus. Vargas Llosa emerged from Sartre’s creative shadow in the late-1960s, but the philosopher’s influence never completely disappeared. Indeed, as J. J. Armas Marcelo concludes: “Sartre fue un dios pasajero que, sin embargo, dejó en MVLL su cicatriz indeleble [. . .]” (294). As Vargas Llosa attempted to reconcile his adherence to Sartre’s earliest concept to literature with its

practical application, he would experience subsequent disillusionments that would challenge his depiction of revolutionary writing. Vargas Llosa's struggle with these theories would ultimately produce some of his most powerful narratives and, ironically, would lead him to articulate the same revised conclusions about literature's incapacity to change the world that he formerly denounced in his literary mentor Jean-Paul Sartre.

CHAPTER II

CUBA AND THE BOOM

Literature and *socialism* are perhaps the two words that most acutely summarize Vargas Llosa's passions throughout the 1960s. At the same time that the young novelist was producing some of Spanish America's most canonical narratives—including *La ciudad y los perros*, *La Casa Verde*, and *Conversación en La Catedral*—he also sought a political setting that would not only encourage socio-economic equality, but also provide a space for a literature that could freely operate in its corrective function. And certainly, Vargas Llosa was not alone in his literary or political aspirations. As Fidel Castro proclaimed victory over Batista on January 1, 1959, a host of ambitious writers were ushering in a period of literary production in Spanish American history that was without precedent. In reality, the Cuban Revolution and the years collectively known as the Spanish American Boom were inseparable, providing a real-life case study for Vargas Llosa's notions regarding a revolutionary literature. As the Revolution was bolstered by the support of the Spanish American intellectual elite,¹ the literature of the Boom simultaneously prospered within the international spotlight that Castro's Cuba generated. The Cuban Revolution also offers a socio-political backdrop that is essential to any evaluation Vargas Llosa's writing during the 1960s, or, for that matter, the decades that

¹ Will H. Corral writes of a unique political atmosphere in Spanish America, wherein intellectualism and politics commonly merge: “[I]ntellectuals have [even] become presidents: Rómulo Gallegos in this century and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento in the last, for example” (491). Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier provides his own humorous definition that certainly had its application in the later stages in the Cuban Revolution: “[T]he Spanish-American intellectual was a man who frequently leaves the university to end up in prison” (qtd. in Corral 492). These interrelations between politics and literature would produce incredible successes in both areas throughout Spanish America in the 1960s, but would also produce challenges, as what was productive for one was not always compatible with the other.

followed. Specifically, Vargas Llosa's epic treatment of Peruvian society during the dictatorship of Manuel Odría in *Conversación en La Catedral* demonstrates not only a new level of literary experimentation, but also complicates and elucidates his developing concept of literature.

As Vargas Llosa was securing a permanent place for his novels in the annals of Spanish American narrative, he was also branching out into other expressive genres, specifically the essay. Indeed, the writer augmented his political activities at the same time that he increased his production of theoretical and political writings. Despite having written the majority of these essays and speeches during the formative years of the Revolution, Vargas Llosa did not publish any comprehensive collection until the early 1970s. Given that the creation of these important writings predates their publication, each essay provides a window to an emerging disparity between the literary theories he describes and his personal doubts in the 1970s regarding their viability. Vargas Llosa's political activities, and, specifically, his disillusionment with the Cuban Revolution following the imprisonment of Heberto Padilla, challenged his views on the potential of literature to occupy a place in Cuba, or even society at large. Most significantly, Vargas Llosa appears to question his own vocation as a writer during these conflictive years. Following a series of political letters and declarations, which many of the Spanish American intellectual elite considered a betrayal of his former commitment to socialism, Vargas Llosa experienced firsthand the solitude that he often attributed to the writer's vocation. More than his political positions, he was obliged through circumstance to defend his concept of literature at every turn, as the leftist circles of which he was once a part severely criticized both his character and his writing. Similar to Vargas Llosa's

notion that one who is devoted to literature “orders his entire life around this love and does battle for his lady whenever called upon” (*Writer’s Reality* 35), so too was he required to defend his views on literature at the expense of his political interests. Though Vargas Llosa was one of the most forthright proponents of Spanish American socialist revolution in the 1960s, he would eventually conclude: “My conviction altered, and I was disappointed at what Cuba had become and what real socialism was when you visited the Socialist countries” (148). Analogous to Jean-Paul Sartre’s disillusionments during the Algerian War for Independence, the Cuban Revolution challenged not only Vargas Llosa’s political positions, but also his basic concept of the writer’s vocation, especially with regard to the potential for literature to truly occupy a critical space in the world.

The “Boom” Generation

In the annals of Spanish America’s literary history, the 1960s are something of an anomaly. Certainly, writers such as Juan Rulfo (1917–86), Alejo Carpentier (1904–80), and, of course, Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986) inscribed themselves into the world literary canon in the preceding decades; nevertheless, even *their* extraordinary literary contributions were not entirely recognized until the onset of the period of creative innovation and international attention known as the Spanish American Boom. During those years of unprecedented creativity, structural complexities, and political aspirations, writers with the renown of Julio Cortázar (1914–1984), Gabriel García Márquez (b1927), Carlos Fuentes (b1928), and, certainly, Mario Vargas Llosa, established themselves as some of the most talented novelists of contemporary world literature. Despite the popularity of the Boom and a proliferation of scholarship concerning the same, the period’s

definition and extension remains a point of critical debate. Scholarly endeavors that position the literature of the 1960s outside of the Cuban political scene, however, neglect one of its primary socio-political contexts. Notwithstanding its importance, Cuba is not the sole factor in establishing a definition for the Boom. Several social, cultural, and political frameworks contributed to the Boom's development, and these become indispensable when placing Vargas Llosa and his concept of literature within the context of Spanish America's comprehensive literary history.

Succinctly defined, the Boom was less a literary movement than an event, or, more precisely, a series of them. One might say that in the 1960s the stars aligned for Spanish American literature. As Randolph Pope writes:

The development of the cities, the coming of age of a large middle class, the Cuban Revolution, the Alliance for Progress, an increase in communication between the countries of Latin America, the greater importance of the mass media, and a greater attention to Latin America from Europe and the United States, contributed to this change. (226)

Certainly, the socio-political circumstance that Cuba promoted captured the political attention of the United States and other nations which previously had a negligible interest in the island. Apart from urban development and aggressive marketing ploys, Castro's Revolution and its cultural implications were of particular mention in the development of the Boom, as writers emboldened by the revolution's promises for new social and artistic freedoms now had a considerable international audience.

Besides the novels themselves, the Boom also witnessed an explosion of literary criticism. Despite generalized descriptions of the period as a moment of increased experimentation coupled with a socio-political circumstance that placed Spanish America squarely in the world's radar, an absolute consensus as to the inclusion of authors and the

duration of the period remains undetermined. While some scholars characterize the literature of the Boom in terms of its themes, others cite creative experimentation as its unifying factor. Still others believe that the Boom was less about aesthetics than the politics of an historical moment. Following this last line of thought, the critical attention that the novelists of the Boom period received centered in an extraordinary socio-political spotlight as much as the works themselves. Should one note a degree of solidarity among the Boom writers, one should likewise recognize that these ties disbanded after the Cuban poet Heberto Padilla was imprisoned for his criticisms of the Revolution. That is, the intellectual support for the Cuban Revolution in its formative stages brought together one of the most talented groups of writers that world literature has produced. The co-called Boom novelists, however, were not typical of other literary schools. Given that it did not possess its own doctrines, theories, or general creative practices, the Boom dissolved concurrently with Vargas Llosa's optimism for freedom of expression in Castro's socialist revolution.

Despite the considerable influence of the political scene in Cuba, we must also remember that neither Spanish American literature nor its cultural Boom was produced in a creative vacuum. "La nueva narrativa hispanoamericana," which Carlos Fuentes describes in his concise treatise of the same title,² has clear literary precedents. Some of the critical confusion related to the parameters of the Boom, therefore, stems from the reality that there were actually two movements during this period, one creative and the

² Fuentes was fundamental in early attempts to bring together the Boom novelists under the banner of the Cuban Revolution. As Raymond L. Williams records: "The symbolic moment in which the ideology of the Cuban Revolution and the politics of the Boom were united occurred in 1962 at a literary conference in Concepción, Chile. There, Fuentes declared to Donoso and other prominent Chilean writers that the Latin American intellectual should be *engagé* and join in support of the Cuban Revolution. As Donoso has explained in his history of the Boom, never before has he heard a writer express such political positions so stridently" (*Postmodern Novel* 127).

other socio-political. As Seymour Menton notes, the Boom era was comprised of “both the intrinsic value of the literary works and the repercussions of the Cuban Revolution” (*Short Story* 419). Both coincided and were often interrelated; in fact, their courses often ran entirely parallel. The writers who contributed to the development of the Spanish American new narrative are numerous, dating back to as early as the 1940s. The Boom novelists, however, consist of a select few. For the purposes of this study, I limit these writers to those who participated in the marketing *boom* of the 1960s and the affairs of the Cuban Revolution.

During the 1960s, Vargas Llosa’s writings and Spanish American intellectualism revolved around the Cuban experience. From the beginning, some writers were completely dedicated to the Revolution, such as Carlos Fuentes and Mario Vargas Llosa, while others, as Ernesto “Che” Guevara notes, were distanced from the Revolution. Despite their lip service, he describes some writers’ reticence to submit their narratives to the needs of the Revolution as their “original sin: they are not authentic revolutionaries” (qtd. in Menton, *Prose Fiction* 11).³ Despite his uncompromised stance on the integrity of his literature, Vargas Llosa also sincerely believed, as Efraín Kristal observes, that “[. . .] his novels were condemning capitalism in Latin America on the eve of a revolutionary period” (xi). Vargas Llosa’s vision for Cuba included a political atmosphere wherein literature could criticize openly without the restraints of censorship. As a writer, in other words, he sought to couple his concept of literature with a socio-political setting founded

³ Vargas Llosa never seemed to have an entirely positive image of Che Guevara. In an essay entitled “La muerte del Che,” he wrote: “Por todo ello, y mucho más, el balance político y moral de lo que Ernesto Guevara representó —y de la mitología que su gesta y sus ideas generaron— es tremendamente negativo y no debe sorprendernos la declinación acelerada de su figura” (*Desafíos* 159). However, it is also important to note, as does Lourdes Casal, “Ché Guevara rechazaba los intentos de censurar la creación literaria y acomodarla a los moldes estereotipados de un realismo ‘socialista’ controlado por funcionarios” (7).

in critical tolerance. Vargas Llosa believed, as did others, that the Cuban Revolution was the means to this end. Though he currently favors free-market politics, socialism was at the heart of the writer's political commentaries throughout a significant portion of his career. Certainly, Vargas Llosa's desire for a socialist revolution in Cuba extended past the realm of his political interests. He also imagined a Cuban society that could embrace a literature that by nature would correct, agitate, and even at times directly oppose its established socio-political structures. This was also the hope of cultural outlets such as *Lunes de Revolución*, although such ambitions ultimately did not materialize.⁴ Given the Revolution's failure to meet his expectations, Vargas Llosa experienced early disillusionments with the Cuban experiment. As a consequence, he boldly declared his allegiance to literature to the detriment of his relationship with Castro.⁵

Apart from the Cuban political scene, international publication interests became the true "boom" of the 1960s,⁶ and the emerging Peruvian novelist Vargas Llosa took center stage during this publicity explosion. Mario Santana, for example, recognizes *La*

⁴ William Luis notes that *Lunes de Revolución* "Recoge en sus páginas el ambiente del momento. Refleja la primera etapa de la Revolución, de unión, alegría, trabajo y entusiasmo, pero también de conflictos, problemas, rupturas y discordias" (*Lunes* 9). Reading the pages of *Lunes de Revolución*, then, teaches us a great deal regarding its importance in Cuba's cultural revolution, as it simultaneously comments on the political controversies of the period.

⁵ Vargas Llosa's defense of the freedom of literature was not limited to the Cuban Revolution. In his native Peru, the writer was also deeply concerned with threats to the freedom of speech. Dick Gerdes notes that during the Cuban Revolution, "Vargas Llosa became concerned about the nationalization of the press, radio, and television. He quickly realized that the process had not liberated the media but continued to subject it to the same abuses of power and partisan censorship that it had faced under a free-enterprise system" (11). Vargas Llosa, as president of the PEN Club, also censured the President of Argentina, Jorge Rafael Videla, in 1976 for his treatment of intellectuals. "I urge you to end this persecution of ideas and books," wrote Vargas Llosa, "to respect the right of dissent, to safeguard the lives of citizens and to allow Argentine writers freely to fulfill the role which they have in society and thus contribute to its progress" (qtd. in Gerdes 13). These examples demonstrate that Vargas Llosa's reaction to Padilla's imprisonment in 1971 was certainly not an isolated case.

⁶ Despite demonstrating some of the creative innovations, for example, that Gabriel García Márquez introduced into his masterpiece narrative, *Cien años de soledad* (1967), "Most of the stories that Garcia Marquez wrote between 1947 and 1955 are seldom read or translated and have been generally ignored by the critics" (Cevallos 267). Such observations demonstrate the influence of the publicity and publication explosion of the 1960s on the exposure and general popularity of the Boom novelists.

ciudad y los perros as “the first Latin American text to captivate a sizable number of critics and become a bestseller in Spain after the Civil War [. . .]” (69). As the first non-Spanish writer to receive Seix Barral’s coveted *Premio Biblioteca Breve* in 1962, Vargas Llosa brought immediate critical attention to his debut novel and Spanish American literature. “When these two works first appeared in the 1960s,” Gerald Martin confirms, “Vargas Llosa was the prodigy of the booming new Latin America novel” (307).⁷ Indeed, the young writer became something of a poster boy for Seix Barral’s publishing ambitions; namely, to publicize the novelties of Spanish American literature through a series of marketing campaigns. Emerging at a time of literary innovation and political intrigue, Vargas Llosa became “a central figure in the literary debates of the decade, not only as a prominent novelist, but also as a critic of contemporary fiction” (Santana 69). His active interest in literary and political concerns only accelerated the proliferation of Spanish American letters throughout Europe, specifically Paris, where he resided at the time. As the world took increased interest in Spanish American literature, publishing houses continued to respond to the demand, thus becoming significant contributors in the development of the Boom. Specifically, Pope explains that “Only Spain [referring primarily to Seix Barral] had enough publishing power combined with adequate distribution of her books to make a novel simultaneously visible in most Spanish-speaking countries.” Given that the Spanish tradition was not only “at the end of a dry period of social realism,” but was also experiencing a significant social and economic

⁷ Martin also writes: “Vargas Llosa was also, at that time, something of an enfant terrible: a socialist and a Parisian, a devotee of Jean-Paul Sartre and a friend of revolutionary Cuba” (307). While the young writer was something of an anomaly, he was quickly incorporated into the mainstream of leftist intellectual circles, and rejected as swiftly once he became an impediment to the purposes of the Cuban Revolution.

transition toward modernity,⁸ a novel such as *La ciudad y los perros* proved as exotic as it was irresistible (230). Carlos Barral, Victor Seix, and Carmen Balcells's enterprise to establish a new marketability for their publications by tapping into a wider international base found fertile soil in Spanish America. Through their efforts, Spanish America's literary inventiveness—one of its defining characteristics during the 1960s—was provided an enthusiastic international audience to consume its fresh pages.

Apart from superior literary output from several nations throughout Spanish America, Cuba provides a concentrated view of this general occurrence. As the Revolution solidified, “the Cuban communist leaders viewed cultural change as the most important goal of the Revolution” (Bunck 3). As Julie Marie Bunck explains:

Cultural ills such as *machismo* and racism, materialism and laziness, elitism and greed were seen as direct consequences of an exploitative mode of production and of neighboring American imperialism. [. . .] The Castro leadership thus sought to replace these attitudes, wholly incompatible with a Marxist-Leninist society, with a more appropriate set of beliefs and values. (3)

As Cuba became the focus of Spanish American intellectualism, Castro also recognized the need to compete with other countries, such as Mexico, Argentina, and Chile, for cultural predominance. Cuba did not possess the history of cultural production of these countries, but the limelight that the Boom and the Revolution shared during the 1960s provided an opportunity for Castro to promote a new Cuban cultural atmosphere that could also advance his revolutionary ideals. Cuba's successes are evident in the rapid establishment and notoriety of magazines, newspapers, organizations, and literary awards

⁸ These years (approximately 1959–73) in Spanish history are often referred to as the “Spanish Miracle,” given the rapid social, economical, and political advances that followed a turbulent nineteenth century, the Great Depression, the Spanish Civil War, etc. Such a situation provided an opportunity for Spain not only to disseminate its own cultural contributions internationally, but also to profit from the political circumstance and literary inventiveness of Spanish American letters during this same period.

that attracted the attention of Spanish America's most significant scholars and writers.⁹ Castro would soon learn, however, that unrestrained cultural production was a two-edged sword. While a potent instrument in promoting his revolutionary ideals, it also opened the door to voices of discontent that challenged the Revolution's shortcomings. Cuba's promise to produce a cultural scene based upon freedom of expression became one of its most significant obstacles, ultimately leading to a devastating aperture with some of Spanish America's most prominent intellectuals.

Once the thirty-three-year-old Fidel Castro had concluded his extended *guerilla* struggle with Batista's armies at the dawn of 1959, he commenced a socio-political revolution that would determine the destiny of Cuba and even alter world history. Most important to our evaluation of Vargas Llosa's concept of literature, however, were Castro's efforts to cement his new Cuban culture in revolutionary ideals. Following Batista's *coup d'état* on March 10, 1952, a group of university students flew black flags over Havana University and voiced their protests through loudspeakers (Goldenberg 146). Castro understood the significance of both the anti-Batista sentiments and the fervor of young intellectuals in the furtherance of his Revolution. For this reason, he became adept at masking "his Marxist radicalization and to make it possible to set up a broad, united anti-Batista front" (153). Whether Theodore Draper is entirely accurate in stating that "Batista, not Castro, was the indispensable revolutionary ingredient" (116) is less important than recognizing that Castro's platform—including the reestablishment of the 1940 constitution and free elections—was centered in Cuba's resentment for Batista's

⁹ As William Luis notes: "La historia de la literatura hispanoamericana del siglo veinte está jalonada por las revistas literarias" (*Lunes* 19). These *revistas* provided an instant forum through which Cuba could become a cultural and political ensign throughout Spanish America.

forced rise to power. As Castro declared newfound freedoms in revolutionary Cuba, he also paraded the idea of a new national culture on the island. Though Cuba had enjoyed a degree of cultural prominence during the 1920s, the subsequent decades resulted in some significant literary achievements, but lacked the forums to adequately promote these works as an emerging national culture. Consequently, as Luis explains: “La escasez de editoriales en Cuba antes de 1959 posibilitó que las revistas se convirtieran en el vehículo más importante para diseminar las tendencias literarias de un momento determinado” (*Lunes* 19). Campaigns to revitalize education and literary production were appealing to numerous Spanish American intellectuals, and Vargas Llosa was not the least of these. Certainly, the skies of Cuba’s cultural history had some bright stars, including writer-intellectuals such as Fernando Ortiz, Nicolás Guillén, and Alejo Carpentier. Castro’s efforts, however, would transform the tide of Cuban letters into a cultural torrent as it also determined the future course of Spanish American literature.¹⁰ Notwithstanding its successes, the Revolution’s intimate relationship with several prominent, outspoken Spanish American writers would mean an inevitable clash of ideals, a conflictive circumstance that Cuba’s newborn culture was not entirely prepared to encounter. Indeed, Cuba in the 1950s, with the notable exception of *Orígenes* (1944–56), boasted “no powerful journals, very few dominating figures, and certainly no recent tradition of culture exchange” (González Echevarría 158). Throughout the 1960s and early 70s, Vargas Llosa’s double-bind crisis was comprised of his desire for socialist revolution

¹⁰ As Roberto González Echevarría writes in 1985: “When the history of twentieth-century Latin American literature is written, much attention will have to be paid to the role of the Cuban Revolution in its development. The Cuban Revolution is the dividing line in contemporary Latin American literature, a literature of before the revolution and one of after the revolution. [. . .] Aside from individual cases, the whole tenor and tempo of cultural activity changes after 1959, not only because of what Cuba does, but also because of what is done elsewhere in reaction to Cuba” (154).

throughout Spanish America and a growing suspicion that the integrity of his literature would be compromised in the service of the Revolution's political interests. As Cuba moved toward a politicized literature in the latter stages of its Revolution, Castro was obliged to adopt a new literary politics. Cuba's leader was essentially gridlocked between the establishment of a new revolutionary culture and his need to defend the ideals of the Revolution against insurrections. Criticism within the Cuban cultural machine was ultimately equated with "the somber legion of enemies who inside and outside of Cuba are planning a sinister revenge" (Aguilar 145). The disparity between literature and politics polarized Spanish American intellectuals and, ultimately, shape the controversies that would expose Castro's intolerance of the critical tendencies that were also the hallmark of Vargas Llosa's narratives.

Prior to 1959, Cuba's academic and journalistic situation—to borrow a word from Roberto González Echevarría—was "dismal" (157), as even its most recognized magazine, *Orígenes*, ceased publication five years earlier. Soon after the Revolution, however, Castro's followers began to establish literary forums through which the nation could promote its revolutionary ideals. "The lack of publishing houses in Cuba before 1959," William Luis observes, "allowed magazines to become an essential vehicle for disseminating literary currents during their publication period" ("Exhuming" 253). Starting as a page of the newspaper *Revolución*, the subsequent supplement *Lunes de Revolución*, which Carlos Franqui proposed and Guillermo Cabrera Infante established on March 30, 1959, was an early attempt to promote such cultural exchanges throughout Cuba. Luis describes *Lunes de Revolución* as "una de las publicaciones literarias más importantes del mundo hispanamericano del siglo veinte" (*Lunes* 9), and further explains

that: “Writers of *Lunes de Revolución* promoted a vernacular literature, recognized the importance of foreign literature, and translated many works from the French, English, and other languages” (“Culture as Text” 84). *Lunes de Revolución*’s broad scope, however, proved to be simultaneously an instrument of its most noteworthy successes and the cause of its eventual demise. Though it reinvigorated a substantial dialogue throughout Cuban intellectualism and Spanish America at large, the cultural supplement was ultimately condemned as anti-revolutionary. According to Castro’s standards, its ideological bent toward the Revolution was not satisfactorily clear.

Guillermo Cabrera Infante, director of *Lunes de Revolución*, declared an independent stance for the literary supplement, a position that Vargas Llosa outwardly supported as he sought a Cuban circumstance that would negate the fabrication of culture for political purposes. As the Revolution progressed, however, Cuba changed drastically as opposition mounted against the “[. . .] political shift in Castro and his government, away from the supporters of the 26th of July Movement and towards those of the Communist Party” (Luis, “Culture as Text” 85). Vargas Llosa describes his disillusionment with this reality as Cuba “[. . .] optó por un rumbo diferente y por unas formas soviéticas de socialismo, por un sistema autoritario, vertical, sin libertad de prensa, de control policial del pensamiento” (qtd. in Setti 141). Castro’s famous 1961 declaration to the intellectuals of the Revolution, “Dentro de la Revolución, todo; fuera de la Revolución, nada,” soon became evident culturally in his impassioned reaction to several authors and publications at the time. Castro’s strong stance at the Bay of Pigs invasion convinced some of the Revolution’s resilience. On the one hand, as Luis observes, this event and others “[. . .] favorecieron la unidad de la nación en contra de un

enemigo común [. . .]” (*Lunes* 29). Other the other, it also placed Castro on a perpetually defensive stage with respect to the possibility of future invasions and insurrections.

Common apathy combined with threats of dissent led Castro to realize in the early 1960s that free speech would of necessity be included on the list of the Revolution’s causalities.¹¹ From this point onward, and increasingly so, Cuban culture would be required to conform to the ideals of the Revolution or be condemned to silence. Cabrera Infante, consequently, published the last issue of *Lunes de Revolución* on November 6, 1961. The significance of its period of publication extends beyond its import as one of the Revolution’s first cultural outlets. It also served as a foreshadowing of Castro’s response to voices of opposition throughout the subsequent decade. Despite Vargas Llosa’s enthusiastic endorsement of socialist revolution, even after his eventual disenchantment with the politics of the Cuban Revolution, the writer’s true commitment was to his literature, even if it meant being ostracized from the intellectual circles that were so intimately tied to his political ambitions.

Despite the complications of the late-1960s and early-1970s, the novelists of the Boom era were unified in their optimism. World attention from foreign publishers, coupled with the excitement of the Cuban Revolution, emboldened Spanish American

¹¹ One of numerous early indications of Castro’s concern with free expression and the image of the Revolution occurs in a letter that he sent to the controversial Chicago Tribune Latin American correspondent Jules Dubois regarding his March 1959 publication of a book-length study on his life. Castro’s letter (dated February 14, 1959) reads: “Mr. Jules Dubois: I understand that you are writing a book entitled FIDEL CASTRO, Rebel, Liberator or Dictator. I do not know what you will write and I do not know what opinions you will express in the book. Every person in the society of free nations—and even those who are oppressed under the heels of dictators—has a right to express his or her opinion. Under the tyranny of Fulgencio Batista that right was denied to the people of Cuba. It is the duty of every newspaperman to report the news, for only with freedom of the press can there be political freedom. Should your book contain errors and should your opinions expressed therein be mistaken or unjust, I shall not hesitate to express my own opinions about the contents of the book when it is published. [Signed] Fidel Castro.” The beginning of Castro’s letter indicates his early intention to maintain the freedom of expression, but the warning in its conclusion prefigures the need for control that would ultimately lead to Cuban censorship.

authors in the 1960s to break away from the social realism of the past in favor of new and innovative literary forms.¹² Whether this confidence can actually be attributed to “a wave of political optimism that swept the Latin American Left after the success of the Cuban Revolution” (Booker 16), or is merely the natural progression of its narratives toward modern experimentation, the literary contributions of the Boom novelists to the future of Spanish American literature were significant.¹³ From the playfulness of Cabrera Infante’s *Tres tristes tigres* (1967) to the use of multiple voices and registers in Fuentes’s *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1962) to the explosion of magical realism onto the world scene through García Márquez’s *Cien años de soledad* (1967), the Boom novelists, both individually and collectively, provided the world with a palpable excitement and literary originality that was contagious.

Clearly, the creative brilliance of the Boom period is not dimmed by our recognition that the entrance of these and other works into the world literary canon was

¹² Vargas Llosa’s literature was more experimental in form than content; certainly, the magical realism that was the mainstay of novelists such as Gabriel García Márquez was not part of the Peruvian’s literary world. Responding to Mónica Xiomara Navarro in an interview in London in 1997, Vargas Llosa provided insightful commentary regarding his relationship with magical realism: “Bueno, yo te voy a dar una respuesta que no es mía, es de un crítico, pero que a mí me gustó mucho y la he adoptado. Me parece que fue de David Gallagher, que fue un crítico muy interesante, fue profesor de Oxford. Él para mí escribió uno de los mejores ensayos que he leído sobre *Conversación en La Catedral*, brillante realmente, magnífico el ensayo. El decía lo siguiente: Bueno, Vargas Llosa sí es realista en sus historias, en sus anécdotas, donde está el realismo mágico, donde está lo imaginario y la fantasía de Mario Vargas Llosa es en su forma, la forma de Vargas Llosa no tiene nada que ver con el realismo; las historias anulan completamente el tiempo, evoluciona la historia por el tiempo como si fuera un espacio retrocediendo, avanzando, volviendo. El tiempo está como inmovilizado, congelado, los efectos son anteriores a las causas. Hay toda una recomposición que es totalmente imaginaria mágica, fantástica, de los términos de la realidad para contar unas historias que son realistas. Entonces lo mágico, lo imaginario, lo fantástico es la forma, es la técnica” (189). The Peruvian’s realist tendencies would nevertheless be criticized as archaic and unoriginal toward the end of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s by numerous Spanish American intellectuals, as will be commented in subsequent pages of this chapter.

¹³ M. Keith Booker makes a noteworthy comparison between the 1960s in Spanish America and an analogous intellectual circumstance in the United States during the prosperity of the 1920s: “The reminder here of the optimism of Vargas Llosa and his fellow ‘Boom’ artists in the wake of the Cuban Revolution suggests an historical parallel that is worth pondering: it indicates at least one concrete reason why writers in Latin America in the 1960s should produce texts so reminiscent of those of Continental and Anglo-American writers in the 1920s” (26). Perhaps, for this reason, writers such as William Faulkner (1897–1962) were so appealing in style, content, and form to the novelists of the Boom generation.

facilitated by external influences. While Spain provided the thrust that disseminated Spanish American literature throughout Europe, other influences in the United States, such as the Kennedy Administration's Alliance for Progress; publishing houses, especially Harper and Row; journals such as *Review* from the Center for Inter-American Relations; and the emergence of superior translators, namely Gregory Rabassa, also combined to produce a new North American interest in Spanish American culture that was as prolific as it was well-marketed. These circumstances further transported the writers of the 1960s into the international spotlight; however, as Vargas Llosa warned in "La literatura es fuego," this new integration into near literary stardom also introduced a seductive threat. At the same time that several nonliterary factors presented the Boom novelists to a world audience, they also determined through marketing, politics, and scholarly criticism the interpretation of their narratives, causing Nobel Prize laureate Gabriel García Márquez to conclude as a reflection: "La interpretación de nuestra realidad con esquemas ajenos solo contribuye a hacernos cada vez más desconocidos, cada vez menos libres, cada vez más solitarios" ("Soledad"). As the Cuban Revolution gradually departed from its original promises, several writers were to learn that faithfulness to the integrity of their literature would also mean exclusion from Cuba's intellectual circles and even exile from the island. Furthermore, the end of Cuban solidarity also concluded the Boom. As José Donoso reflected in 1972:

El *boom* ha sido un juego; quizás más precisamente, un caldo de cultivo que durante una década alimentó en Hispanoamérica la fatigada forma de la novela, y el *boom* desaparecerá—ya se habla menos de él—, y quedarán tres o cuatro o cinco novelas magistrales que lo recuerden, y por las cuales haya valido la pena tanto escándalo y tanta bulla. (qtd. in Angvik 193)

Whether a *game* or simply a political circumstance that facilitated the exposure of some of the most innovative novels of the century, the Boom indeed dissolved, although its literature and socio-political implications are nonetheless enduring. Though Vargas Llosa would continue on as the most prominent of the post-Boom writers, he would also conclude through a number of hard lessons that solitude was preferable to interpolation when balancing between the demands of politics and the ideals of literature.

Conversación en La Catedral

With the publication of *La ciudad y los perros* and *La Casa Verde*, Vargas Llosa had already established himself as one of the principle novelists of the Boom. Though the thematic and structural successes of his first two novels were considerable, his third narrative would take these to a new level of complexity and experimentation. The novel is also a political experiment that exemplified the type of literature that supporters of the Revolution demanded of writers. *Conversación en La Catedral*, published in two parts in 1969, dramatizes the experiences of Santiago Zavala (“Zavalita”), the son of a powerful politician and businessman. Besides delving into the socio-political implications of Santiago’s refusal to receive the social favors of his father, Don Fermín, Vargas Llosa also addresses an important period in Peruvian history known as *el ochenio*, a term used to refer to the eight-year dictatorship (1948–56) of Manuel Odría.¹⁴ *Conversación en La Catedral* is not only the writer’s most complicated narrative—as it blurs the boundaries

¹⁴ Vargas Llosa once commented to Miguel Oviedo: “[L]a dictadura de Odría era muy diferente de otras que fueron o son más violentas. Esta prefirió gobernar mediante la corrupción, la intriga, el compromiso y la duplicidad... Fue una dictadura que robó a nuestra generación. No hubo héroes ni produjo mártires, pero sí muchos fracasos” (qtd. in Oviedo, *Invencción* 245). One of the central themes of *Conversación en La Catedral*, then, becomes the ruin that is Peru at the time, including the disillusionment that this causes in the personal lives of each of the novel’s central protagonists.

of time and space by literally telling several stories simultaneously—but is also Vargas Llosa’s “most political novel” (Rossman 493).¹⁵ The result of this mixture is the narrative’s greatest achievement, an aesthetic portrayal of a confused Peruvian society wherein Santiago questions once and again the origins of his nation’s socio-political failures. Furthermore, the protagonist’s disappointments are analogous to those that his author was experiencing at the time of the novel’s construction. While one must be cautious when reading a fictional work as representative of its author’s sentiments—Vargas Llosa insisted on the autonomy of his writing—there is a strong correlation between the personal experiences of Santiago and the novelist. As Sabine Schlickers writes, *Conversación en La Catedral* presents a narrator who “sólo finge ser desinteresado e imparcial” (189). As a consequence, the novel often serves as a creative window into Vargas Llosa’s deepest concerns, including his struggles with certain communist doctrines, the direction of the Cuban Revolution, and even the basic premises of his concept of literature in the 1960s.

Literary Commitment

Vargas Llosa’s principle protagonist, Santiago Zavala, is an aspiring revolutionary who ultimately consigns himself to a life of mediocrity as a journalist.

¹⁵ On the contrary, it is interesting to note that Vargas Llosa has claimed that *Conservación en la Catedral* “[n]o es una novela política y no tiene tema político, pero algunos de los caracteres que describo son personajes verdaderos de la vida política” (qtd. in Boldori de Baldussi 43). I concur with Charles Rossman’s assessment that: “To be sure, all his books reverberate with political implications, given their depiction of political corruption, the abuse of power, the exploitation of the weak, and the coerciveness of the socio-economic hierarchy. But *Conversation in the Cathedral* addresses such themes directly and explores them within an explicitly political setting in modern Peru” (493). Perhaps unwittingly, *Conversación en La Catedral* becomes the first narrative that overtly incorporates Vargas Llosa’s personal opinion into his text, despite the author’s claims to the contrary. His tendency to express in his novels arguments from his essays would become increasingly common in the pages of his subsequent creative narratives.

Despite Vargas Llosa's confessions that his experiences writing for *La Crónica* informed this and other novels, he also has made clear distinctions between journalistic and novelistic pursuits. Similar to Vargas Llosa, Santiago begins writing as a poet, but, under the pressures of society leaves the vocation to become a mere "typewriter." Though not readily apparent, Vargas Llosa's concern is not one of style, but rather of the freedom necessary for the creative writer to remain true to his literary vocation. As Vargas Llosa once stated regarding the life of Sebastián Salazar Bondy: "No sería justo, por lo demás, condenar rápidamente a esos jóvenes que reniegan de su vocación, es preciso examinar antes las razones que los mueven a desertar. En efecto, ¿qué significa, en el Perú, ser escritor?" ("Salazar Bondy" 93–94). Besides the example of Santiago, we also see in the characterization of one of his conversation partners, namely Carlos, similar struggles with Vargas Llosa's question, especially with regard to society's propensity for exhausting creative spontaneity. Some critics have expressed their opinion that Vargas Llosa's portrayal of these characters—as several renounce revolutionary and literary ambitions under the pressures of socio-political corruption—demonstrates the writer's doubts with regard to the potential of literature to effectuate change in the world. As Schlickers observes: "Parece por lo tanto que ya en *Conversación [en La Catedral]* existe una toma de distancia implícita acerca del poder político de la escritura, defendido con tanto fervor por Sartre" (191). *Conversación en La Catedral* could represent Vargas Llosa's first literary *distancing* from his former commitment to the influence of literature, but we must also consider the other face of the critic's suspicions: "[. . .] la novela podría leerse también como una puesta en tela de juicio de las condiciones de posibilidad de la filosofía de la libertad de Sartre" (91). Throughout his career, Vargas Llosa has used his

writing as a testing ground for both his literary theories and deepest concerns. Furthermore, his literature is replete with negations of the ideal, as he has preferred instead to portray reality's most deplorable circumstances. Taking Peruvian literature from the 1950s as models, Vargas Llosa's writing is consistent in its "oposición a los valores y concepción del mundo del statu quo" (Vidal 19). Using this definition of his literature as a guide, therefore, we can read Santiago's and Carlos's respective betrayals of their original revolutionary and literary zeal as a condemning double thrust of societal pressure and lack of commitment. As Vargas Llosa notes: "Esa vocación, además de hermosa, es absorbente y tiránica, y reclama de sus adeptos una entrega total" ("Fuego" 133). Vargas Llosa further demonstrates his debt to Sartre in *Conversación en La Catedral* in his depiction of characters who are entrapped by "una situación histórica determinada" (Schlickers 191). Though Santiago certainly "se acomoda en el fracaso y práctica 'la mauvaise foi' en vez de comprometerse" (191), Vargas Llosa's novel implies that his protagonist is not entirely at fault, as he becomes yet another victim, strangled by the grip of a demoralizing Peruvian society. As Frank Dauster notes: "Lima is, for Vargas Llosa, a regimented inhuman society which forces even its youth into a moral and intellectual straightjacket" (274). His fatalistic portrayal of individuals who conform to the demands of society is also inherently Sartrean in the narrative's apparent recognition of a writer's moral responsibility to use the pen to combat repressive socio-political circumstances—such a position, of course, is also one of the standards of speeches such as "La literatura es fuego."

Throughout the introduction of "La literatura es fuego," Vargas Llosa emphasizes: "Como regla general, el escritor latinoamericano ha vivido y escrito en

condiciones excepcionalmente difíciles, porque nuestras sociedades habían montado en frío, casi perfecto mecanismo para desalentar y matar en él la vocación” (133). Vargas Llosa’s definition of the function of literature in society has changed throughout the years; nevertheless, his commitment to literature at the expense of all other passions was absolute at the time. In *Conversación en La Catedral*, Santiago’s duplicity becomes his predicament. As society tugs at him in several directions, he fails to commit to his original passions, with the possible exception of his repugnance for social privilege. Responding to inquiries regarding his study plans, for example, Santiago replies with characteristic trepidation, “Creo que Literatura,” and then adds, “Pero todavía no sé” (1: 79). Similarly, Santiago lacks the commitment to pursue romances, engage in sustained revolutionary activities, or even continue to write poetry. Rather, he has made the conscious choice to prostitute his literary talents, confessing, “Vengo temprano, me dan mi tema, me tapo la nariz y en dos o tres horas, listo, jalo la cadena y ya está” (1: 14). Similar to Alberto in Vargas Llosa’s first novel, Santiago realizes that the real world demands the sacrifice of one’s ideals. Throughout the narrative, he searches for the specific moment when his own life and Peruvian society took a turn for the worst. “Él era como el Perú [. . .] se había jodido en algún momento,” but Santiago true question becomes: “¿en cuál?” (1: 13). Vargas Llosa challenges his readers to ask the same question of his Peruvian homeland and his literary protagonist. Santiago’s disillusionments are not the evidence of what has to be, but rather what perpetually has been. Vargas Llosa’s depiction of a writer who succumbs to society’s pressures, then, serves as an opportunity for others to reaffirm their own commitment to writing and its socio-political implications. Serving as a counter-example of his author’s own

commitment to the writer's vocation, Santiago is both a model of the devastating consequences of noncommitment to one's literary endeavors and a subtle but powerful invitation for writers to choose otherwise.

¿De veras eres comunista?

As Santiago recounts details from his past in a three-hour conversation with Ambrosio, a former chauffeur of Don Fermín, he recalls several personal dialogues related to Peruvian politics. One of these involves a female revolutionary named Aída, who is also Santiago's unfulfilled love interest. Santiago's question to Aída, "¿Tú eres comunista? [. . .] ¿De veras eres comunista?" (1: 76), is also a self-directed inquiry. Moreover, these reservations reflect Vargas Llosa's own conflictive relationship with communism.¹⁶ Though committed to socialist principles, the novelist had practical concerns with the tendency of communist regimes to censor individual freedoms of expression for the benefit of the collective. As evidenced in a 1967 speech in London entitled, "La censura en la URSS y Alexandr Solzhenitsin," Vargas Llosa echoed the sentiments of several intellectuals who viewed the Soviets as a model for their respective socialist revolutions, but disagreed with some of their precepts regarding personal freedom. Following the ratification of the new USSR constitution, which prohibited censorship as an official communist doctrine, the state censors nonetheless continued to

¹⁶ Vargas Llosa's struggles with communism mirror, to some degree, those of Jean-Paul Sartre. As Mark Poster notes: "Sartre's adherence to the Soviet position must not be overemphasized. Unhappy with capitalism and liberal democracy, Sartre was by no means a spokesman for the proletariat, much less for Stalinism. In support of popular, democratic movements, Sartre remained independent of the CP and suspicious of marxism's claim as the sole representative of the oppressed" (10). Similar to Vargas Llosa, Sartre desired a socialist society that could ensure *common* free choice (Desan 150). Sartre's position, however, was complicated by his notions of a determined historicity, which meant that if communism was the wave of the future, which he believed it was, "Each individual sees the totality of the struggle and aligns himself on one side or on the other" (96). Vargas Llosa was unwilling to make such a clear declaration of allegiance.

regulate printed materials, including the publication of literature. Alexandr Solzhenitsyn condemned these actions as illegal and even immoral, declaring that such censorship denied the Soviet's declared revolutionary freedoms. "Excelentes manuscritos de autores jóvenes," Solzhenitsyn reports, "aún desconocidos, son rechazados por los editores con el único argumento de que no pasarán la censura" (qtd. in Vargas Llosa, "Solzhenitsin" 127). Through Vargas Llosa's commentaries on Solzhenitsyn's words,¹⁷ he reveals his own views on the relationship between writers and the societies that would silence their antagonistic voices. "Una literatura que no respira *el mismo aire* de su sociedad," Vargas Llosa concludes, "que no puede mostrar a la sociedad sus temores y sus dolores, que no puede alterar *a tiempo* sobre los peligros morales y sociales, no merece el nombre de literatura, sino de 'cosméticos'" (128–29; emphasis mine). Vargas Llosa's description brings to the fore Sartre's insistence that a writer was obligated to address the contemporary concerns of his or her own society. His desire for socialist revolution complicated his criticisms of communism. Notwithstanding early backlash from the intellectual Left, however, he remained persistent in his censure of any society that censored the type of condemnatory literature that he advocated in his essays and exemplified in his novels.

During a writer's conference in Moscow on May 22–25, 1967, Solzhenitsyn implored, according to the words of Vargas Llosa, "[. . .] la abolición de toda clase de censura para las obras artísticas y libere a las editoriales de la obligación de obtener permiso de las autoridades antes de publicar cualquier libro" (128). As a response to the censorship that Solzhenitsyn denounces, Vargas Llosa wrote:

¹⁷ It should be noted that throughout Vargas Llosa's essay, his tone is extraordinary cautious as he balances between his defense of literature and his political interests at the moment.

La censura fomenta la arbitrariedad y desemboca en el absurdo. Su origen es la incomprensión del acto creador, un inconfesable temor a la obra de arte, y la estúpida creencia de que un libro, un cuadro, un poema o una película no son sino instrumentos para la propaganda política o religiosa, vehículos para difundir y acuñar en la sociedad las consignas y la ideología del poder. (130)

Apart from his comments on the vices of these literary restrictions, Vargas Llosa also references his aversion to a trend called “socialist realism,” a creative doctrine which encouraged artists and writers to contribute their talents to revolutionary causes through the explicit promotion of socialist ideals.¹⁸ Although Vargas Llosa certainly believed that his novels had socio-political consequences, his definition of literature required a clear detachment from the influence of ideology, even those doctrines that he openly supported.¹⁹ As Vargas Llosa recalled years later, these conflicts between literary integrity and political ambition would become increasingly complicated. “Because Socialist realism was the official aesthetic philosophy of the Communist party,” the writer explains, “I had a difficult relationship with my comrades in the party because I could not share this philosophy, this aesthetic doctrine of Socialist realism, which espoused literature as propaganda, as a vehicle to disseminate political ideas and the

¹⁸ Socialist Realism is a cultural trend in some socialist and communist countries that uses art to promote political ideals in an explicit manner. While some nations adopted socialist realism wholesale, it is important to note that this was not the case in Cuba. As Rafael Hernández and Haroldo Dilla write in 1991: “In contrast with other socialist countries, Cuba has had no official art. A look at the literature, plastic arts, and music created over the last 30 years reflects the assimilation of contemporary currents of talents and the space granted to experimental and avant-garde art. Socialist realism is simply one of many schools of art, not an official ‘state art’” (43). Cuban cultural outlets, in fact, seemed to be cautious to avoid direct association with the term. Though the Cuban government certainly influenced and even manipulated its cultural production, Castro’s initial promises regarding the freedom of artistic expression appear to have successfully safeguarded the island from an “official” cultural doctrine.

¹⁹ Vargas Llosa carried this position to its ultimate consequence when he wrote in *Literature and Freedom* (1994) that literature represented not only that “element which rushes out spontaneously from the most secret corner of one’s personality,” but also that creative writing: “[. . .] in some cases, not only does not coincide with our ideas but can even go so far as to substantially contradict them” (qtd. in Köllmann 64).

correct philosophy of the proletariat” (*Writer’s Reality* 48).²⁰ Due to Vargas Llosa’s commitment to the autonomous character of his literature, the writer was ostracized from several of the intellectual circles that were once a safe haven.

Following Vargas Llosa’s criticism of Soviet censorship, he also condemned its invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Given the intimate relations between Cuba and the Soviet Union, the Peruvian’s commentaries were not well received by left-leaning Spanish America intellectuals. By the publication of *Conversación en La Catedral*, Vargas Llosa was already receiving criticisms from his former revolutionary compatriots. His position on Cuba and socialism as an institution is perhaps best summarized in the pages of his third novel, specifically through an exchange between Santiago and his friend Popeye. As Santiago declares his desire to study at the controversial San Marcos instead of the more conservative choice, La Católica, Popeye concludes: “O sea que ahora también te las das de ateo.” Santiago’s response not only typifies his character, but is also emblematic of Vargas Llosa’s own posture with regard to Cuba and socialism. “No me las doy de ateo,” Santiago replies, “Que no me gusten los curas no quiere decir que no crea en Dios” (1: 37). Though Santiago’s metaphor uses religious imagery, it aptly describes his author’s underlying political concerns. In short, Vargas Llosa declared in unambiguous terms that his occasional criticisms of some communist regimes were not indicative of any apparent waning in his support for the larger objectives of socialist revolution. As Vargas Llosa recalls even years later: “I was very enthusiastic about

²⁰ Discussing the work of Roland Barthes, Vargas Llosa made an interesting distinction between literature and politics through a definition of the terms *écrivante* and *écrivain*. Vargas Llosa explains: “If I remember, he said an *écrivante* is someone who uses language only as an instrument, an instrument through which a message, any sort of message, can be transmitted. And an *écrivain*, a writer, is someone who uses language as an end in itself, as something that in itself has justification. That is a good distinction between a professional, or instrumental, writer and a creative writer” (*Writer’s Reality* 114–15). It is through this “distinction” that Vargas Llosa first started to make his concept of literature independent from the theories of Jean-Paul Sartre.

Marxism in general in spite of having many doubts and disagreements with some aspects of Marxism, particularly the Marxist approach to aesthetics, to literature, to art” (*Writer’s Reality* 145). Despite his efforts to reconcile these political and literary interests, however, Vargas Llosa experienced the same disillusionments as his protagonist. Throughout the 1960s, numerous detractors would challenge his theoretical distinctions between literature and politics, especially during some of the most decisive moments of the Cuban Revolution.

Personal Disillusionment

While Efraín Kristal claims that *Conversación en La Catedral* is the culmination of Vargas Llosa’s “socialist period,” stating that it is in tune with his “socialist conviction that capitalist society is inherently beyond reform” (66), Sabine Köllmann rejects such a position, noting that there is “no hint of a real alternative to this society. [*Conversación en La Catedral*] is by no means the burning attack on politics that one might have expected [. . .]” (93). There is truth in both of these statements, but the novel is perhaps best placed somewhere in between. Undoubtedly, a basic tenet of the narrative is its notion that Peruvian corruption has condemned the region to perpetual failure and disillusionment. Ambiguities regarding solutions, on the other hand, do not contradict but rather concur with Vargas Llosa’s notion that literature serves to cultivate the discontent required for his readership to counteract societal voids with revolutionary action. Literary theories aside, the foreboding sense of despair in *Conversación en La Catedral* admittedly appears also to indicate that the beleaguered writer shared at least some of his protagonist’s personal disappointments.

From the dedicatory epigraph of the novel, Vargas Llosa establishes a personal context for his momentous novel. Dedicated to Luis Loayza (b. 1934), “el borgiano de Petit Thouars,” and Abelardo Oquendo, “el Delfín,” the dedication concludes with “con todo el cariño del sartrecillo valiente, su hermano de entonces y de todavía.” During the earliest years of Vargas Llosa’s writing, Loayza, a talented but largely unread Peruvian writer, and Oquendo, a Peruvian cinematographer,²¹ were close friends. The three artists shared numerous conversations about literature and politics, and often corresponded during Vargas Llosa’s years in France through frequent letter writing. Vargas Llosa’s dedication, in fact, is almost an exact replication of a quote from Oquendo’s introduction to a collection of these letters wherein he recalls his earliest encounters with Vargas Llosa, first at a conference and then through a chance meeting on a bus:

A partir de ese viaje en ómnibus fuimos construyendo una hermosa amistad que pronto compartimos con Luis Loayza, el borgeano de la calle Petit Thouars. Lo llamábamos, entre nosotros, el sartrecillo valiente: Jean-Paul Sartre era en esos tiempos su paradigma.²² Éramos íntimos, inseparables, solidarios [. . .]. [Después] su creación literaria ingresó a nuestras conversaciones, y cuando dejó el Perú fue tema frecuente de sus cartas.

Unfortunately, the details of their actual conversations are lost in time, besides the invaluable glimpses recorded in letters. It is likely, however, that the threesome’s

²¹ In 2005, Abelardo Oquendo produced a filmic biography of Vargas Llosa, tracing his political shifts and touching briefly on some of his major literary works. Some prominent figures from Spanish America and Vargas Llosa’s personal life—including Guillermo Cabrera Infante (before his death in February 2005) and Julia Urquidí—also participated in the project.

²² Oquendo’s reference to Vargas Llosa as “el sartrecillo valiente” is substantiated in letters that the young writer sent to him during his formative years as a novelist. Vargas Llosa, for example, writes to Oquendo: “Anoche oí hablar a Sartre. Ya sabes que esto era una vieja aspiración de adolescente. Como es natural estoy muy impresionado y tengo una urgencia por hablar de eso, horas de horas. ¡Helas! Con la partida de Luis [Loayza] me he quedado sin un ‘interlocutor válido’, como dice De Gaulle; los amigos que tengo aquí son otra cosa, no pueden comprender lo que esto significa exactamente, se quedarían sorprendidos si me vieran tan excitado, pensarían que soy un pequeño burgués incorregible, un alienado, un beato. Tú y Loayza en cambio, saben que Sartre no es para mí una estrella de cine, sino un instrumento, el único, creo, que tiene respuestas precisas y definitivas para los problemas que me tocan de veras.” Once more, Vargas Llosa demonstrates his dependence upon Sartre’s theories in his development as a writer and the significance of his break with his creative mentor in subsequent years.

conversaciones about literature, politics, and the failures of Peruvian society became a powerful influence on the conceptualization of *Conversación en La Catedral*.

The solidarity that Vargas Llosa shared with Loayza and Oquendo contrasts the Peruvian's growing disassociation with those within Cuba's intellectual circles. During Vargas Llosa years in France, he wrote a letter to Oquendo that at once confirmed his dedication to Sartre and introduced his new position as an outsider.

Anoche oí hablar a Sartre. Ya sabes que esto era una vieja aspiración de adolescente. Como es natural estoy muy impresionado y tengo una urgencia por hablar de eso, horas de horas. ¡Helas! Con la partida de Luis [Loayza] me he quedado sin un "interlocutor válido", como dice De Gaulle; los amigos que tengo aquí son otra cosa, no pueden comprender lo que esto significa exactamente, se quedarían sorprendidos si me vieran tan excitado, pensarían que soy un pequeño burgués incorregible, un alienado, un beato. Tú y Loayza en cambio, saben que Sartre no es para mí una estrella de cine, sino un instrumento, el único, creo, que tiene respuestas precisas y definitivas para los problemas que me tocan de veras.

Vargas Llosa's circle of "interlocutors" reduced incrementally as he spoke out against the failures of Soviet communism and, more specifically, the direction of the Cuban Revolution. Though these isolationist sentiments would come to a climax in the 1970s, Vargas Llosa had already faced significant criticism—both politically and literarily—in the previous decade, due, in part, to his resolute defense of the writer's role as perpetual disturber of a society's *statu quo*. Certainly, the writer's disillusionment with the practical application of his literary and political ideals permeates each page of *Conversación en La Catedral*. Santiago's disappointment with his inability to sustain his personal ideals amidst the pressures of a corrupt society was all too familiar to his author by the late-1960s. Perhaps it is for this reason, then, that so many of the Peruvian's earlier novels demonstrate "la alienación de los personajes que no logran decidir su propio destino y son arrastrados por los sucesos" (Enkvist 83). During the years when he composed

Conversación en La Catedral, Vargas Llosa sensed a turn in his relationship with his literary cohorts and even his own definition of literature. Similar to his protagonist, however, Vargas Llosa struggled to pinpoint the moment that his disenchantment commenced, a circumstance that would take him another three decades to truly reconcile in his writings. One might describe the novelist at this time using words similar to those that critic Charles Rossman employs to describe Santiago. While the young idealist initially believes in the efficacy of revolution, the realities of the world cause him to realize that his perspective is more naïve than pure. As Rossman astutely notes: “By the time that [Santiago] reaches the university, however, he can be more truthful” (497), as he understands that his idealistic zeal was less than compatible with the political atmosphere. Vargas Llosa seems to anticipate in his protagonist’s regrettable epiphany his own disappointments with the politics of the Cuban Revolution.

Conversación en La Catedral has often been celebrated for its structural and narrational contributions to Spanish American literature’s most distinguished decade, but there remains a continued need to analyze the novel with regard to its author’s concept of literature then and in the future. Contemporary and extraordinarily Peruvian, *Conversación en La Catedral* depicts Peruvian society at its worst, engrossing the reader in the depths of one of its most difficult political moments. According to Vargas Llosa’s literary theories, this does not necessarily indicate a waning in his confidence in the power of the written word, but rather a call for writers to remain true to their literature, despite at times extreme socio-political pressures. As Dick Gerdes observes: “[*Conversación en La Catedral*] shows how a Peruvian dictatorship in the 1950s not only determined but destroyed its citizen’s lives” (273), thus becoming more a sharp criticism

of irresponsible politics than a condemnation of Santiago's noncommitment to literature. Moreover, as Raymond L. Williams writes, "[. . .] lo que sus personajes sufren es el resultado de un momento histórico preciso y no debe ser interpretado como una descripción de la condición humana en general" (*Otra historia* 153). Despite these limitations, however, Vargas Llosa also expresses clear concerns in his third novel with literature's place within a world where "ideals inevitably wither in the face of reality" (Rossman 509). *Conversación en La Catedral* can be considered the capstone of Vargas Llosa's notion of writing as revolution—after the Padilla Affair, the writer's concept of literature would be altered definitively as he also became progressively distanced from his revolutionary ideals.

The Padilla Affair

Though the Padilla Affair of 1971 produced the intellectual divide that resulted in the end of the Boom era, the disintegration of support from writers such as Vargas Llosa did not occur in an instant. Rather, throughout the 1960s, the Peruvian and others recognized several indications that Cuba would not produce the ideal situation for the creative writer. Vargas Llosa became increasingly critical of the Cuban Revolution over the years, but he did not abandon his socialist leanings until the late 1970s. Prior to the divisions that the Padilla Affair occasioned, Vargas Llosa and other Spanish American intellectuals had already demonstrated "[. . .] su disconformidad con la actitud dogmática de la Revolución Cubana en la política cultural" (Armas Marcelo 108). Comprehending the events that led to the Padilla Affair, especially as personally experienced by Vargas

Llosa, provides an opportunity to evaluate the lasting influence of these political episodes on the novelist's concept of literature.

As a resident of several European nations throughout the 1960s, Vargas Llosa was often geographically distanced from Cuba and his native Peru, but his enthusiasm for the socio-political progress of both countries was nonetheless resolute. Regarding his feelings for Cuba, he recalls in retrospect:

Cuba me parecía realmente una forma renovada, más moderna, también más flexible y más abierta, de la revolución. Yo vivía eso con muchísimo entusiasmo; además, considerando a Cuba como un modelo que podría ser seguido por América Latina. Nunca, antes de eso, he sentido un entusiasmo y una solidaridad tan poderosos por un hecho político. (qtd. in Setti 141)

During the formative years of the Revolution, the respect between Vargas Llosa and Cuba was mutual. When the young writer received notice that he was being considered for the Rómulo Gallegos Prize, for example, he contacted Alejo Carpentier—who was serving as a cultural *attaché* in Paris at the time—to learn of Fidel's opinion of the prize.²³ Vargas Llosa soon received a personal phone call from Cuba's foremost writer-intellectual. Carpentier explained his need to speak with Vargas Llosa in person and that he would travel to London immediately to do so. While of some length, the following remembrance from Vargas Llosa demonstrates clearly the Peruvian's position on literary integrity and his emerging consciousness that authors were to become dispensable tools of the Revolution, celebrated when useful and discarded as readily. Vargas Llosa recalls:

Entonces fue a verme [Carpentier] a Londres, con mucho secreto. Era la primera vez que iba a Inglaterra. Lo fui a buscar al aeropuerto, fuimos a almorzar en un

²³ Vargas Llosa's concern with accepting the Rómulo Gallegos Prize at the time was due to political conflict between Cuba and Venezuela. Disputes commenced in 1961, when Venezuelan president Rómulo Betancourt severed official relations with Cuba, as the country refused to recognize "nonelected" officials. Further conflicts, including Cuba's expulsion from the Organization of American State (OAS) at the vote of Betancourt, escalated to a climax in 1967 (with a failed coup of Cuban-trained Venezuelan troops) only months before Vargas Llosa accepted Venezuela's most distinguished literary prize in Caracas.

restaurante en Hyde Park, y entonces sacó una carta de Haydée Santamaría. Era una carta no para que yo la tuviera, sino para que yo la oyera. Era una carta de Haydée Santamaría a Alejo Carpentier para que él me la leyera a mí. Para que no quedaran pruebas, que no quedaran huellas del episodio. Y en esa carta, Haydée Santamaría —era una carta que probablemente no había sido escrita por ella, porque Haydée no hubiera podido escribir así; pero sospecho más o menos quien pudo haberla escrito— decía, entre grandes elogios a mi obra, que el premio Rómulo Gallegos me daba la gran oportunidad de hacer un gran gesto a favor de la revolución en América Latina, y que ese gesto debía consistir en lo siguiente: hacer un donativo al Che Guevara, que estaba en ese momento no se sabía dónde. Si yo lo hacía, ello tendría una gran repercusión en América Latina.

Hasta allí muy bien; pero entonces venía una parte que a mí me ofendió mucho. La carta continuaba diciendo que “naturalmente nosotros comprendemos que un escritor tiene necesidades”, y por consiguiente “esto no significa que usted tenga que perjudicarse por esta acción; la revolución le devolverá a usted el dinero discretamente, sin que esto se sepa”. Le dije a Alejo Carpentier: “Alejo, mira, esta es una cosa que es muy ofensiva. ¡Tú imagínate lo que Haydée me propone! Que yo haga la farsa de, primero, recibir el premio. Luego,irme de Caracas a La Habana, donde vamos a montar una farsa extraordinaria donde voy a aparecer como un héroe que dona 25 mil dólares a la revolución. Y luego me vengo a Londres, y la embajada cubana, discretamente, me devuelve mis 25 mil dólares.” O sea, yo, un farsante, actuando realmente con una duplicidad extraordinaria. Le digo entonces a Carpentier: “¿Cómo puede Haydée hacerme una propuesta semejante? Es una cosa que a mí me ofende muchísimo. Si a mí me dicen: ‘Dónenos usted el premio’, yo sabré si lo dono, o no lo dono. Pero que no me digan: ‘Haga la farsa de donar el premio, porque usted no perderá nada, se va a quedar con la plata’. Eso no es la manera de tratar a un escritor que tiene respeto por su trabajo”. (qtd. in Setti 148–49)

Beyond the dramatic intrigue of this scene, Vargas Llosa’s sentiments reveal several important aspects of his concept of the writer’s vocation. Principally, he demonstrates through his rejection of Haydée Santamaría’s invitation that his notion of commitment to literature did not include the enslavement of his writing to the whims of political institutions. Returning to Vargas Llosa’s acceptance speech for the Rómulo Gallegos prize, therefore, we can read his words with an additional level of interpretation. As the Peruvian praises the Revolution, his warning to the world that literature is a mode of permanent insurrection is also directed toward Castro’s Cuba. Though Santamaría sent

Vargas Llosa a congratulatory letter following the delivery of “La literatura es fuego,” their once-mutual admiration had already turned suspect.

Vargas Llosa’s experience with Santamaría was also an early indication of the superlative influence of *Casa de las Américas* in both cultural and political spheres. By 1967, Carlos Franqui and Guillermo Cabrera Infante, respective founder and director of *Lunes de Revolución*, became exiles from Cuba. Only months before Vargas Llosa’s speech, Santamaría had also engaged in a separate debate, this time with the international literary magazine *Mundo Nuevo*, accusing its director, Emir Rodríguez Monegal, of accepting the sponsorship of the CIA. The accusation stems from the financial contributions from the Ford Foundation that made the journal possible, but also seems to have a degree of market competition attached to its smear tactics. Most important to our discussion, however, are the early divisions among the Spanish American intellectual elite with regard to their support for the Revolution some four years before the Padilla Affair would make them concrete. As Suzanne Jill Levine recounts: “Fuentes and Vargas Llosa were pro-Fidel but also supported the merits of *Mundo Nuevo*, while García Márquez, a close friend of Fidel’s, and Cortázar, a well-meaning idealist, refused to contribute after the scandal broke out” (197). As was typical, Vargas Llosa continued to pledge his support for Cuba’s socialist revolution, while retaining the privilege of criticizing its policies as necessary. Similar to others, Rodríguez Monegal would resign from his position in 1968 under the pressure of leftist intellectuals from various countries, causing *Mundo Nuevo* to cease publication, despite attempts from Vargas Llosa and others to restart the journal under the symbolic name of *Libre*.

Each of the mentioned cases contributed to the degree of tension and controversy involved in the Padilla Affair, as the poet's imprisonment certainly had its antecedents. Birger Angvik, among others,²⁴ argues that there were actually two distinct "Padilla" affairs. The first occurred when the poet published a favorable appraisal of Cabrera Infante's *Tres tristes tigres* in a 1967–68 edition of *El caimán barbudo*. Instantly, as Cabrera Infante notes, "Heberto Padilla escribe un elogio a *Tres Tristes Tigres* y, con un golpe de dedos que no abolirá al zar, da comienzo a la polémica mencionada" (qtd. in Lourdes Casal 13). Recognizing that "[. . .] no podía escribir en Cuba, tampoco podría vivir" (15), Cabrera Infante officially renounced his support of the Revolution, for which he was known throughout Cuba as "un triste gatito del imperialismo" (qtd. in Casal 22). Furthermore, as Jorge I. Domínguez writes: "Caught praising a defector's book, the editorial board of *El caimán barbudo* [also] had to resign and Padilla's freedom to travel was limited" (393). Vargas Llosa responded to this situation at the same time that he was criticizing the Soviet Union's invasion of Czechoslovakia and Castro's apparent approval of that decision. Comparing the invasion to similar actions from the *imperialist* United States, Vargas Llosa asked: "En estas condiciones ¿qué pensar de las palabras de Fidel justificando la intervención militar?" (qtd. in Angvik 196). The combination of the "Padilla" tensions and Vargas Llosa's association of Cuba's position on Czechoslovakia with the United States introduced the impassioned dialogues that would ultimately engross the entirety of Spanish American intellectualism. By the conclusion of the 1960s,

²⁴ Roberto González Echevarría, for example, associates the "first" Padilla Affair with Cuba's inexperience in cultural debates. He writes: "Without [a critical] foundation, fruitless confusion reigns; all work has to begin from scratch; there is no shared language and no sense of values; as a result misunderstandings reign supreme. This is very much what happened in the Cuba during the first years of the revolution until the first Padilla affair in 1968, which was triggered by a critical debate about two novels by young Cuban writers: Lisandro Otero's *La Pasión de Urbino* and Guillermo Cabrera Infante's *Tres tristes tigres*. Though there are many other factors involved, in my opinion a great deal of the acrimony was due to the lack of experience with this sort of polemic" (159).

it was clear that Vargas Llosa's outspoken defense of the freedom and function of his writing would clash with Castro's political objectives. The closing exclamation point was Heberto Padilla's eventual arrest and imprisonment three years after the publication of his controversial collection of poems *Fuera del juego* (1968).

Vargas Llosa—who pledged his complete support for socialist revolution even after he considered Cuba a deficient model—was immediately disconcerted at the news of Padilla's imprisonment. The writer recognized that a threat to the part was inevitably a threat to the whole, and, as far as Vargas Llosa was concerned, creative liberties were inseparable from the social freedoms of any socialist revolution. Cabrera Infante's description of the Revolution as “un sueño que salió mal” (qtd. in Casal 18) also describes Vargas Llosa's deepest personal regrets. Certainly, these events were the source of serious disillusionment for Vargas Llosa, as he once considered the Cuban Revolution the culmination of the rebellious literature that supported its successes. Cabrera Infante's description of Cuba as a dream-turned-nightmare was also an ironic depiction of Castro's complicated circumstance. Indeed, the camaraderie that once united the intellectuals of Spanish America soon transformed into a political catastrophe.

Obtaining the support of a number of European, Latin American, and North American intellectuals, Vargas Llosa drafted a response to Padilla's incarceration. Considering the poet's misfortune an overt reversal of Castro's earlier promises regarding literary freedoms, Vargas Llosa concludes in his letter:

[E]l uso de medidas represivas contra intelectuales y escritores quienes han ejercido el derecho de crítica dentro de la Revolución, puede únicamente tener repercusiones sumamente negativas entre las fuerzas anti-imperialistas del mundo entero, y muy especialmente en la América Latina, para quienes la Revolución Cubana representa un símbolo y estandarte. (qtd. in Casal 74)

Vargas Llosa's open letter—together with subsequent pressure from PEN Club International and other intellectual organizations—resulted in Padilla's release after thirty-eight days of imprisonment (Angvik 187); however, the controversial scene and the reaction of intellectuals throughout the world had only commenced. No sooner was Padilla released than he read a signed public declaration on the state of the Revolution, commenting on his “despicable” role in opposition to its progress. Considered to have been an act of compulsory contrition drafted by Castro's regime, Padilla's words were yet another source of resentment for Vargas Llosa. Clearly, he was not alone in his disappointment, as several of the world's most distinguished intellectuals parted ways with Castro and his Revolution following the reading of the confession.

Padilla's apologetic was actually a political diatribe that condemns his own actions and exposes the supposed attempts of other writers to use their literary talents to thwart the Revolution. Some of the individuals that he includes in this category are: Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Julio Cortázar, Pablo Armando Fernández, César López, José Yanes, Noberto Fuentes, Manuel Díaz Martínez, and José Lezama Lima, among others. Padilla even denounces those individuals who signed the letter that petitioned his release, stating that his conduct did not merit the pardon that they demanded. Describing his own condition, Padilla declares, “A mí me gustaría encontrar un montón de palabras agresivas que pudieran definir perfectamente mi conducta” (qtd. in Casal 80). He continues by insisting that his self-condemning declarations are of his own creation. “Si no creen en lo que yo estoy diciendo,” the poet warns, “peor para ellos” (92). Despite Padilla's abundant claims to the contrary—or most likely because of their excesses—Vargas Llosa was convinced that Padilla's apologetic was merely the artifice of Cuban politics. Therefore,

Vargas Llosa with other writers in Barcelona drafted a second open letter²⁵ to Fidel Castro to denounce what they considered a false confession:

El desprecio a la dignidad humana que supone forzar a un hombre a acusarse ridículamente de las peores traiciones y vilezas no nos alarma por tratarse de un escritor, sino porque cualquier compañero cubano—campesino, obrero, técnico o intelectual—pueda ser también víctima de una violencia y una humillación parecidas. (qtd. in Casal 123)

Despite various attempts from Cuban intellectuals to defame Vargas Llosa and those who followed his lead, the fissure between many prominent Spanish American intellectuals and the Revolution could not be reconciled.

Castro's reaction to this negative intellectual response was as significant to the future of the Cuba as the opposition itself. As Seymour Menton notes: "[Padilla's] speech was widely denounced by leftist writers all over Latin America and Europe as a Stalinist-type confession" (*Prose Fiction* 149). Castro's bold responses, however, further deepened the divide between Cuba and some Spanish American writers, whom he excoriated as members of the "mafia," "intelectuales burgueses," "agentes de la CIA," "ratas intelectuales," among other disparaging distinctions. Menton also explains: "[Fidel's speeches] also clearly defined the new government policy toward the arts, which obviously supplants [his] oft-quoted 1961 'Palabras a los intelectuales'" (149). Vargas Llosa was clearly concerned with the political direction of Castro's revolution, but his greater preoccupation centered in Cuba's retracted promises regarding the role of the writer in its nascent socialist society. As the freedom of the writer's vocation was

²⁵ Vargas Llosa has described the production of this letter in some detail: "La iniciativa de esta protesta nació en Barcelona, al dar a conocer la prensa internacional al acto de la UNEAC en que Heberto Padilla emergió de los calabozos de la policía cubana para hacer su 'autocrítica'. Juan y Luis Goytisolo, José María Castellet, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Carlos Barral (quien luego decidió no firmar la carta) y yo nos reunimos en mi casa y redactamos, cada uno por separado, un borrador. Luego los comparamos y por votación se eligió el mío. El poeta Jaime Gil de Biedma mejoró el texto, enmenando un adverbio" (qtd. in Angvik 190).

transformed into a politicized “arma de la Revolución” (149), Vargas Llosa was not alone in his doubts regarding the future of the Revolution.

Following backlash from Spanish American and world intellectualism, Roberto Fernández Retamar wrote a canonical essay, which can be considered the document that closes the Spanish American Boom. “Calibán” (1971), which was published in the September-October issue of *Casa de las Américas*, is more than a cultural response to José Enrique Rodó’s *Ariel* (1900). Directing his comments to those intellectuals who turned on the Cuban Revolution following the Padilla Affair, Retamar attempts to assuage their antagonism as he repositions the Shakespearean Caliban as the true symbol of Spanish American identification. Retamar’s basic premise is the following:

Nuestro símbolo no es pues Ariel, como pensó Rodó, sino Calibán. Esto es algo que vemos con particular nitidez los mestizos que habitamos estas mismas islas donde vivió Caliban: Próspero invadió las islas, mató a nuestros ancestros, esclavizó a Calibán [. . .]. No conozco otra metáfora [Calibán] más acertada de nuestra situación cultural, de nuestra realidad. (33–34)

Retamar’s petition to the intellectuals of Spanish America is reminiscent of the repetitive use of the *nuestro* employed by Rodó in several of his essays,²⁶ and even José Martí in “Nuestra América” (1891; Sacoto). Not surprisingly, then, Retamar dedicates a specific section of his essay to the Cuban poet-patriot. He also comprises an extensive list of notable “Calibanes” throughout the world; equally important are those names that *brillan por ausencia*. Of course, Vargas Llosa, Fuentes, Cabrera Infante, and even Cortázar, are

²⁶ Regarding the recent proliferation of studies advocating a more integrated Spanish American–Brazilian literary canon, Rodó and his *Ariel* are essential. As Robert Patrick Newcomb notes: “Rodó, then, remains an obligatory point of reference in Latin American literary scholarship—and an essential object of study for those interested in comparative approaches to Brazilian and Spanish American literature and criticism. Rodó’s importance, not merely a function of his impact in Spanish America, is due quite concretely to the range of his textual dealings with Brazil—Rodó wrote about Brazil with a degree of specificity that Martí, for example, did not” (368).

not initiated as “Calibans” of Castro’s Cuba.²⁷ Carlos Fuentes, in particular, receives extensive criticism in Retamar’s essay. He writes:

Pienso, concretamente, en la llamada *mafia* mexicana, una de cuyas más conspicuas figuras es Carlos Fuentes. Este equipo expresó cálidamente su simpatía por la Revolución Cubana hasta que, en 1961, la Revolución proclamó y demostró ser marxista-leninista, es decir, una revolución que tiene al frente la alianza obrero-campesina. (54)

Besides providing his views on a Marxist-Leninist Cuba, Retamar singles out Fuentes, as he also criticizes several authors of the Boom through his historic essay.²⁸ Retamar’s words clearly reference the divisions among Spanish American intellectuals regarding the Cuban Revolution. Moreover, the title of the last section of the essay is perhaps most germane to our present discussion: “¿Y Ariel, ahora?” Retamar continues:

Ariel, en el gran mito shakespeariano que he seguido en estas notas, es, como se ha dicho, el intelectual de la misma isla que Caliban: puede optar entre servir a Próspero—es el caso de los intelectuales de la anti-América—, con el que aparentemente se entiende de maravillas, pero de quien no pasa de ser un temeroso esclavo, o unirse a Caliban en su lucha por la verdadera libertad. (64)

Retamar’s description—and implicit invitation—is a rhetorical trap that transforms the decision to support or reject the Cuban Revolution into a choice between allegiance to socialism and the imperialism of the United States. For numerous writers, such as Mario Vargas Llosa, this was not an issue of socialism *per se* but rather one that threatened

²⁷ Retamar’s shortlist of *Calibanes* includes the following: “De Túpac Amaru, *Tiradentes*, Toussaint-Louverture, Simón Bolívar, el cura Hidalgo, José Artigas, Bernardo O’Higgins, Benito Juárez, Antonio Maceo y José Martí, a Emiliano Zapata, Augusto César Sandino, Julio Antonio Mella, Pedro Albizu Campos, Lázaro Cárdenas, Fidel Castro y Ernesto *Che* Guevara; del Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, el *Aleijadinho*, la música popular antillana, José Hernández, Eugenio María de Hostos, Manuel González Prada, Rubén Darío (sí: a pesar de todo), Baldomero Lillo y Horacio Quiroga, al muralismo mexicano, Héctor Villalobos, César Vallejo, José Carlos Mariátegui, Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, Carlos Gardel, Pablo Neruda, Alejo Carpentier, Nicolás Guillén, Aimé Césaire, José María Arguedas, Violeta Parra y Frantz Fanon” (34).

²⁸ Retamar, for example, describes Fuentes’s *La nueva novela hispanoamericana* as “un verdadero manifiesto ideológico” (56). Instead of the more internationally popular (“burgués”) Boom novelists, he favors the literary precedent of Cuban novelists, such as Alejo Carpentier. Retamar notes: “Tras el magisterio de hombres como Alejo Carpentier, que en vano han tratado de negar algunos usufructuarios del *boom*, la empresa acometida por la nueva novela hispanoamericana [. . .]” (57).

literature as an unbound (uncensored) protestor of socio-political abuses. Regarding the influence of these controversies on the Boom novelists, María Pilar Donoso lamented a decade after the Padilla Affair: “El *boom* ya no es boom, no es grupo ni acción conjunta ni reuniones de amigos. Son señores maduros que escriben sus propios libros y leen los ajenos individualmente, cada uno en su estudio en países diferentes” (qtd. in Angvik 195). Despite the efforts of Retamar and others to reclaim intellectual support for the Cuban Revolution, neither the intellectual core of writers from the Boom generation nor Vargas Llosa’s basic concept of literature would ever be the same.

A Writer’s Solitude

During an impassioned speech at the First National Congress of Education and Culture (April 1971), Fidel Castro repudiated writers who lived far from the trenches of the Revolution, basked in the limelight of its successes, and still criticized its presumed shortcomings. Moreover, his descriptions seem to target Vargas Llosa directly. Castro boldly declares:

Pero lo que es con Cuba, a Cuba no la podrán volver a utilizar jamás, ¡jamás!, ni defendiéndola. Cuando nos vayan a defender les vamos a decir: “¡No nos defiendan, compadres, por favor, no nos defiendan!” “¡No nos conviene que nos defiendan!”, les diremos. Y desde luego, como se acordó por el Congreso, ¿concurritos aquí para venir a hacer el papel de jueces? ¡No! ¡Para hacer el papel de jueces hay que ser aquí revolucionarios de verdad, intelectuales de verdad, combatientes de verdad! Y para volver a recibir un premio, en concurso nacional o internacional, tiene que ser revolucionario de verdad, escritor de verdad, poeta de verdad, revolucionario de verdad. Eso está claro. Y más claro que el agua. [. . .] Y tendrán cabida los escritores revolucionarios, esos que desde París ellos desprecian, porque los miran como unos aprendices, como unos pobrecitos y unos infelices que no tienen fama internacional. [. . .] Ya saben, señores intelectuales burgueses y libelistas burgueses y agentes de la CIA y de las inteligencias del imperialismo, es decir, de los servicios de inteligencia, de espionaje del imperialismo: En Cuba no tendrán entrada, ¡no tendrán entrada!, como no se la

damos a UPI y a AP. ¡Cerrada la entrada indefinidamente, por tiempo indefinido y por tiempo infinito! (82–83)

Vargas Llosa responded to this speech by informing Haydée Santamaría in a letter that under the circumstances he was cancelling his plans to teach a creative writing course for Casa de las Américas. At that time, he also resigned as an editorial board member of the *revista*.²⁹ As Vargas Llosa attempted to declare his general support for Cuba in the years to come, he received in return an onslaught of criticism. Whereas these attacks focused initially on his politics, they eventually turned toward the debasing of his literature and literary theories.³⁰ Dick Gerges describes this period as “a healthy dialogue among Latin American writers and literary critics, allowing the Peruvian author the opportunity to clarify, expound upon, and defend his ideas” (9–10). This might be true to some degree; however, Vargas Llosa would also bear the brunt of at times unwarranted criticism for several years. Regarding the writer’s concept of literature, this period marks a critical transition that is evident as early as the mid-1960s. Indeed, challenges to Vargas Llosa’s literary theories predate the controversies of the Padilla Affair. The 1970s, however, proved to be a decade of confrontation and reflection, as Vargas Llosa’s literary theories transitioned from his former concept of literature as revolution toward a new definition of the writer’s vocation.

²⁹ Vargas Llosa became an editorial board member of *Casa de las Américas* in 1965 after staffing changes intended to expand the reach of the publication. As Seymour Menton writes: “The journal *Casa de las Américas* also made significant changes in 1965. Antón Arrufat, who has assumed the editorship in 1962, was replaced by Roberto Fernández Retamar, and the editorial board was expanded to include Cubans Desnoes, Otero, and Graziella Pogolotti, Peruvian Mario Vargas Llosa, Colombian Jorge Zalamea, Argentinian David Viñas, and Haitian René Depestre” (*Prose Fiction* 134). Other writers of international renown on the board from outside of Cuba included: “Argentiniens Ezequiel Martínez Estrada and Julio Cortázar, Uruguayan Angel Rama, Paraguayan Elvio Romero, Peruvian Sebastián Salazar Bondy, Guatemalan Manuel Galich, and Mexicans Juan José Arreola and Emmanuel Carballo” (134n18).

³⁰ Efraín Kristal provides an apt and concise description of this process, as he writes: “At first [Vargas Llosa] was condemned for counter-revolutionary behavior. Soon after he was scorned for his literary ideas, and finally he was criticized for the ‘reactionary’ content of his novels” (72).

Several of Vargas Llosa's closest associates have commented on his personal disillusionments throughout his experience with the Cuban Revolution. In the early 1960s, his disappointments were based in his desire for social revolution. Urquidi Illanes, Vargas Llosa's first wife, recalls his deep emotions when he learned that a revolution patterned after Cuba had failed in his native Peru. She concludes: "[H]e was young and saw things differently from the way he sees them now, as I understand" (qtd. in Corral 193). As the years passed, his disillusionments turned from the despair of a committed revolutionary to suspect of the Revolution that he once viewed as a path to an ideal socialist society. As Will H. Corral explains regarding these later years: "[. . .] Urquidi Illanes is talking about disillusionment, since Vargas Llosa parted company with the vehemently leftist Spanish-American intelligentsia at the time of the 1971 Padilla affair" (193). Even Vargas Llosa's close friend Abelardo Oquendo described—although sympathetically—his compatriot's move to Right in terms of a *sell-out*:

It was a very difficult time for him [. . .]. The left tried to paint him as an enemy of revolution. And all of a sudden the upper class was inviting him to speak. The right had nicer clothes, better receptions, prettier women. As the sector of his former friends, the left, closed to him, another sector was opening. (qtd. In Rosenberg)

Vargas Llosa's personal disillusionments with Cuba and even socialism as a viable political system would be compounded by doubts regarding his own literary theories. As scholars, writers, and even close associates—including Ángel Rama, José Miguel Oviedo, Wolfgang Iser, Jorge Aguilar Mora, and others—characterized his work as “‘decimonónica,’ ‘individualista,’ ‘romántica,’ ‘peligrosa,’ y ‘anacrónica’” (Castaneda 348), Vargas Llosa sought new “open doors” for his writing. Though Vargas Llosa

responded to many of these challenges with invaluable clarifications of his literary theories, he also began to reconsider his former views on literature.

Even in the years prior to the controversies of the Padilla Affair, some intellectuals expressed their discontent with Vargas Llosa's criticisms of the socio-political direction of the Revolution. Following his Rómulo Gallegos Prize acceptance speech in 1967, critics concurrently began to challenge his literary theories and true devotion to Cuba's revolutionary ideals. One of the most famous exchanges occurred when Óscar Collazos contested Vargas Llosa's basic concept of literature and his dedication to the Revolution in an intellectual debate that was ultimately published as *Literatura en la revolución y revolución en la literatura* (1970), a year prior to the Padilla Affair. Besides chastising Vargas Llosa for criticizing Castro's position on Czechoslovakia, Collazos also condemns the Peruvian's argument that "la literatura no puede ser valorada por comparación con la realidad. Debe ser una realidad autónoma, que existe por sí misma," claiming that his position "se está patentizando una *peligrosa* actitud de mistificación" (9; emphasis mine). Julio Cortázar, the third integrant of the polemic, accurately recognizes that Collazos interprets the comments from Vargas Llosa "[más] en la función intelectual y crítica que en la de la creación narrativa propiamente dicha, y por eso habrá que detenerse un momento para deslindar terrenos" (53). Cortázar demonstrates a degree of solidarity with Vargas Llosa, as he not only supports his notion of the creative process, but also as he states that Collazos's theories "no andarían tan lejos como él quisiera del 'realismo socialista'" (53), which Vargas Llosa openly deplored.

After claiming that Collazos's negative assessment of the Boom's popularity did more to confuse than convince, Vargas Llosa focuses his commentaries on the duplicity of the author. He explains:

[E]l acto de la creación se nutre simultáneamente, en grados diversos en cada caso, de las dos fases de la personalidad del creador: la racional y la irracional, las convicciones y las obsesiones, su vida consciente y su vida inconsciente. [. . .] Naturalmente que no estoy insinuando la falta de solidaridad del autor con su obra; sólo afirmo que en el acto de la creación hay la intervención de un factor irracional que muchas veces trastorna y contradice las intenciones y las convicciones del escritor. (82, 84)

Vargas Llosa claims that writers are not responsible for their literary themes in the same way that an individual is not accountable for the content of dreams. Furthermore, he makes a clear distinction between thematics and structure, as he places the responsibility of *form* squarely on the shoulders of the author. Otherwise, as Vargas Llosa cautions:

[E]liminar toda posibilidad de antagonismo entre una obra y su autor [. . .] sería suprimiendo todo *espontaneidad* en la creación literaria, reduciendo el trabajo creador a una operación estrictamente racional en la que alguien (el guardián de los valores ideológicos o morales: la Iglesia o el Estado) determinara, a través de ciertas normas o regulaciones, los temas o el tratamiento de los temas, de modo que la obra no se apartara de los valores entronizados por la sociedad. (84)

Comparing such a circumstance to the Spanish Inquisition and Socialist Realism, Vargas Llosa concludes that the negation of the writer's proper function in society also signifies his greater concern, "la banalización y casi la extinción de la literatura."

Through his commentaries, Vargas Llosa explicitly references, defends, and clarifies the literary concepts presented in his "Literatura es fuego" speech. He explains, for example, "Entiendo que [. . .] le irrita tanto [a Collazos] que yo haya dicho [en "La literatura es fuego"] que la función de la literatura será *siempre* subversiva" (85; emphasis original). As Vargas Llosa describes his view that Collazos uses a double

standard in his literary criticisms, he also defines the use of the term “subversiva” from his 1967 speech:

A [Collazos] le parece bien que la literatura sea subversiva en la sociedad capitalista, pero no admite que lo sea en una sociedad socialista. [. . .] [E]ntiende el término ‘subversiva’ en su acepción exclusivamente política y de ahí viene su confusión: deduce que yo propongo que la literatura en toda sociedad socialista sea procapitalista. ¿Acaso sólo puede tener este contenido la noción de ‘subversiva’ en una sociedad revolucionaria? (86)

Vargas Llosa’s conclusion that “la función política [del escritor] no consiste en complementar la misión de [los funcionarios oficiales de una sociedad], sino, más bien, en moderarla, y, cuando es necesario, contrarrestarla” (90), clearly references one of his central concerns at that moment: the need to challenge even the most ideal societies.

Vargas Llosa’s words also confirm his passionate declarations in “La literatura es fuego” that his literature might be silenced, but would never conform.

Although Vargas Llosa’s defense of his concept of literature is resolute throughout his writings in the 1960s—and even in his response to Collazos in 1970—the onslaught of political and literary criticism in the months and years that followed produced doubts in the writer’s mind regarding his own theories. Cuba’s new position on literary dissent following the Padilla Affair challenged Vargas Llosa’s hope for a socialist society tolerant of literature’s critical function. Several examples could be cited, but Vargas Llosa’s responses to the severe criticism of author-critic Ángel Rama in *Marcha* (May 5, 1972) clearly demonstrate the compromises that ultimately resulted in the modification of some of the most basic tenets of his concept of literature.

With the 1971 publication of Vargas Llosa's *Historia de un deicidio*,³¹ intellectual circles tied to the Cuban Revolution had ample material with which to dispute the credibility of Vargas Llosa's notion of the irrational ("demonic") influences of his literary creations. Most of the literary theories that Vargas Llosa presents in his treatise on the life and works of Gabriel García Márquez had already been written and published in other forums. Opposition to his theories, however, was not as common until post-1971 when Vargas Llosa was declared antithetical to Castro's Revolution. On May 5, 1972, for example, Ángel Rama published an article in *Marcha* entitled "Vade retro" that Vargas Llosa described as "[e]l exorcismo de Ángel Rama contra *Historia de un deicidio*" ("Regreso" 179). Responding to Rama's criticism of what he considered an irresponsible and archaic³² approach to literature, Vargas Llosa wrote "El regreso de Satán,"³³ stating that he would "romper una norma de conducta basada en la convicción de que los libros deben defenderse solos," with the rationale that "Rama es un crítico respetable y si él,

³¹ *Historia de un deicidio* contains some of the most canonical of Vargas Llosa's statements on his earlier concept of literature and the writer's role in society. Most of the criticism of Vargas Llosa's literary theories originates in the confusion of his terms, and perhaps intentionally so. Some refused his concept of literary rebellion as merely a challenge to the real world; others were unable to accept his notion that an author was responsible for the form of a creative work, but not its underlying themes. The disassociation of writers from the content of their novels, after all, would mean that an author could critique openly without the consequences tied to personal accountability. According to Vargas Llosa's perspective, some of these criticisms seemed hypocritical, as the same theories on literary insurrection that were celebrated when his writing supported the ideals of the Revolution, were summarily rejected when his writing seemed a threat to the same.

³² As Castaneda clarifies: "Según Rama, la expresión de los 'demonios' personales del escritor y el alejamiento de este de la sociedad en que vive van contra la idea 'moderna' del autor como productor de una obra literaria que responde 'a una demanda de la sociedad o de cualquier sector que este necesitado no solo de disidencias sino de interpretaciones de la realidad que Vargas Llosa como crítico por el uso de imágenes persuasivas comprenderla y situarse en su seno válidamente'" (252).

³³ Vargas Llosa's introduction to his essay reads: "El exorcismo de Ángel Rama contra *Historia de un deicidio* ("Vade retro", en *Marcha*, 5 de mayo de 1972), es lo bastante estimulante como para romper una norma de conducta basada en la convicción de que los libros deben defenderse solos, y de que, además de inelegante, es inútil replicar a las críticas que merece lo que uno mismo escribe. Pero Rama es un crítico respetable y si él, que habitualmente lee con agudeza, ha entendido tan mal el libro, tiemblo pensando en la impresión que habrá hecho en lectores menos avezados" (179).

que habitualmente lee con agudeza, ha entendido tan mal el libro, tiemblo pensando en la impresión que habrá hecho en lectores menos avezados” (179). Though Vargas Llosa’s concept of literature remains intact throughout his rebuttal, the writer of the 1972 essay is clearly not the same author who composed the original version of *Historia de un deicidio*. In fact, the careful student of Vargas Llosa’s essays on literature will note distinctive concessionary undertones in his response to Rama:

Subrayo *principalmente* al hablar de la intervención de lo irracional en la material de la narración y de lo racional en la elaboración de su forma, para indicar que, aun cuando piense que el tema procede, sobre todo, del inconsciente, no excluyo la participación del elemento consciente, y que no estoy diciendo que toda “forma” sea exclusivamente “racional”: también en ella participan, a veces de manera decisiva, la intuición, el puro instinto. (184)

Vargas Llosa continues by further conceding that “Desde luego que cualquier generalización respecto a esta tesis es arbitraria: cada caso puede constituir una variante, aunque siempre dentro de esas coordenadas” (184), a statement that predates Oviedo’s observation that “Sólo en un sentido la ‘teoría’ [de los demonios] es totalmente válida: como una justificación de su caso personal. [. . .] El único defecto de la ‘teoría’ es que cuando empieza a alejarse de Vargas Llosa y de su objeto de estudio, su aplicabilidad resulta menos segura [. . .]” (qtd. in Köllmann 20).³⁴ Despite Vargas Llosa’s retention of his basic concept of literature in the early 1970s, these types of retractions eventually caused his concept of literature to transform significantly. Besides these transitions

³⁴ Belén Castaneda expresses the sentiments of numerous scholars as she writes: “La teoría crítica de Vargas Llosa como método analítico, no es, por consiguiente, de gran valor universal. Tiene numerosas limitaciones en cuanto a su aplicabilidad y utilidad crítica. Sin embargo, el sistema crítico de Vargas Llosa sirve para marcar y aclarar su propia praxis literaria. Es una expresión personal del o que el novelista Vargas Llosa considera de importancia en la creación literaria” (357). Vargas Llosa concedes in his later essays that the theories that he once considered applicable to all authors are more accurately descriptions of his own writing. And even so, the actual applicability of these theories to his own literature remains in continuous flux.

during a period of general uncertainty in Spanish American literary history,³⁵ Vargas Llosa also reconsidered the legitimacy of socialist societies. Though he would not openly replace Karl Marx with Karl Popper until the 1980s, the tempestuous 1970s would become a time for Vargas Llosa to experience first-hand the *reality* of his theoretical notions regarding personal solitude as inherent to the writer's vocation. These years of deep, personal introspection would permanently alter the future course of his novels, literary theories, and political persuasions.

Madame Bovary, c'est moi

During the 1970s, Vargas Llosa transitioned from the revolutionary concept of literature that he espoused under the auspices of Sartre's literary theories to a literature that more closely resembled the theories of Gustave Flaubert.³⁶ Though Vargas Llosa has confessed Sartre as his primary influence during his formative years as a writer, in retrospect, it was possible that he had more in common with the author of *Madame Bovary* (1857). Flaubert was a rebellious youth who, similar to Vargas Llosa, found escape from the real world through writing. Both began their literary ambitions as

³⁵ As a preface to his interview with Vargas Llosa in 1972, Ricardo Cano Gaviria published an important note entitled "Aclaración." The critic describes that state of Latin American literature as "[un] ciego en casa nueva... Nada parece estar en su sitio [. . .]. Conversar con Mario Vargas Llosa es en cierta forma ir reconociendo, paso a paso, el «sitio» de la literatura, así como el de otras realidades emparentadas con ella. [. . .] Pero, desde luego, el reconocimiento por Vargas Llosa del «sitio» de la literatura —de su literatura— es, necesariamente, un acto polémico" (7–8). As Cano Gaviria aptly describes, Vargas Llosa was not alone in his search for literature's place in a Spanish American political and cultural situation that had recently turned on its head.

³⁶ As Efraim Kristal explains: "Vargas Llosa eventually abandoned his ideas about the socialist implications of literature, but he has always defined his artistic aspirations in terms of Flaubert's concept of the novel as an aesthetic creation *in prose*" (25–26). Though Kristal accurately describes Vargas Llosa's relationship with Flaubert, it is important to clarify that while the Peruvian followed the theories of Flaubert in his early years as a novelist, he did not begin to explicitly articulate his adherence to these literary precepts until the 1970s.

poets,³⁷ both were frustrated in their earliest attempts at publishing a novel, and both conceived the literary vocation as one of agonizing solitude. Flaubert's interest in the aesthetic attributes of writing—he is famous for struggling for *le mot juste*—divided Vargas Llosa from Sartre's promotion of the *usefulness* of literature over its artistry. Vargas Llosa's admiration for Flaubert was the impetus of various essays and the publication of a book-length study of the author in 1975. While the work contributes to the corpus of literary criticism on Flaubert's writings, specifically *Madame Bovary*, it also provides insights into Vargas Llosa's own theories on literature. Furthermore, Sartre's publication of *L'Idiot de la famille: Gustave Flaubert de 1821 à 1857* (1971) four years earlier³⁸ complicates and enriches Vargas Llosa's elucidation of Flaubert's writings. Similar to Vargas Llosa's study of Flaubert, Sartre's own theories are readily apparent in his analysis on the relationship between Flaubert's words and the writer's psychological being. Vargas Llosa's ironic criticism of Sartre's *L'Idiot de la famille* that “[. . .] el libro interesa más al sartreano que al flaubertiano [. . .]” (221) also describes his own work, as the Peruvian even confesses that the first of the three sections in *La orgía perpetua* “[. . .] es un mano a mano entre Emma Bovary y yo en el que, por supuesto,

³⁷ Flaubert once stated: “Oh, how much I prefer pure poetry, the cries of the soul, the sudden soarings and the deep sighs, the voices of the soul, the thoughts of the heart” (qtd. in Sartre, *Idiot* 358).

³⁸ Vargas Llosa explains in *La orgía perpetua* that Sartre work was intended to be four comprehensive volumes. The series, however, was never actually completed. Vargas Llosa describes the unfinished work as: “Libro extraordinariamente desigual, alternan en él análisis agudos y hallazgos luminosos con contradicciones flagrantes” (*Orgía* 767). Despite his failures to complete the daunting task of exploring the entirety of Flaubert's life and literature, Vargas Llosa makes commentaries regarding the success of his failure, thus simultaneously providing insights into his own totalizing obsessions. “Pero es evidente que en ambos casos en el defecto está el mérito,” explains Vargas Llosa, “que la derrota constituye una suerte de victoria, que en ambos casos la comprobación del fracaso solo cabe a partir del reconocimiento de la grandeza que explica y que hizo inevitable ese fracaso. Porque haberse empeñado en semejante aventura—haber incurrido en el crimen de Luzbel: querer romper los límites, ir más allá de lo posible—es haber fijado un tope más alto a la novela y a la crítica” (770–71). Vargas Llosa's assessment of Sartre's work has clear connections to his description of a totalizing literature that seeks “la ilusión de sintetizar lo real, de resumir la vida” (733).

hablo más de mí que de ella” (726).³⁹ Vargas Llosa’s *La orgía perpetua*, then, elucidates through Flaubert new directions in his concept of literature during a period when he also began to openly criticize Sartre’s theories. As Vargas Llosa and Sartre write their respective pieces, therefore, Flaubert becomes a posthumous intermediary between their literary theories. Through his writings on Flaubert in the mid-1970s, Vargas Llosa responds to Sartre as he also reconsiders his own notions *à propos* literary aesthetics.

Sartre begins his essay on Flaubert by analyzing his experiences as a youth and then compares these to the writer’s reflections on these same incidents. As Sartre criticizes Flaubert’s tendency to idealize the past, which he describes as “a process of degradation,” he confirms his conviction that a writer should only address his or her own people in a contemporary context. Sartre writes that as Flaubert systemically prefers “what has happened,” the writer “underestimates the present and overestimates it once it has passed.” Sartre further condemns Flaubert’s backward gaze, as he contends that the writer’s censure of his classmates several years later was not persuasive in that “he should have condemned them without appeal *while they were despairing together*” (5). Solidarity, then, also becomes another essential aspect of Sartrean theory that he criticizes in Flaubert. Furthermore, Sartre explains in his treatise on Flaubert that “[i]t was not in retrospect that negative was transformed into positive” (10). For Sartre, this happened in the present, as immediacy could produce a more accurate depiction of contemporary

³⁹ Castaneda confirms and expands the discussion of this tendency in Vargas Llosa’s writings: “Sebastián Salazar Bondy, Gabriel García Márquez, Flaubert, Sartre y Camus. En estos estudios, Vargas Llosa no solamente desarrolla su propio vocabulario técnico y sistematiza la metodología crítica que seguirá a lo largo de su producción teórica, sino que exterioriza y define los procedimientos que reconoce como primordiales en la obra de todo escritor en general. Con respecto a la concepción literaria de Vargas Llosa, se puede decir que es a la vez, una combinación y, en algunos casos, una alteración de numerosos principios teóricos que juntos, forman una ideología crítica no totalmente original pero sí problemática” (347).

circumstances. According to Sartre, art as a self-contained universe could have no practical application, but would be condemned to a purely aesthetic function.

Sartre's descriptions of Flaubert suggest a combination of deep respect and disgust with the writer's theories. Sartre admired Flaubert's craft, but disagreed with his basic concept of the creative process. Despite his distance from Flaubert's literary theories, however, he nonetheless provides apt descriptions of the writer. Describing a mature Flaubert, Sartre simultaneously distinguishes between poetry and prose:

At this period, Flaubert no longer hesitates: the *poetic* attitude was merely the flight from the real into the imaginary; *artistic* activity consists of devaloring the real by realizing the imaginary. In state-of-the-soul poetry, the flight left reality intact: you escaped into the nonreal; the negation concerned Gustave's being-in-the-world and not the world itself. Now the movement inverts itself: Flaubert reconsiders the world in order to annihilate it, which can be done only by totalizing it. (375)

Similar to Vargas Llosa, Flaubert recognizes that the writer's vocation, especially as they conceived of it, was at times agonizing. He writes:

I very early felt a profound disgust with men from the moment I came into contact with them. From the age of twelve I was sent to school. There I saw a model of the world, its vices in miniature, its sources of ridicule, its little coteries, its petty cruelty; I saw the triumph of strength, mysterious emblem of the power of God; I saw faults that would later become vices, vices that would later be crimes, and children who would be men. (qtd. in Sartre, *Idiot* 4)

Apart from the strikingly similar experience that Vargas Llosa dramatizes in *La ciudad y los perros*, Flaubert's words also demonstrate a view of the writer's vocation that had a direct influence on Vargas Llosa's own theories. Whereas Sartre criticized Flaubert, describing his solitude as "impotent rage" (5), both he and Vargas Llosa would have concurred that Sartre's negative view on the writer's solitude is the basis for their marginality. During the controversies of the 1970s, it is not surprising that Vargas Llosa

empathized with Flaubert's plight. As a result, the Peruvian's narratives began to move in new directions.

Sartre's comments on the writer's solitude and even the impotence of writing as an aesthetic creation were not unfamiliar to Vargas Llosa. Sartre descriptions of the writing vocation as "failure" (375), "quasi-powerlessness" (360), and "futile denial" (375) remained from his experience in the Algerian War for Independence. Vargas Llosa indirectly comments in *La orgía perpetua* on the difficulty in hearing such comments from Sartre amidst the shouts of "¡Viva Argelia Libre! y las vociferaciones con que un centenar de sanmarquinos, armados de piedras y palos [. . .]" (*Orgía* 8). Furthermore, he explains that his readings of Flaubert created within him a personal conflict of interest with regard to his concept of literature. Vargas Llosa was entirely committed to Sartre's literary precepts in the 1950s and 60s. Due to Sartre's "frases contra Flaubert" in *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*, Vargas Llosa's rediscovery of Flaubert years later occasioned "retroactivamente una especie de angustia, una colisión de lealtades" (*Orgía* 760). As Vargas Llosa fleshes out these conflictive feelings in *La orgía perpetua*, he consequently sides with Flaubert throughout his literary transitions in the 1970s.

Flaubert provided Vargas Llosa with an opportunity to further support his theories on the spontaneous creation of his novels. Vargas Llosa believed that an author's lived experiences provided the raw material for a narrative, but he also claimed self-detachment in even his most explicitly autobiographical narratives. According to the writer, he was Alberto (*La ciudad y los perros*), Santiago (*Conversación en La Catedral*), and certainly Varguitas (*La tía Julia y el escribidor*), but only in the same way that Flaubert confessed, *Madame Bovary, c'est moi*. Despite parallels with their personal

lives, their writings were not intended as autobiographies. On the contrary, Vargas Llosa reaffirmed through Flaubert his concept that literature should radically *recreate* reality and not merely *reflect* it. Personal experience invariably provided raw material for a narrative, but the writing process was a creative *deicide* that reshaped reality into something new. Sartre writes of Flaubert:

If we look at the years 1838–1840 in the light of Flaubert’s own testimony, and also in the light of the number and nature of the works he produced during this period and the events defining them, we are struck by the agreement between exterior and interior, that is, by evident “correspondences” and reciprocal symbolizations, as if an identical reality were being constituted and simultaneously expressed in various languages. (356)

Sartre cites these “correspondences” as evidence of the writer’s conscious role in creating his novels. As he also notes: “[a] writer’s reflection on [his] work is not distinguishable from his reflection on himself” (*Idiot* 358). Certainly, the relationship between Vargas Llosa, Flaubert, and their respective narratives is intimate. Their distinctions from Sartre’s theories, however, are based in the means of the creative process and not the end result. That is, both writers recognized themselves in even the most aberrant characteristics of their protagonists, but also believed that these characters were not mere copies of themselves.

Vargas Llosa read *Madame Bovary* at the conclusion of the 1950s, and confessed in retrospect: “Hacia años que ninguna novela vampirizaba tan rápidamente mi atención, abolía así el contorno físico y me sumergía tan hondo en su materia” (*Orgía* 731).⁴⁰

Vargas Llosa’s self-association with the novel’s rebellious title character introduces a

⁴⁰ To my knowledge, Vargas Llosa has not made so bold a declaration of any individual reading, with the notable exception of Euclides da Cunha’s *Os sertões*, a work which likewise had a profound influence on his concept of literature and the direction of his creative writing.

central component of an emerging literature dedicated to individual freedom and societal transgression. He writes:

La rebeldía, en el caso de Emma, no tiene el semblante épico que en el de los héroes viriles de la novela decimonónica, pero no es menos heroica. Se trata de una rebeldía individual y, en apariencia, egoísta: ella violenta los códigos del medio azuzada por problemas estrictamente suyos, no en nombre de la humanidad, de cierta ética o ideología. Es porque su fantasía y su cuerpo, sus sueños y sus apetitos, se sienten aherrojados por la sociedad, que Emma sufre, es adúltera, miente, toba, y, finalmente, se suicida. (*Orgía* 734)

Vargas Llosa's continued preoccupation with transgression against the repression of restrictive societal norms stems from his experiences in Cuba, but expands to counteract *any* institution that would limit freedom in the name of ideology. He continues: “[. . .] Emma representa y defiende de modo ejemplar un lado de lo humano brutalmente negado por casi todas las religiones, filosofías e ideologías, y presentado por ellas como motivo de vergüenza para la especie” (736). Apart from using Flaubert to make a transition in his concept of literature from revolutionary action to social transgression, he also opens a creative window to the use of melodramatic writing to support Flaubert's theories.

Commenting on Peruvian *huachafería*⁴¹ as “uno de los dominios en el que los peruanos hemos sido realmente creativos,” Vargas Llosa also explains that “la cursilería [es] una de las expresiones humanas más persistentes y universales” (*Orgía* 741). Such a position would have seemed repugnant to Sartre—and perhaps even to Vargas Llosa—during the revolutions of the 1950s and 60s. As Vargas Llosa and other Boom novelists transitioned into a new decade, however, post-modern parody began to transform Spanish America's literary landscape, with Vargas Llosa's brand taking a melodramatic form.

⁴¹ *Huachafería* does not have an exact English equivalent, although some have equated the word with the notion of *kitch*. For Vargas Llosa, *huachafería* signifies a rebellion against the established norms of cultural production. Through the parody of social and cultural norms, he could at once participate in and challenge the limitations of a perceived *high culture*. As will be discussed in chapter 3 of my dissertation, Pedro Camacho is the epitome of *huachafería* in Vargas Llosa's extensive literary *oeuvre*.

The writer's next two novels, *Pantaleón y las visitadoras* (1973) and *La tía Julia y el escribidor* (1977), exemplified this trend, as both departed considerably from his former literary standard. Regarding his descriptions of melodrama in the works of Flaubert, Vargas Llosa clarifies:

Melodrama, quizás no sea la palabra exacta para expresar lo que quiero decir, porque tiene una connotación ligada al teatro, al cine y a la novela, y yo aludo a algo más vasto, que está presente sobre todo en las cosas y hombres de la realidad. Hablo de una cierta distorsión o exacerbación del sentimiento, de la perversión del gusto entronizado en cada época, de esa herejía, contrapunto, deterioro (popular, burgués y aristocrático) que en cada sociedad sufren los modelos establecidos por las élites como patrones estéticos, lingüísticos, morales, sociales y eróticos; hablo de la mecanización y encanallamiento que, en la vida cotidiana, padecen las emociones, las ideas, las relaciones humanas; hablo de la inserción, por obra de la ingenuidad, la ignorancia, la pereza y la rutina, de lo cómico en lo serio, de lo grotesco en lo trágico, de lo absurdo en lo lógico, de lo impuro en lo puro, de lo feo en lo bello. (*Orgía* 740)

Though criticism has declared Vargas Llosa's novels of the 1970s inferior to those of the previous decade—as they lacked revolutionary zeal—they did not depart as radically as some believed from the writer's notion of literary rebellion. Through Flaubert, Vargas Llosa made a subtle modification to his concept of literature. Instead of a revolutionary literature with political implications, Vargas Llosa's theoretical gaze shifted toward a type of cultural rebellion against various social norms that the author viewed as enemies to freedom.

Besides the immediate impact of *La orgía perpetua* in Vargas Llosa's fourth and fifth novels, his new preference for Flaubert also influenced the creation of his most celebrated narrative. Given Vargas Llosa's former devotion to Sartre's notions of locale and temporality, each of his novels until *La guerra del fin del mundo* (1981) was based in the contemporary Peruvian context. Vargas Llosa's rebellion against social norms, then, even seemed to include the basic tenets of his own literary theories, as his creative

depiction of the turn-of-the-century Brazilian backlands rebellion in Canudos, Brazil, broke radically with the former parameters that he had established for his writing. Vargas Llosa discusses three specific changes with Roland Forgues:

[. . .] *La guerra del fin del mundo* es una novela que tenía un tema muy distinto al de las otras novelas y exigía por lo tanto también una estructura muy distinta. En primer lugar es una novela que ocurre en el pasado, hace cien años; en segundo lugar, es una novela de tipo histórico; y, en tercer lugar, es una novela cuyos personajes no son peruanos, no hablan español, pertenecen a otro mundo cultural; y, entonces, todo eso requería una estructura muy distinta. (qtd. in *Ética* 250)

Despite the author's explicit recognition of these modifications to his literary landscape in this and other interviews, criticism has failed to adequately highlight the import of these alterations to his concept of literature. The narrative's near obsession with sight also seems to reference Vargas Llosa's own assessment of his experience with the Cuban Revolution. "Little by little I began to *see* the reality," Vargas Llosa reports to *People Magazine*, "Cuba was authoritarianism. The symptoms were there from the beginning, but we had too many illusions. We didn't want to *see*" (qtd. in Rosenberg; emphasis mine). Certainly, with the publication of Vargas Llosa's first historical novel, his own *vision* regarding the creation and purpose of his literature had also changed significantly.

Conclusion

Vargas Llosa's concept of literature, actual novels, and political attitudes were intimate companions during the fundamental changes that each experienced after the writer's involvement in the Cuban Revolution. Though the Peruvian maintained his allegiance to socialist ideals for several years after the Padilla Affair, he could never accept Cuba's view that the Revolution was unconditionally "más importante que el estilo literario" (qtd. in Casal 82). Politically, Vargas Llosa would turn increasingly to the

right, and, ultimately, would denounce Castro's Revolution in absolute terms, even comparing him with dictators such as Augusto Pinochet in the 1980s ("Boca" 192). Following the reaction of Castro and other intellectuals to Vargas Llosa's active denunciation of Padilla's imprisonment, the novelist undoubtedly felt an increased rapport with the principle protagonist of *Conversación en La Catedral*. Though Santiago's distrust of the potential for literature to alter his condition does not necessarily represent his author's position at the time, it does seem to foreshadow Vargas Llosa's sentiments in the years to come. "When democracy is reestablished in Peru," Kristal notes, "[Santiago] is not optimistic because he sees the new regime merely as one more chapter in the vicissitudes of a corrupt society" (57). Similarly, Vargas Llosa's mistrust of political systems became a companion for his doubts regarding the potential of creating a truly revolutionary literature. Due to the disillusionment of the previous decade, the 1970s became a time of reevaluation with regard to both his creative writing and his basic concept of literature.

Vargas Llosa was not alone in his disillusionments. Other writers also retreated into the nebulous realm of the Spanish American post-Boom, or the period of literary and political uncertainty that followed the Cuban Revolution. José Donoso, for example, observed that the Padilla Affair "rompió esa amplia unidad que durante tantos años acogió muchos matices políticos de los intelectuales latinoamericanos, separados ahora política, literaria y afectivamente en bandos amargos e irreconciliables" (qtd. in Angvik 192). Carlos Fuentes's comments on the development of the new narrative might also be applied to the decomposition of the Boom. "Lo que ha muerto no es la novela," states the writer-critic, "sino precisamente la forma burguesa de la novela y su término de

referencia [. . .]” (*Nueva* 17). Ironically, those same literary innovations that several Spanish American writers believed were combating the woes of capitalist societies proved to be one of the Boom’s most serious and seductive challenges. As the Boom novels entered the realm of world commercialism, Vargas Llosa’s notion that literature “[. . .] no es nunca racional, sino espontáneo, incontrolable, esencialmente instintivo. Y el escritor no puede poner ese elemento al servicio de nada [. . .]” (qtd. in Köllmann 62) was tested to its core. Despite scholarly claims that Vargas Llosa carried his theories to an opposite extreme with the publication of so-called popular novels, such as *Pantaleón y las visitadoras* and *La tía Julia y el escribidor*, these new forms are more accurately a search for increased liberties in his writings through the transgression of *any* social doctrines that would restrict free expression. As Angvik summarizes: “[L]a historia vino a penetrar al grupo de los escritores del *boom* para disolverlo, y a la vida individual, para cambiarla” (183). Certainly, Vargas Llosa’s experience with the Cuban Revolution is an exemplary case. Regarding his concept of literature, this period occasioned a transition from a revolutionary literature to one of social transgression, this time without clear political implications. Vargas Llosa’s reluctance to embrace ideologies absolutely in the future—even his own literary theories—caused him to experiment with diverse literary forms and genres in the subsequent decades. Ultimately, these modifications to his concept of literature would inspire the novelist to compose the epic narrative that criticism has lauded as a creative depiction of the end of ideologies, his masterpiece *La guerra del fin del mundo*.

CHAPTER III

THE CANUDOS TRANSITION

In a 1977 interview, Vargas Llosa confessed: “He cambiado de manera de pensar muchas veces, no sólo en cuestiones políticas, sino también en cuestiones literarias o más personales, esto no lo he negado nunca” (qtd. in Coaguila 121). As the novelist continues, he identifies some of the specific amendments to his literary and political positions during the 1970s. Vargas Llosa explains:

Hablaba contra el humor en literatura y terminé escribiendo una novela humorística. En un momento estuve bastante cerca del Partido Comunista, y ahora creo estar bastante lejos de él. En un momento estuve muy cerca de la Democracia Cristiana, y ahora estoy muy lejos de ella. Un tiempo estuve muy cerca de Sartre, en el que veía el non plus ultra de la visión de la literatura, y hoy en día me siento muy alejado de esa posición. (121)

Vargas Llosa’s comments reveal at least three of his personal concerns at the time: (1) the creative novelties of his latest narratives, (2) his changing political views, and (3) his relationship with Jean-Paul Sartre. By the conclusion of the 1970s, Vargas Llosa had learned enough from his literary and political disillusionments to articulate his opinions with a degree of introspection.

Despite negative appraisals by some scholars of *Pantaleón y las visitadoras* (1973) and *La tía Julia y el escribidor* (1977), perhaps “due to the expectations roused by such statements as ‘Literature is fire’” (Köllmann 139), both of these novels are important transitional narratives. Critics such as Sabine Köllmann are correct in their observations that these novels were “totally lacking the bitter tone of social criticism marking his earlier works” (139). Despite at times sharp satire, neither offers the socio-

political tenor of the novels that Vargas Llosa published in the 1960s. As M. Keith Booker confirms, however, Vargas Llosa's publication of *La guerra del fin del mundo* in 1981 "marks a radical departure from its two immediate predecessors" (75). Some critics even described Vargas Llosa creative rendering of the nineteenth-century Canudos uprisings in the Brazilian backlands as reminiscent of the writer's original concept of literature. More accurately, however, *La guerra del fin del mundo* offers a new position for Vargas Llosa's literature that is in many respects entirely anti-Sartrean. Though the novelist wrote throughout the 1970s, it was not with the same political passion of the earlier decade. As Vargas Llosa's political pendulum swung toward Cuba and back again, its return brought with it a new perspective on the role of the writer in society. Beyond experimentation with new novelistic genres and the discovery of humor in his 1970s novels, Vargas Llosa's basic concept of literature was significantly altered during this period. Specifically, his opinion that literature should address the contemporary concerns of one's own people was fundamentally challenged with *La guerra del fin del mundo*. Following an intense reading of Euclides da Cunha's *Os sertões* (1902),¹ Vargas Llosa abandoned his Sartrean tendency to write only about contemporary Peruvian society. As the writer broadened his literary scope, his novels and critical essays simultaneously reveal modifications in his creative theories and earlier political persuasions. By the 1980s, in fact, Vargas Llosa had entirely abandoned the two basic standards that

¹ As a substantive part of my analysis of Vargas Llosa's reading of *Os sertões* and its author, I reference notes from his teaching notebooks as a professor of Latin American literature at Columbia University (1975–76), which are part of the Mario Vargas Llosa Papers in the Princeton Firestone Library Special Collections. Throughout the writer's career, he has taught at several prestigious institutions, including Queen Mary, University of London, King's College, Washington State University, University of Puerto Rico, Columbia, Harvard, Princeton, Georgetown, and City University of New York. I am personally grateful for the assistance of AnnaLee Pauls in securing scanned copies of essential pages from these notebooks.

governed his earlier writings: (1) his passion for socialist revolution and (2) his former adherence to the literary philosophies of Jean-Paul Sartre.

Following an in-depth discussion of Euclides da Cunha, *Os sertões*, and *La guerra del fin del mundo*, this chapter concludes with a brief discussion of three novels that demonstrate specific aspects of a still-developing concept of literature. Prior to making his presidential candidacy official in 1989, Vargas Llosa published three novels in as many years: *Historia de Mayta* (1984), *¿Quién mató a Palomino Molero?* (1986), and *El hablador* (1987). Similar to other periods in Vargas Llosa's writings, these narratives can be considered brief but important intermediary narratives in preparation for a new stage in his career as a writer and, politically, as a presidential candidate. Despite the quantity of creative and essayistic works that he produced between 1984 and 1989, Vargas Llosa did not produce his next *great work* until the new millennium, a second historical novel based upon the thirty-one-year dictatorship of the Dominican strongman Rafael Trujillo. With regard to his concept of literature, however, each of these minor novels contributes to our consideration of a new concept of literature that initially took root in the backlands of Brazil.

Pantaleón y las visitadoras

Pantaleón y las visitadoras recounts Pantaleón Pantoja's special mission to ease the sexual tensions of the Peruvian military through an organized prostitution service that was intended to remain clandestine. Beyond providing pleasure, Pantoja's secret assignment is proposed to eradicate the sexual abuses that the soldiers had previously imposed upon the women of the Peruvian Amazon. Similar to Lieutenant Gamboa in *La*

ciudad y los perros, the exemplary Captain Pantoja is relegated to a remote posting once his compromises the secrecy of the mission. The entire situation abounds with cynicism, addressing several of the same themes of corruption and misuses of power that Vargas Llosa incorporated into his earlier writings. *Pantaleón y las visitadoras*, however, is markedly distinct in its style and tone. Whereas novels such as *La ciudad y los perros*, *La Casa Verde*, or *Conversación en La Catedral* are serious, and even somber, in their criticisms of Peruvian society, *Pantaleón y las visitadoras* introduces a humoristic component to his literature, wherein Vargas Llosa “continúa la crítica, a través de la risa” (Dauster 243). Besides its lighter nature, the Peruvian’s fourth novel is also far less structurally complex than his previous narratives, a change that several scholars have identified as “a movement toward traditional storytelling” (Williams, “Narrative Art” 76).² Breaking with the norm that “cada autor encuentre «su» estilo y permanezca siempre allí” (Dauster 243), Vargas Llosa demonstrated with his parodic novel that his literature would not be static.

Despite its disappointing critical reception, *Pantaleón y las visitadoras* is an important work that is replete with social commentaries that turn the reader’s laughter into a self-deprecating activity. Vargas Llosa’s social mirror, in other words, takes on a new form, but continues in its critical function, condemning the failures of Peruvian society. Moreover, the narrative demonstrates Vargas Llosa’s acceptance of Gustave Flaubert as a new model for his concept of literature. Specifically, *Pantaleón y las visitadoras* is a

² Vargas Llosa’s shift toward more traditional modes of storytelling corresponds with the emergence of novels that evaluate the significance of oral narrative. *El hablador* is the most explicit example of this trend; however, *La guerra del fin del mundo* also exemplifies this increased concern with orality. Both of these novels mildly equate oral traditions with more archaic civilizations. *La fiesta del Chivo*, however, provides a distinct view, as the modern Storyteller Urania Cabral—a Harvard-educated attorney in New York—clearly has no ties to the primitive societies depicted in the other novels.

preliminary exercise in “huachafería” (‘bad taste’), which expresses through ironic parody some of the basic literary tenants of Flaubert’s theories on literature. Vargas Llosa also takes the Flaubertian concept of the invisible narrator to a new level in *Pantaleón y las visitadoras* at the same time that he challenges his readers to bridge the gaps between language and reality throughout the novel. Vargas Llosa’s emphasis on language, including the distinction between reality and fiction, creates a critical overpass that leads from a concept of literature based in revolution to one that transgresses—and thus challenges—the norms of a given society.

Sara Castro-Klarén is one scholar who has given explicit attention to Vargas Llosa’s use of the Peruvian slang expression *huachafo* in *Pantaleón y las visitadoras*. According to the *Real Academia Española*, the term *huachafo* “[s]e dice de un artista o de un escritor, o de sus obras, cuando en vano pretenden mostrar refinamiento expresivo o sentimientos elevados.”³ Calling Vargas Llosa’s use of *huachafo* a caricature of high culture, Castro-Klarén concludes: “*Captain Pantoja* is therefore both an imitation and a parody of the *huachafo* social and linguistic formation rampant in the hierarchical structure of Peruvian society” (*Understanding* 147). *Pantaleón y las visitadoras*, through an overt parodic lens, creates a ridiculous mirror of one of the most controlling sectors of Peruvian society, its military forces. Vargas Llosa’s struggle with the Cuban culture machine in the 1970s, combined with the rejection of societal norms that he gleaned from Flaubert’s writings, produced a new style of writing and new messages regarding his

³ *Real Academia Española* provides the following synonym as an alternative definition of *huachafo*: “Cursi: 1. adj. Se dice de un artista o de un escritor, o de sus obras, cuando en vano pretenden mostrar refinamiento expresivo o sentimientos elevados. 2. adj. coloq. Dicho de una persona: Que presume de fina y elegante sin serlo. U. t. c. s. 3. adj. coloq. Dicho de una cosa: Que, con apariencia de elegancia o riqueza, es ridícula y de mal gusto. huachafo, fa. 1. adj. *Bol. y Perú.* cursi. U. t. c. s.”

concept of literature. *Pantaleón y las visitadoras*, to the dismay of some critics, was an early indication that not only Vargas Llosa's literary theories but also his literature were malleable. Specifically, he demonstrated through *Pantaleón y las visitadoras* that his writing would not be defined or confined by any exterior socio-political customs, taboos, or literary doctrines.

Apart from the exaltation of bad taste in his caricaturization of the outrageous actions of the Peruvian military, Vargas Llosa's novel also exemplifies one of the true standards of Flaubertian literature. Whereas the Peruvian had implemented Flaubert's theories on the invisible narrator in his previous narratives, these attempts to disappear with his novels reach an apotheosis within the pages of *Pantaleón y las visitadoras*.⁴ Vargas Llosa's experience as a journalist endowed him with the capacity to *tell it straight*, meaning that he described *new* realities without imposing his opinions on readers or providing interpretation for the actions of his characters. As Inger Enkvist notes: "El método fundamental que utiliza el autor para 'destapar' esa realidad es *mostrar*, sin comentarios, el lenguaje militar" (159; emphasis mine). Vargas Llosa demonstrates his debt to Flaubert in becoming a truly invisible narrator in *Pantaleón y las visitadoras*, the epitome of the concept of *show-don't-tell*. "Dialogues, letters, maps, radio commentary, print media articles, official memoranda, scientific charts and articles, interior monologue, and rumor constitute the fragments of discourse brought together in the book as vehicles that tell Pantaleón's story" (Castro-Klarén, *Understanding* 140).

⁴ Ironically, Vargas Llosa's notion that real-life events, and especially those related to the author's experience, should be distorted to the point that they become unrecognizable to the reader would reach an opposite extreme in the creative of his next novel. Despite Vargas Llosa's claims that in *La tía Julia y el escribidor* "[...] hay más invenciones, tergiversaciones y exageraciones que recuerdos y que, al escribir[la], nunca pretendí ser anecdóticamente fiel a unos hechos y personas anteriores y ajenos a la novela" (*Mentiras* 17), he makes a clear move toward an explicit autobiography that also resurfaces in subsequent novels.

Furthermore, Vargas Llosa's authorial absence requires his readers to distinguish for themselves "el contraste entre la realidad y lo que se dice" (Enkvist 160), a technique that makes the narrative more complex than is readily apparent.

As Captain Pantoja is criticized by military officers because an anthem written by some of the prostitutes in his "Special Service" does not include references to the navy, Vargas Llosa reveals one of the central messages of his novel in his *exemplary* officer's explanation that "the hymn was not planned by military authorities, but rather was a 'spontaneous creation of the personnel'" (Williams, *Mario Vargas Llosa* 79). As Vargas Llosa describes the ridiculousness of social institutions attempting to control the deepest passions of humanity, he also responds to the unnatural restrictions that these societies have placed upon the spontaneous creation of fiction. As Vargas Llosa declared a new freedom for his literature, both through his political exchanges with the Cuban government and the creation of narratives that were distinct from his earlier writings, he also sought to establish the basic parameters for an evolving concept of literature.

La tía Julia y el escribidor

Similar to *Pantaleón y las visitadoras*, Vargas Llosa's fifth novel, *La tía Julia y el escribidor*, introduces new aspects of writing into the Peruvian's literary *oeuvre*. Moreover, the narrative demonstrates a further distancing from his earlier commitment to Sartre's concept of literature as revolution. Throughout earlier decades, Vargas Llosa criticized popularized fictions, but confessed that he wrote his own with *La tía Julia y el escribidor*. One of the most debated aspects of his novel is the degree and accuracy of its autographical referents. Beyond Vargas Llosa's tendency to transform his lived

experiences into purely fictional creations, one cannot ignore the explicit autobiographical nature of his recounting of the struggles of Marito to become a writer. As Robert Richmond Ellis notes, “Vargas Llosa undermines his own project of rhetorical concealment by intertwining a series of fictional narratives with an autobiographical account of his first marriage to his aunt” (223). *La tía Julia y el escribidor*, then, presents a *new project* that is a turning point for Vargas Llosa’s literature and concept of the writer’s vocation.⁵ Departing from his earlier depictions of writing as a challenge to *the real* in order to inspire socialist revolution, the novelist introduces one of the most defining concerns for his recent writing, the subtle distinctions between reality and fiction. Vargas Llosa’s concept of the *truth of lies* would dominate his theoretical writings in the years following his semi-autobiographical novel, introducing as a derivative consequence a metafictional literature that explicitly ponders the writer in the act of writing.

At a conference in 1966, Vargas Llosa made the following observation regarding the autobiographical nature of his narratives:

Yo creo que todas las novelas son autobiográficas y sólo pueden ser autobiográficas [. . .] y que la habilidad del escritor, del novelista, no está en crear propiamente sino disimular, en enmascarar, en disfrazar lo que hay de personal en lo que escribe. (qtd. in O’Bryan-Knight 16)

Regarding the writer’s earlier narratives, Kristal accurately concludes that “[t]he opinions and feelings in Vargas Llosa’s works can always be attributed either to his characters or to his narrators, even when they appear to be autobiographical” (28). *La tía Julia y el*

⁵ Speaking of the influence of Flaubert on the construction of *La tía Julia y el escribidor*, Vargas Llosa reveals in an enlightening conversation with Federico de Cárdenas and Peter Elmore: “Si algo quedó claro para mí tras escribir *La tía Julia y el escribidor* es lo válido que es la teoría de Flaubert. Si tú te metes en una ficción tienes dos posibilidades: te conviertes en un personaje de ficción y ese personaje no te representa más que cualquier otro o te mantienes tal cual y en consecuencia esa historia pasa a ser documento o testimonio, algo que ya no es ficción” (qtd. in Coaguila 130).

escribidor, however, is so overtly autobiographical that it is impossible to separate the views and experiences of the author Vargas Llosa from those of his literary protagonist Marito. Vargas Llosa even confesses to José Miguel Oviedo that half of his novel is “[. . .] absolutamente objetivo y absolutamente cierto” (“Conversation” 158).⁶ As the novel’s chapters alternate between Vargas Llosa’s real-life experiences as a young writer (odd chapters) and the fictional story of the outlandish Pedro Camacho (even chapters),⁷ the novelist introduces a new theoretical concept for his literature, as “[. . .] intercalar esas dos historias era un poco como presentar el reverso y el anverso de una realidad, una parte objetiva y una parte subjetiva, una cara verídica y otra inventada” (156, 158). Vargas Llosa’s “autobiographical” chapters describe a developing romance with his divorced Aunt Julia, fourteen years his elder. These scenes intermix with the scripts that the Bolivian Pedro Camacho writes feverishly for the radio station where both characters work. As the reader notices that Camacho’s creative output is approaching insanity, so too does Marito’s life resembles these fictions, suggesting a complex relationship between truth and lies that is evident at many levels throughout the novel. Besides providing important insights into Vargas Llosa’s biography, *La tía Julia y el escribidor* also represents the writer’s increasing thematic concern with distinctions between fiction and reality, ultimately resulting in a series of essays and creative works that address both the theoretical and practical implications of the truth of lies.

⁶ Such a position contrasts with other statements from Vargas Llosa on the fictional nature of autobiographical sections within his novel: “Creo que el Varguitas de mi novela es un personaje tan ficticio como cualquier otro” (qtd. in Coaguila 130).

⁷ Though his personage is highly fictionalized in Vargas Llosa’s novel, Pedro Camacho is also based upon a real soap opera scriptwriter named Raúl Salmón. As Vargas Llosa states in an interview with José Miguel Oviedo: “Por supuesto, en mi libro toda esta historia [de Salmón] está muy transformada, se puede reconocer de ella solo una especie de embrión” (“Conversation” 156).

Whereas Vargas Llosa notes that his “capítulos objetivos” are characterized by “un lenguaje sumamente informativo,” he also is clear to distinguish his autobiographical writing from the straightforward approaches that he had recently introduced in *Pantaleón y las visitadoras*. Responding to Oviedo’s inquiries regarding a possible relationship between the two narratives, Vargas Llosa clarifies:

No, porque allí [en *Pantaleón y las visitadoras*] hay un elemento paródico, que en este texto [*La tía Julia y el escribidor*] no debería aparecer de ninguna manera. No, son capítulos en los que realmente de una manera muy ‘factual,’ como se diría en inglés, se va desarrollando la acción. En cambio, en los otros capítulos, había un elemento de ‘huachafería,’ como se diría en limeño. (“Conversation” 160, 162)

Besides personally referring to his own works in terms of the “bad taste” of *huachafería*, Vargas Llosa also recognizes an important distinction between the real world and the fictions he creates.

Traté de hacer [. . . alternar] un capítulo, digamos, de imaginación pura o casi pura, con un capítulo de historia personal auténtica, documental. Lo que pasó es que también en este caso, como a mí me ocurre siempre, el proyecto empezó a desbaratarse a la hora de llevarse a la práctica. Es decir, los episodios en los que yo quería no ser sino veraz y contar solamente cosas que estaba absolutamente segura que había ocurrido así, eran completamente imposibles, porque la memoria es engañosa, y se contamina de fantasía y porque en el momento mismo de escribir ese elemento imaginario se filtra, se instala y se incorpora irremediamente a lo que uno escribe. Y al mismo tiempo, en los capítulos que son supuestamente o síntesis o paráfrasis de los radioteatros del protagonista, la pura invención tampoco existe. Hay también unos ingredientes intrusos, diríamos, que proceden de la realidad objetiva, que se van infiltrando poco a poco. (156, 158)

Vargas Llosa’s literary theories are replete with contrasts, and these two levels of reality—objective truth and literary fiction—would provide a transition point for his concept of literature from a revolutionary act to the recovery of the past through the use of memory. Although one of the initial intentions of *La tía Julia y el escribidor* was to demonstrate these distinct depictions of reality “que en principio parecen tan rígidamente

independientes uno de otro,” the writer would discover that truth and fiction were “en realidad [. . .] visceralmente comunicados” (162), a concept addressed in this and other novels through a new level of metafictional writing.

Vargas Llosa’s introductory epigraph for *La tía Julia y el escribidor* is a less-than-subtle indication of the metafictional intentions for his novel. Citing the Mexican Salvador Elizondo’s *El grafógrafo*, Vargas Llosa likewise indicates:

Escribo. Escribo que escribo. Mentalmente me veo escribir que escribo y también puedo verme ver que escribo. Me recuerdo escribiendo ya y también viéndome que escribía. Y me veo recordando que me veo escribir y me recuerdo viéndome recordar que escribía y escribo viéndome escribir que recuerdo haberme visto escribir que me veía escribir que recordaba haberme visto escribir que escribía y que escribía que escribo que escribía. También puedo imaginarme escribiendo que ya había escrito que me imaginaría escribiendo que había escrito que me imaginaba escribiendo que me veo escribir que escribo.

Though each of Vargas Llosa’s previous narratives included some degree of autoreferentiality, specifically as related to the writing process, *La tía Julia y el escribidor* was “[. . .] the first of Vargas Llosa’s narratives whose subterranean thread is that of the writer in the process of writing [. . .]” (Oviedo, “Self-Portrait” 167).

Subsequent narratives indicate that *La tía Julia y el escribidor* is a doorway to a new metafictional world that is also evident in works such as *La señorita de Tacna* (1981), *El hablador* (1987), *Lituma en los Andes* (1993), *Los cuadernos de don Rigoberta* (1997), and *Travesuras de la niña mala* (2006), among numerous others. Throughout *La tía Julia y el escribidor*, Vargas Llosa struggles with questions such as “¿Qué cosa es el realismo, señores, el tan mentado realismo que cosa es?” (164), as he literally and literarily attempts to resolve such concerns through the act of writing. Certainly, as Inger Enkvist explains, “[. . .] su gran interés [es] por el oficio de novelistas en sí y por la relación entre la literatura y la realidad” (181). Vargas Llosa’s transition from the demons of politics to

specific concerns with the writing process, including the dividing line between literature and reality, maintains the cathartic element of the creative process, but replaces the obsessions to be exorcised. Furthermore, as Vargas Llosa's literary canon continues to develop its metafictional tendencies, so too does the relationship between his novels and his concept of literature become more concrete.

As Vargas Llosa's description of Marito's development as a writer approaches the present, it becomes increasingly clear that the main character at the novel's conclusion is not the young writer of the 1950s, but the experienced novelist of the 1970s. The true distinction between Marito the character and Mario the author is "the ironic distance gained over two decades of subsequent experience and success" (Booker 62). *Varguitas*, then, is a mere *reflection* in the writer's mature lens, as he reviews his life in retrospect.⁸ As Oviedo notes, Vargas Llosa's decision to incorporate his life so explicitly in the text creates in the reader a feeling that "[. . .] there is a first person protagonist who *remembers*, rather than *images*" ("Self-Portrait" 167; emphasis mine). Distinct from his other novels, Vargas Llosa employs a simple and constant past tense for his first-person narrator. As the novelist creates a narrational memoir based in his own personal memories, he transitions from one totalizing task to another. Once conceptualized as a revolutionary agent of change in the world, Vargas Llosa's literature shifts with the publication of *La tía Julia y el escribidor* to a new concept of literature based in memory.

⁸ Vargas Llosa's reflective tendency in his later novels also corresponds with a pedagogical mode wherein the writer serves as teacher of his own theories on literature. This is especially true in later works, such as *Cartas a un joven novelista* (1997) and *Travesuras de la niña mala* (2006), which provide examples par excellence of the writer's pedagogical and reflective inclinations respectively.

Reading Brazil's Backlands

La guerra del fin del mundo is perhaps Vargas Llosa's most important and best-written narrative. The previous two novels have their critical interest, but they certainly do not possess the depth or complexity of the Vargas Llosa's fictional recreation of the backlands struggles in Canudos. Given the general importance of the novel to Vargas Llosa's literary canon and Spanish American literature, critical approximations to *La guerra del fin del mundo* are abundant. These studies range from Leopoldo Bernucci's indispensable transtextual analysis to Sabine Köllmann's close reading of the structure and thematics of the Peruvian's masterpiece narrative. Most commonly, criticism has opted for comparative analyses of da Cunha's *Os sertões* and Vargas Llosa's creative rendition of the Canudos rebellion. These studies, while expansive in scope, can also be exclusionary in terms of the broader context of Vargas Llosa's writings. Establishing the relationship between the Peruvian and his turn-of-the-century Brazilian counterpart is essential to the evaluation of the Vargas Llosa's narrative; however, as Armas Marcelo astutely notes: "*Os Sertões*, su lectura apasionada, es el origen, pero no es el desarrollo ni tampoco el resultado en *La guerra del fin del mundo* [. . .]" (335). Drawing from Belén S. Casteñeda's observation that "La experiencia del escritor sirve, por lo tanto, como el punto de partido para la edificación de una 'realidad ficticia' autosuficiente" (350), so also does *La guerra del fin del mundo* retain its autonomous character, despite having drawn its original material from da Cunha's writings. Vargas Llosa's reading of *Os sertões* was a personal *event* that distanced his writings from earlier Sartrean notions of literature. As Renata Wasserman's noteworthy article on the strategy of intertextuality denotes: "The reader of [Vargas Llosa's] novel is assumed to know about *Os sertões* and

is invited to read *La guerra* doubly [. . .]” (461). Though this assumption can become a critical trap that limits unnecessarily the interpretive potential of *La guerra del fin del mundo*, a close reading of the text and context of *Os sertões* is nonetheless invaluable when considering Vargas Llosa’s departure from the contemporary Peruvian context that was the former standard for his narratives. Extreme critical differences in opinion, including debates about the character of Antônio Conselheiro, are typical of the impulse to critique Vargas Llosa’s novel exclusively in terms of sometimes tentative analyses of Euclides da Cunha and his compelling narrative. Indeed, studies of Vargas Llosa’s novel that are based upon explicit comparisons with *Os sertões* are inescapably interpretations of an interpretation. When combined with nationalistic lenses, these criticisms are often ironic examples of the ideological confusions that Vargas Llosa’s epic narrative describes. My objective in the following sections, therefore, is to enlarge our understanding of Vargas Llosa’s concept of literature through an analysis of the historical and cultural contexts that produced *Os sertões*. Doing so not only benefits the reader of *La guerra del fin del mundo* but also enlightens our view of Vargas Llosa’s experience as a reader of *Os sertões*, its intricate historical context, and, perhaps most importantly, the writer Euclides da Cunha.

Critical Interpretations

Within historical and literary canons, Euclides da Cunha’s *Os sertões* occupies a unique place. Despite the fact that this work of non-fiction is based in the historical occurrences of the backlands Canudos rebellion, it also embodies traces of fiction that distinguish it as a masterpiece in Brazilian literature. Perhaps the most world-recognized

piece in Brazilian letters, *Os sertões*, due to its hybrid character, resists definitive critical interpretation. In Vargas Llosa's teaching notebooks (Columbia, 1975–76), the Peruvian describes both da Cunha's work and Sarmiento's *Facundo* as "originally written as works of history or sociologie, that can be read now as novels" ("Papers").⁹ Furthermore, due to the iconic status of da Cunha's masterpiece, its readings have been at times obscured in Brazilian nationalistic pursuits. While criticism cannot mistake the influence of Brazilian positivism, combined with social-Darwinist tendencies,¹⁰ *Os sertões* also has been read as the condemnation of Brazil's militaristic attempts at modernization. Such readings maintain that da Cunha's experience at Canudos alters his perspective of the military and the positivism that was its theoretic base. Certainly, da Cunha was astonished at the Canudos scene. However, his distaste for the Brazilian military has a personal precedent that is reminiscent of Vargas Llosa's clear disgust with the abuses of the Peruvian armed forces. Da Cunha does condemn the brutalities at Canudos; nevertheless, his commentaries are not a contradictive stance on positivism or evidence that he celebrated the condition of the Brazilian backlander.¹¹ Euclides da Cunha's constant thesis throughout *Os sertões*, which must have intrigued Vargas Llosa at a time of increasing concern with the inevitable need for modernization in the Peruvian interior, was that

⁹ All citations of Vargas Llosa's handwritten teaching notebooks have been reproduced in typeset as faithfully as possible. For this reason, I maintain the use of capitalization, underlining, and other emphases, which are all original to the manuscript, unless otherwise noted. Furthermore, spelling errors are also retained (without the intrusion of [sic]) given that, as Gregory Rabassa once explained, "[Mario's] English wasn't that good" (10) and orthographical errors within his notes are frequent.

¹⁰ Throughout the following pages, I refer to the concept of social evolution as social Darwinism. Given that the period under consideration precedes the conception of this title, I use it as a descriptive term to describe the theories at the time and the individuals the conformed to them. However, I do not mean to indicate that the individuals discussed considered themselves as social Darwinists.

¹¹ The contrastive nature of *Os sertões* is a recurrent theme, especially in criticisms that evaluate the account as a work of literature. Maria Zilda Ferreira Cury's commentaries provide one such example, wherein form and content are considered an inseparable whole: "Como são essas vozes contraditórias em si mesmas, a resultante literária é a presença constante da figura antitese, de uma maneira exasperada de escrever, da enorme tensão dramática do texto até nos trechos mais descritivos" (76).

Brazil could not exist as a nation without the Europeanization of its society as a solution to its racial predicament.

From the moment of its publication, *Os sertões* entered Brazilian national consciousness. “Publicado em 1902,” Maria Zilda Ferreira Cury explains, “conheceu sucesso editorial imediato, transformandose em leitura obrigatória para os estudiosos da literatura e da cultura brasileiras” (72). Though nationalism was the mechanism that introduced *Os sertões* into the forefront of Brazilian intellectualism, it also has been the means to the distorted interpretation of its content. Robert Levine explains that “Canudos has been recalled frequently over the decades, often in a romanticized vein” (“Mud-Hut” 526). Destined to become one of the centerpieces of Brazilian nationalism, the interpretation of *Os sertões* has been molded to adapt to the desired conception of the Brazilian nation and its presentation to a world audience. As Luiz Costa Lima notes: “*Os Sertões* was probably the first Brazilian book to give Europeans a picture of rural tropical Brazil incorporating (along with virtues that exceed its many defects) a true spirit of the people and the setting which could be understood by Europeans as essentially different, bearing the mark of a culture and a destiny apart from European patterns” (164). And not just to Europe, as the work also became popular throughout South America. Despite bordering every mainland country in the continent with the exception of Chile and Ecuador, Brazil has had surprisingly limited crossover in literary and intellectual dialogue with its Spanish-speaking neighbors.¹² *Os sertões*, however, provides a clear exception to this lamentable norm in Latin America’s composite literary history. Though da Cunha’s

¹² As Juan Rulfo astutely observed: “No obstante las fronteras geográficas, lingüísticas e históricas que separan a esta gran nación del resto de América Latina, parece que hubieran establecido también barreras intelectuales, ya que hasta la fecha aún son muchos los hispanoamericanos ajenos a la literatura brasileña, y lamentablemente, muy pocos quienes se ocupan de estudiar las numerosas obras que aportan a nuestro continente una valiosa y amplia riqueza cultural” (*Toda la obra* 386).

account does provide a window to the unexplored Brazilian backlands, his true message speaks directly to a more general New World dilemma: a choice between conformity to the consequences of European modernization and perceived condemnation to the depravity of barbarism.

Given Euclides da Cunha's complex character, contrastive critical interpretations to *Os sertões* are to be expected. Célio Pinheiro, in an edition that celebrates the eightieth year since the publication of *Os sertões*, categorizes a series of critical citations from the work's publication in 1902 to the early 1980s. Earliest criticisms tended to characterize the work as a representation of the Brazilian national character, whereas the 1960s introduced a new wave of criticism that highlighted the literary aspects of the otherwise historical account. Given its dual character, critics such as João Etienne Filho began to reconsider its aesthetic attributes: "*Os sertões* pode ser classificado como obra de ciência e obra de arte" (qtd. in Pinheiro 47). Such a shift in interpretation becomes important to our discussion of Vargas Llosa's experience as a reader, as he was unquestionably familiar with these more recent critical trends. Indeed, the Spanish American Boom of the 1960s no doubt exerted some influence on this new literary focus. Perhaps this was also an impetus for Rui Guerra's unrealized intention to recreate the story of Canudos through a cinematographic lens. Whatever the case, Vargas Llosa could not have found a more intriguing piece through which to evaluate the distinction between truth and lies than the turn-of-the-century historical account that nonetheless resembled a work of creative fiction.

Contemporary criticism seems to have moved in two distinct directions. Perhaps due to critical trends concerned with the voice of the subaltern, da Cunha's writing has

inspired collections of articles devoted to *Os sertões*'s condemnation of the brutalities of the Brazilian military in support of the backlands inhabitants. Other studies, such as Levine's seminal *Vale of Tears* (1992), evaluate Canudos through more objective historical means.¹³ Levine's work is perhaps most indicative of this second tendency, though Lori Madden¹⁴ and Frederic Amory have also made significant contributions to the recovery of the historical Euclides da Cunha, an iconic personage that has become as much a myth as a man. Vargas Llosa was expressly captivated by the author that he describes in his teaching notebooks as "A HERO OF 'UNDERDEVELOPED COUNTRIES'" ("Papers"). Given Vargas Llosa's literary and political uncertainties at the time he read *Os sertões*, the biography of the man Euclides da Cunha, cast through circumstance into an epic struggle between civilization and barbarism, provided as compelling a story as the narrative that he eventually composed.

As is common in Vargas Llosa's criticism of other writers, he reveals significant details about his own literary theories. Through his teaching notebooks on *Os sertões*, which outline his lesson plans for the classroom, we also learn something of his personal readings. Providing his students with a general overview of the evolution of Latin American literature, Vargas Llosa positions *Os sertões* in a section entitled "the beginning" within a subdivision called "a poor, mediocre genre." Characterized by a "lack of originality" and a general "poorness of imagination" that added little to the imitations of the European models that preceded these works, Vargas Llosa concludes

¹³ Levine also delineates common misconceptions in the interpretation of *Os sertões* throughout a series of *reparative* articles that revisit the backlands through critical analysis. Two examples include clarifications that "Canudos never posed a significant political threat to the Republic" (208) and the misconceived view that the monarch was responsible for "national backwardness" (212).

¹⁴ One of Madden's central conclusions is that "official" discourses that describe Canudos "are dominated by outside projections of meaning unto the Canudos happenings, along with their labels (messianic, fanatic, Monarchist, atavistic, socialist)" (5).

that “the best narrators are the essayists.” He notes that the essayists were more “powerful” and “inspiring” than the novelists in the following categories: dialogues, plot, characters, and descriptions. Specifically, he includes *Facundo* and *Os sertões* as examples, calling them: “Works originally written as works of history or sociologie, that can be read now as novels.” These accounts, according to Vargas Llosa’s notebooks, were followed by a “Folkloristic Period” that includes a powerful sense of social consciousness. Though he concludes that the essays of this period were “[. . .] most important as historical, sociological and politically documents than as esthetical achievement,” he ultimately provides more generous appraisals of *Os sertões*. As Vargas Llosa describes the “ambitious nature of the novel,” he concludes that “quantity is quality,” specifically including the Brazilian’s work in this category. With these observations, Vargas Llosa enters into a discussion of the total novel, a narrative style that is inherent to his own literature. Echoing the *tentation de l’impossible* that he outwardly admired in Flaubert, Vargas Llosa records in his notebooks: “It is impossible as realization but not as ambition. The ambition of ‘totality’ (with all this ‘naivete’) is inseparable of the novel (it is in its nature).” Vargas Llosa, furthermore, demonstrates his deep admiration for both Euclides da Cunha and his writing when he respectfully concludes: “This ambition is evident in ‘Os Sertoos’” (“Papers”).

Euclides da Cunha

Vargas Llosa has explicitly commented on the solidarity that he felt with Euclides da Cunha as he read *Os sertões*. “I was deeply moved by the case of Euclides da Cunha himself,” Vargas Llosa recalls, “[. . .] because his experience was like an incarnation of

that of many intellectuals in the past and in the present in Latin America” (*Writer’s Reality* 125). Vargas Llosa’s preparatory work for *La guerra del fin del mundo* included travels to Brazil and extensive research on the backlands regions. Specifically, he has expressed his interest in the conflictive life and writings of da Cunha. For this reason, this section presents a detailed exploration of the life of the Brazilian engineer-writer. Given that the works and life experiences of certain influential authors—Sartre and Flaubert not being the least of these—have been critical to the development of Vargas Llosa’s literary theories, a careful reading of da Cunha’s biography elucidates his influence on *La guerra del fin del mundo* and Vargas Llosa’s concept of literature.

Euclides da Cunha was born in 1866, at the conclusion of the Civil War (1861–65) in the United States, and during a period of Brazilian history complete with technological advancement and the challenges of modernity. Previous to his birth, the nation saw the placement of steamships on the Amazon (1839), the first telegraph line (1852), and the first railway (to Petrópolis) (1854). Cables to Europe (1874) and the linking of all central Brazilian cities (1890) followed thereafter. Da Cunha was no stranger to these advances and was interested throughout his life in the movement of Brazil toward a modern state of civilization. Throughout his complex and combative existence, which Gilberto Freyre has described as a “mongrel background” (237), da Cunha was influenced by several Brazilian intellectual schools of thought as his conception of these competing theories emerged. Nevertheless, as Adelino Brandão states, “O fato de Euclides ter recebido todas estas influências, porém, não significa que ele o tenha feito de um modo passivo, pois ele não foi um simples ‘copiador’, mas assimilador e reelaborador” (*Sociologia* 116). Similar to Vargas Llosa’s struggles to

establish a place for literature in society, Euclides da Cunha, in his own circumstance, searched for an intellectual framework through which to contemplate concerns of race and progress in the nascent Brazilian republic.

Positivism was essential to the character of Euclides da Cunha, the construction of *Os sertões*, and the intellectual development of the Brazilian nation.¹⁵ Founded by the Frenchman Auguste Comte (1798–1857), positivism proposed that civilizations experience phases of development in their progression toward the utopian concept of Humanity. Similar to other Latin American nations, Brazilian intellectualism established its models in European, and specifically French, philosophies. However, the incorporation of positivism into the Brazilian intellectual consciousness is an extreme case. More than the obvious influence of positivism on Brazil’s national motto (“Ordem e progresso”), immortalized on its national banner, the precepts of positivism were and continue to be woven intricately into the intellectual, political, social, and militaristic fabric of the Brazilian nation.

Certainly, the influence of Brazilian positivism was tremendous and enduring; nevertheless, the diverse schools that competed for its attention were less than cohesive. Vargas Llosa might have sympathized with da Cunha’s circumstance, as he and his Spanish American counterparts have also struggled to find the literary threads that could restitch a sense of intellectual solidarity among them. Conflicts between faith and science were evident as early as 1874 with Luis Pereira Barreto’s contemptuous commentaries regarding the Brazilian Catholic Church. More important than Pereira Barreto, however, was the influence of Benjamin Constant Botelho de Magalhães (1836–91). Raimundo

¹⁵ As Eakin explains: “*Os sertões* [. . .] is a window into the psyche of the Brazilian intelligentsia at the turn of the century as they grappled with how to reconcile their European fixation with their Native American and African heritage” (157–58).

Nina Rodrigues confirms: “It is in large part to Benjamin Constant that we owe the extinction of the monarchist regime in Brazil” (qtd. in Freyre 110). Despite Constant’s eventual abandonment of the Brazilian Positivist Society, which he founded in the mid-seventies, he remained throughout his life a dedicated student of Comte (Amory, “Positivism” 88–89). Constant was esteemed throughout Brazilian intellectual circles (Rabello 33). During his career as a professor of mathematics in the Brazilian military, he educated a new generation of the intellectual elite in positivist percepts, ultimately attempting to combine the Republic’s declared “love of science and [. . .] desire for reform” (Amory, “Positivism” 87).

Under Constant’s auspices, two students transformed the face of Brazilian positivism and formed partitions among its disciples. Miguel Lemos and Raimundo Teixeira Mendes—the Apostolate—recreated the Brazilian Positivist Society as the Positivist Church (1881). In this moment, the positivist tradition in Brazil was divided between its scientific and religious conceptions. As Constant became disassociated with the orthodox positivism of Comte’s Religion of Humanity, others, such as Cândido Rondon (1865–1958), adopted this new religious posture. Euclides da Cunha, similar to others in Brazil at the time, was positioned between the extremes of military science and religious scientism. Resembling Vargas Llosa’s departure from socialist ideals, da Cunha ultimately searched for alternatives to Brazilian positivism as it departed from its originally declared intentions, or, specifically, “quando o positivismo foi provido à Religião da Humanidade” (Brandão, *Antropologia* 63). Not unlike Vargas Llosa’s distaste for Cuban politics after it transitioned toward the Soviet model, da Cunha’s

disillusionment with this new direction for Brazilian positivism coincided with his disenchantment with the Brazilian military.

Commenting on the differences that severed any sense of unity within positivism as a whole, Amory observes that the options available to disciples of the positivist movement were few:

[If] a young man of the capital, or from the provinces, wanted to be a part of the movement in the late nineteenth century, either he would have to be enrolled in one of the [. . .] institutes of higher learning, preferably in the Military School with Benjamin Constant as his teacher, or else he could betake himself to the Positivist Church and sit at the feet of the Apostolate. (“Positivism” 88)

Euclides da Cunha was one such student, who, with his classmate Cândido Rondon, opted to continue his studies in the military school under Constant. Sylvio Rabello notes that “Benjamin Constant não tinha nada de antimonarquista. Poderia mesmo dizer-se que lhe era indiferent tanto a monarquia quanto a República” (34). Rondon and da Cunha, however, became proponents of the Republic. Whereas Rondon defected to the Positivist Church, where he remained throughout a life consecrated to nationalism, da Cunha continued with the armed services, despite evidence that he never was comfortable there. Though da Cunha accepted positivism as the “ideology of the Republic” (89), he was not apt to associate himself with institutionalized science. His relative torpor for institutionalized positivism demonstrates yet another parallel to Vargas Llosa’s concerns in the years prior to his reading of *Os sertões*. Vargas Llosa’s detachment from what he perceived as the institutionalization of literature for political purposes did not preclude the writer’s support of socialist ideals. Similarly, da Cunha’s discretions regarding the direction of positivist thought should not be read as the denunciation of science, or a rejection of Brazil’s modernization, but rather a disassociation with the institutions that

proscribed unnatural boundaries around the positivist theories to which he generally subscribed.

During these transitions in the theoretic conception of Brazil as a nation, da Cunha was discharged from the military due to health concerns, and other altercations with authorities (Skidmore and Holloway 31). Distanced from military service, the engineer commenced his career in journalism and became a writer for the Brazilian newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo*. Perhaps due to his military experience, the newspaper provided da Cunha with an assignment that has become a definitive moment in Brazilian nationalism. The ex-lieutenant was to travel to the Brazilian backlands to cover the story of Antônio Conselheiro. His experience was formative to the future of the Brazilian republic as he witnessed and recorded the tragedy at Canudos. These descriptions were published in newspaper installments and, subsequently, they were collected and expanded as the Brazilian masterpiece *Os sertões*. Euclides da Cunha's expulsion from the military at once commenced his writing career and ostracized him from social circles. Similar to Vargas Llosa, da Cunha's negative experiences and personal solitude would become powerful impetuses for his future writings. Though he published several now-famous works, da Cunha's private life is not as well documented. As Skidmore and Holloway note: "No diaries or intimate notebooks have ever been published. The correspondence available to date has been revealing, though limited."¹⁶ Such sources, however meager, are indispensable in revealing the connection between the author and his work" (30). Though Vargas Llosa was certainly enthralled by the convictions and life decisions of Euclides de

¹⁶ In the same article, the authors include sixteen letters that Euclides da Cunha wrote to Oliveira Lima (between 1903–09). These letters provide a glimpse into the personal life of a man who, as mentioned, is most commonly known through anecdote.

Cunha, it is true that he was most impacted by his writing. According to Vargas Llosa, *Os sertões* was “la aventura en un gran fresco épico” that provided him with “la oportunidad de escribir una novela de aventuras, algo que siempre quise hacer” (qtd. in Coaguila 128).¹⁷ Even more important to Vargas Llosa’s future narratives, however, was the influence that *Os sertões* would have on some of the most critical aspects of his concept of literature. Da Cunha and the Canudos experience would also transport Vargas Llosa’s future novelistic ventures from a contemporary and strictly Peruvian landscape to new international settings, wherein the writer would still speak to the present, but through a retrospective, historical lens.

Os sertões

Positivism and da Cunha’s experience in the Brazilian military comprise an important context for the construction of *Os sertões*. Da Cunha categorizes his account of the Canudos rebellion into two distinct sections: (1) The Backlands and (2) The Rebellion. Whereas the initial section (subdivided as “The Land” and “Man”) provides scientific descriptions of the backlands and its inhabitants, da Cunha centers on the events at Canudos in the second. Vargas Llosa positively described these two sections in his teaching notebooks as “THE COORDINATES TO TELL EVERYTHING” (“Papers”). Dissimilar to Vargas Llosa’s totalizing rendition of the scene at Canudos, however, da Cunha does not seem as concerned with the development of the leader of the backlands movement, the

¹⁷ Vargas Llosa has mentioned on several occasions his fondness for *novelas de caballerías*. Specifically, with regard to his reading of *Os sertões*, he explains: “Hay personajes extraordinarios, que realizan toda clase de proezas y llevan un destino fuera de lo común, al igual que en las novelas de caballerías” (qtd. in Coaguila 128).

messianic Antônio Conselheiro.¹⁸ For da Cunha's purposes, he is content to characterize Conselheiro as a mere outshoot of his determined temporal and geographic circumstances. Certainly, he is not represented as the extraordinary case that Vargas Llosa describes. Booker notes: "Da Cunha consistently depicts the Counselor as a pathetic and deranged figure, an unfortunate product of certain abominable social conditions in Brazil. Vargas Llosa also never leaves any doubt that the Counselor is a misguided fanatic, but at the same time he invests this fanatic with a creative dignity that is missing from da Cunha's account" (91). While Köllmann concurs with Booker, and further stresses Vargas Llosa's ambiguous representation of Conselheiro, Bernucci states: "[Vargas Llosa] consigue recrear una imagen del Consejero cuyos atributos son únicamente positivos, estableciendo, así, para la visión del mundo del narrador básico un modelo ideológico definido; es decir, la defensa del personaje o lo simpatía hacia él" (28). Still other critics, such as the Brazilian Edmundo Moniz, claim: "Nunca mais Vargas Llosa poderá fugir do estigma de ter escrito este livro contra Antônio Conselheiro. [. . . Foi] uma das maiores falsificações de todos os tempos" (qtd. in Köllmann 181). Da Cunha also ironically incorporates his own *falsifications* of Conselheiro's character for the purposes of his account.¹⁹ Strangely enough, it is da Cunha's consultation of an extensive bibliography that enabled him to manipulate his

¹⁸ Scholars have debated the messianic character of Antônio Conselheiro. Madden states: "The actual extent of Conselheiro's Messianism is something that should be reconsidered. Conselheiro himself denied that he was a divine emissary and no testimony in the literature contradicts that fact" (12). Nonetheless, the ideological conception of the backlanders and the Republic as forces of Good and Evil have left this discussion open to critical debate.

¹⁹ Vargas Llosa's fascination with this aspect of da Cunha's writings might have corresponded with the publication of Hayden White's *Metahistory* in 1973. I am unaware of any essay where Vargas Llosa explicitly mentions White's work; however, the close relationship between the theorist's notions of history as a creative process and similar descriptions from Vargas Llosa should not be ignored. Specifically, Vargas Llosa's commentaries on the fictional nature of history resemble White's writings on "enplotment" in *Tropics of Discourse* (1978).

narrative with precision,²⁰ a technique that Vargas Llosa expertly reenacted with his own laborious research and subsequent fictionalization of the Canudos massacre.

Euclides da Cunha commences his account with descriptions that resemble social Darwinism, and then continues into a potent depiction of the backlands scene. Despite his presentation of these sections as a historically accurate account, his descriptions are determined by the writer's clear concern with the Republic's denigration due to the miscegenation of its diverse peoples. *Os sertões*, therefore, is as much a treatise on race as a depiction of a historical moment.²¹ Furthermore, details in da Cunha's account regarding the personal character of Antônio Conselheiro are not absent without intention. For example, one of the central reasons for the Canudo's conflict was Conselheiro's opposition to marriage as an institution, for he considered it a sacred sacrament, one consecrated of God and not the state. Afrânio Peixoto approached da Cunha with Conselheiro's personal manuscripts on the subject, but the writer declined them, as his incorrect conception of Conselheiro as a proponent of polygamy more closely harmonized with his purposes (Freyre 101). Throughout his narrative, in other words, da Cunha considers sure evidence as secondary to the intended influence of his words. Da Cunha seems to have anticipated Vargas Llosa's own theories on the creative process in this regard; or perhaps, more accurately, he influenced them. Following Vargas Llosa's reading of *Os sertões*, his concern with the contrast between historical and fictional truth intensified. His theoretical stance that even a historian's most sincere attempts at

²⁰ For an excellent discussion on the bibliographical references that comprise Euclides da Cunha's construction of *Os sertões*, see Frederic Amory's article, "Historical Sources and Biographical Context in the Interpretation of Euclides da Cunha's *Os Sertões*."

²¹ Robert Levine's *Vale of Tears* compares an historical reconstruction of the Canudos tragedy to the account that Euclides da Cunha produces in *Os sertões*. These corrective studies are not intended to diminish the value of *Os sertões*, but rather to open new doors of interpretation.

objectivity are inescapably influenced by personal bias not only informed a series of essays on the creative techniques of various literary masters entitled *La verdad de las mentiras* (1990), but also led him toward the fictionalization of history in some of his most significant creative narratives.

Whereas the first sub-section of *Os sertões* describes the Brazilian backlands,²² the second concentrates on the Brazilian “man” as its pseudo-scientific theme. Similar to da Cunha’s descriptions of the natural eradication of barren desert lands, he believes in the evolution and modernization of Brazil and its diverse peoples. In this section, da Cunha continues his concerns with miscegenation and the future of Brazilian civilization. “Bound up with influences which, in varying degrees, are modified by three ethnic elements,” da Cunha states, “the origin of the mixed races of Brazil is a problem which for a long time to come will defy the efforts of the best minds. It has as yet been barely outlined” (50). Without doubt, the recent abolition of slavery in Brazil (1888) impacted and intensified da Cunha’s preoccupation with the racial dimensions of the nation. Once more, he summarizes the central purpose of his writings: “We are condemned to civilization. Either we shall progress or we shall perish. So much is certain, and our choice is clear” (54). Extraordinarily Darwinistic in his claims, da Cunha demonstrates his notion that the mixed composition of Brazilian peoples equates inescapable denigration, and eventual extinction, which he attempts to demonstrate in the case of Canudos. Da Cunha’s theories, delineated in this first section, are concentrated and

²² Though Vargas Llosa does not describe the Brazilian landscape in the same scientific manner as does da Cunha, his concern with topography in *La guerra del fin del mundo* is nonetheless apparent. In an interview with Federico de Cárdenas and Peter Elmore, Vargas Llosa confirms: “La geografía sí es rigurosamente fiel. Esa región la he estudiado y visitado, verificando cada uno de los sitios. He procurado ser muy fiel en las descripciones, porque uno de los encantos de la región es su paisaje absolutamente personal, donde hay una enorme austeridad que tiene mucho que ver con las doctrinas de Antônio” (qtd. in Coaguila 132–33).

accentuated in the third, wherein the historical account submits to narrative technique in the exposition of the Canudos massacre. Levine comments: “Da Cunha, as an unreconstructed positivist, chastised the Republic for its excesses but pitied the vanquished backlanders, though he also held steadfast to his anguish over what he considered to be their ‘degeneracy,’ which he explained in pseudo-scientific terms” (“National” 221). Brazil’s racial composition, according to da Cunha’s views on race and nationalism, was the impasse to its transition to modern civilization.

Euclides da Cunha’s descriptions of the four expeditions to rout Conselheiro’s rebellion commence in the second section. Several armed conflicts, both within the nation and without, forced Brazil to recognize its militaristic instabilities.²³ The War of Triple Alliance (1866–1870) provides one of the clearest examples, as Brazil was forced to confront its need for a professional military. Republicanism (based on US models) and positivism were important impetuses to military expansion, as Brazil recognized that its military was essential to the permanence of the nation. Canudos, therefore, was an additional militaristic awakening for the new Republic. Despite its thousands, and prominent leaders such as Antônio Moreira Cesar, the Republican military experienced a series of three defeats at the hands of the backlands peasants. Within the subsection appropriately entitled “Doubtful Autonomy,” da Cunha explains: “Here was the largest military force which had been seen throughout the whole of the north country, and that it should have to contend with such difficulties as these was something which might have been foretold” (196). Despite the enormity of the armed forces, or perhaps for this reason, da Cunha concludes that “nature protects the sertanejo” (195), as the conditions of the

²³ The rebellion of Canudos is a unique case in Brazilian history as, incredibly, “Collective revolts against established authorities were few and far between” (Levine, *Legacies* 165).

northeast “ran counter to the commonly accepted precepts of the art of war” (196). These comments return the reader to his previous statements on the land as the producer of the Brazilian man. Comparing Canudos to France’s Vendée, da Cunha also evidences his militaristic disillusionments. As was the case with Vargas Llosa’s socialist aspirations, da Cunha would also learn that theory and practice were at times incompatible. Most important to our discussion is the subtle metaphor that da Cunha develops in the failures of the Republic’s tactics. Scientific advancements, in the military or otherwise, are rendered impotent in the natural conditions present in the Brazilian backlands. The Canudos predicament, while specific to a region, can also be read as a synecdoche to a more expansive circumstance. Da Cunha conceives Brazil as the mismatched and even conflictive cohabitation of the *natural* state of barbarism and the *imposed* desire for a new and modern civilization.

Throughout *Os sertões*, da Cunha also provides overt and authoritative commentaries on the regrettable actions of the Brazilian military.²⁴ “These ignorant and impenitent ones,” da Cunha states in reference to the backlands inhabitants, “these criminal degenerates, guilty of stupidly adhering to the most ancient traditions, stood in need of energetic corrective measures. They must be rescued from a barbarism which was

²⁴ Cunha’s esteem for the Brazilian military clearly diminishes in the Canudos experience; however, his disenchantment with the institution has a more extensive precedent. Although da Cunha achieved the position of second lieutenant in the Brazilian military, he never seemed comfortable in those circumstances (Skidmore and Holloway 31). One might speculate that Vargas Llosa, should he have read *Os sertões* twenty years earlier, could have written da Cunha into *La ciudad y los perros* as a rebellious cadet at the Leoncio Prado Military Academy, as the real-life da Cunha entered military school at age twenty in 1886 at Praia Vermelha and was discharged from the same within two years. During a reception for the Brazilian War Minister Tomás Coelho, “[S]omething appeared to snap with Euclides, and in an outburst of insubordination he hurled down his sword in the presence of the minister of war, thus ending his career as a soldier for a time” (Putnam xiii). While an extreme case, this episode is representative of da Cunha’s conflictive sentiments throughout his career in the armed forces. Following this incident, he spent time in the military hospital and some believed that he was mentally unstable, a claim that da Cunha resolutely denied (Rabello 38–39). Other experiences also demonstrated that da Cunha’s perception of the Brazilian military, even previous to Canudos, was not equal to his concern for the future of the Republic.

a disgrace to our age, must at once be put upon the road to civilization, at the point of the sword” (203). Saturated in caustic sarcasm, da Cunha’s words must have appealed to Vargas Llosa’s literary and political sentiments. Vargas Llosa also must have concurred with da Cunha’s desire for modernization through nonviolent means. The Brazilian’s denunciation of the “mass slaughter” (308) at Canudos has been read as contrastive to the development of social Darwinism in the earlier section. Certainly, the writer does not condone the brutalities at Canudos; however, neither does he abandon his central thesis. As Levine also notes, da Cunha’s criticisms were intended “[. . .] not as a defense of the *sertanejo* but as an attack on the barbarity of the ‘civilized’ leaders of the nation” (“National” 219). From da Cunha’s perspective, Brazil’s entrance into modern civilization was dependent upon the elimination of the backlands inhabitants. Rejecting indiscriminate violence as a tolerable means to this inevitable end, da Cunha encouraged modernization through education, the influence of scientific and social ideology, and increases in European immigration.²⁵

As a related theme, da Cunha introduces the disconnect between the interior of Brazil and the coastal regions.

Isolated in space and time, the jagunço, being an ethnic anachronism, could do only what he did do—that is, combat, and combat in a terrible fashion, the nation which, after having cast him off for three centuries almost, suddenly sought to raise him to our own state of enlightenment at the point of the bayonet, revealing to him the brilliancy of our civilization in the blinding flash of cannons. (280)

²⁵ The abolition of slavery presented serious social complications, which also extended into the realm of economics. In truth, the social and economic consequences of abolition were inextricably linked. Coffee production, perhaps, provides the clearest example. By 1880, coffee occupied 65% of exports and abolition meant the need for new sources of labor. Brazil turned to immigrants (instead of Brazilian peasants), which occasioned another dramatic alteration to the dynamics and demographics of the nation. Between 1888 and 1914, the period that witnessed the Canudos rebellion and the publication of *Os sertões*, some 2.7 million people immigrated to Brazil, and most settled in São Paulo (Eakin 34). Distinct from its central intention to produce new labor for the Brazilian economy, immigration also served a secondary purpose to “whiten the population,” which was the interest of Euclides da Cunha.

Distinct from the anachronistic characterization of the *jagunço*,²⁶ wherein “[. . .] o tempo parecia não ter corrido sobre a sociedade do sertões” (Rabello 61), da Cunha exposes one of the central concerns of Brazilian demographics, the consortium of civilization on its coastline. From the Portuguese discovery to the present, most of the Brazilian population has existed in its coastal regions, and, as Robert Levine concludes, “[the] racial gap between its coastal and hinterland population threatened Brazil’s very future” (“National” 219). Levine also explains that da Cunha “brought the backlands to the readers of the São Paulo newspaper for which he worked, [and] had a national vision of the ‘Brazil’ he was writing about [. . .]” (*Legacies* 36). Similar to Rondon, who believed that “wherever the telegraph goes there people will experience the benefits of civilization [. . .]” (16), da Cunha searched for the manner in which the backlands could become modern through considerable contact with European influences on the Brazilian coast. Da Cunha further resembles Vargas Llosa in this regard, as the Peruvian would demonstrate his own concerns with the Peruvian interior through essays, interviews, and his novel *El hablador*.²⁷ In a conversation with Federico de Cárdenas and Peter Elmore in 1981, Vargas Llosa explained his view that these types of cultural and geographical divisions are common to Latin America:

[C]uando leí *Os Sertões* [. . .] me encontré con un tema que tocaba fibras muy íntimas. [. . .] Creo que lo ocurrido con los *yagunzos* y el ejército que los

²⁶ Throughout da Cunha’s account, he interchanges the terms *sertanejo* [an inhabitant of the backlands] and *jagunço* [a backlands ruffian], a curious note in consideration of the author’s obsession with the classification of the “species” of man in the backlands.

²⁷ Scott DeVries notes: “It is difficult [. . .] to come away from a reading of some of Vargas Llosa’s earlier works with the feeling that an ethical message is being communicated, much less one as specific as environmentalist discourse.” Nevertheless, as the critic explains, Vargas Llosa’s later novels have communicated “ideas familiar to the environmentalist discourse concerning consumption, conservation, the fragility of the natural world, and alternatives to development” (544). Though DeVries does not make the connection, we might also conclude that these environmentalist tendencies actually commenced with his portrayal of the Brazilian backlands in *La guerra del fin del mundo*.

combatió fue un fenómeno experimentado por casi todos los pueblos latinoamericanos y que se sigue dando: el desencuentro de dos sociedades en un mismo país, que viven totalmente incomunicadas porque tienen diferencias culturales o ideológicas que levantan una barrera infranqueable. [. . .] Toda la historia de nuestros países está signada por tragedias de ese tipo, lo que es otro de los motivos que me impulse a escribir sobre este tema. Encontré en *Os sertões* un material que me estimuló como pocos, tal vez ninguno antes (qtd. in Coaguila 128–29).

Despite Vargas Llosa's recognition of the need for Peruvian modernity, it has likewise been the process that has eluded him. Vargas Llosa has understood the inevitable sacrifice of indigenous culture in the modernization of Peru. Even so, he would have also concurred with da Cunha's conclusion that forced enlightenment was the true expression of barbarism.

Perhaps one of the most cited statements in *Os sertões* comments on the inhabitants of Canudos as “[. . .] the very core of our nationality, the bedrock of our race, which our troops were attacking here, and dynamite was the means precisely suited” (464). Summarizing the citation and restating the thesis of da Cunha's entire work, Marshall Eakin writes: “Da Cunha has enormous admiration for the racially mixed people of the interior, and he recognizes that *they* are the true Brazilians. Yet he desperately wants Brazil to be European, and that would mean the gradual elimination of the racially mixed people of the backlands and their replacement with European immigrants” (158). Da Cunha is impressed, even astonished, at the resilience with which the backlands people oppose the armies of the Republic. Nonetheless, as Herbert Parentes Fortes explains: “Euclides, aunque deplora la suerte de los insurrectos y la crueldad con que fueron tratados, al mismo tiempo, como si no hubiese ninguna contradicción en eso, señala la estrategia que habría vuelto más eficiente la acción del ejército” (xv). Da Cunha's strategies can be scrutinized within the context of his experience in military

service; however, his sentiments also demonstrate important characteristics of his social theories. E. Bradford Burns notes that the depiction of the backlander “as the ‘bedrock of race’ scandalized the Europeanized coastal elites and middle class” (5). Given that the “bedrock” of the Brazilian race is characterized as backward throughout the account, the declaration that Canudos represents the true Brazilian is also an indication of the nation’s unstable circumstance. “Although [da Cunha] expresses a collective guilt over the destruction of Canudos,” Madden explains, “the apology is superficial. He and other contemporary reporters and intellectuals actually reinforced the same sentiments of the military chronicles through subtler means” (10). Da Cunha, it is true, commends the Brazilians backlanders at the same time that he condemns them to extinction.

Perhaps the most disturbing lines to the contemporary reader are those that are most indicative of da Cunha’s position on race in Brazil. “An intermingling of races highly diverse is, in the majority of cases, prejudicial,” declares da Cunha. “Miscegenation carried to an extreme means retrogression” (84–85). Racial concerns, more than other topics, pervade the pages of da Cunha’s account. Critical tendencies to make concessions for these commentaries are indicative of contemporary Brazilian nationalism, wherein the concept of “racial democracy” is maintained as the “bedrock” of its cultural identity, despite the reality of extreme racial divisions. “Let us not play sophists with history,” da Cunha comments. “There were very powerful causes which led to the isolation and conservation of the autochthonous [backlands Brazilian] stock” (82). Similar sentiments can be applied to the interpretation of *Os sertões*. Perhaps nationalistic sophistries, to some degree, have determined the nature of criticism, especially with regard to those commentaries that seem to oppose the cultural base of the Brazilian

nation. “The elites,” describes Burns, “most specifically the intellectuals, ‘discovered’ and then depicted those ‘outside’ of official society. In the folk, they found a distinctive Brazilian personality, a discovery of immense potential in the shaping of nationalism” (7). Criticism, therefore, must recognize these “shaping” tendencies as well as the sources that inspired (1) da Cunha’s commentaries on selective social evolution, (2) his condemnation of the Brazilian military, and (3) his descriptions of Canudos.

Throughout *Os sertões*, da Cunha maintains an internal coherence in his social and militaristic commentaries. His conclusions do not produce contradictions to his former stance on positivism, but rather extend the ideals of social Darwinism and Spencerian positivism in the denunciation of unnatural methods to the Brazilian racial dilemma. Euclides da Cunha is both creative and complex. For this reason, criticism must consider both “o estilo é o homem” (Parentes Fortes 5), without one dominating at the expense of the other. Gilberto Freyre contextualizes da Cunha’s work as one of several theorists who “served to alleviate two of the deepest resentments of cultivated Brazilians: that of being inhabitants of an almost entirely tropical country and that of either being *mestiço* or having a predominantly *mestiço* population as compatriots” (360). Da Cunha simultaneously denounced the destruction of Canudos as he likewise believed that “to be ‘progressive’ and ‘modern’ meant to turn their backs on their own heritage and to stop being Brazilian” (Eakin 158), a concern of nationalism that continues into the present. *Os sertões*, then, continues to elude and engage us, as its central precepts dialogue with current issues of civilization and barbarism. Euclides da Cunha’s words, which demand critical interpretation separate from the ideologies that have at times construed their

significance, become a persuasive experience that searches for the representation of the *Other* and the character of ourselves.

Vargas Llosa faced an analogous search in his passionate reading of *Os sertões*, a narrative that caused him to discover “[u]n tema que hace tiempo andaba buscando, de manera no muy clara” (qtd. in Coaguila 128). As the Peruvian relived the Brazilian backlands experience through da Cunha’s pseudoscientific account, he was also reconsidering the role of literature in society and reconstructing his views on the writer’s vocation. While critics such as Sara Castro-Klarén believe that “el sentido de la historia en la novela [es fiel] al maestro brasileño” (*Análisis* 117), others, including myself, note significant disparities. As Bernucci and others clearly demonstrate, *Os sertões* was the primary influence for Vargas Llosa’s novel. Notwithstanding this raw material, however, the author was no more faithful to the Brazilian text than to any other “reality” that he has transformed into fiction.²⁸ Vargas Llosa has maintained no commitment of fidelity to *reality* in his literature, historically or otherwise. More important to Vargas Llosa’s concept of literature than the similarities and differences between *Os sertões* and *La guerra del fin del mundo* are the novelist’s readings of the Canudos scene and Euclides da Cunha as a man and a writer. His reading of the Brazilian masterpiece *Os sertões* was significant enough to cause him to abandon the contemporary locale of his native Peru for a more expansive international literary landscape. Beyond these important transitions to his literary canon, this period also evidences an explicit rupture with his former Sartrean concept of literature. An evaluation of this temporal and geographical changeover is

²⁸ Vargas Llosa has called these modifications to reality the “element añadido” of literature, a concept that developed as earlier as *Historia de un deicidio* and then exploded with the publication of *La orgía perpetua*, which dedicates an entire chapter to the subject. Vargas Llosa explains: “Este elemento añadido es lo que hace que una novela sea una obra de creación y no de información, lo que llamamos con justicia la originalidad de un novelista” (*Deicidio* 86).

indispensable to the overarching significance of Vargas Llosa's first historical novel and the development of his views on writing.

La guerra del fin del mundo

Previous to his reading of *Os sertões*, Vargas Llosa continued to articulate his notion that literature was an authoritative avenue toward socio-political reform. Confronted with the Canudos massacre, however, the novelist's perception started to evolve. *Os sertões* provided Vargas Llosa with more than the material for a new historical narrative; indeed, his reading of da Cunha's account, which underscores the tragedy of miscommunication, obliged him to confront once more the incompatibility of ideals (*ideologies*) and the vicious realities of the world. Similar to Sartre's conclusions amidst the violence of the Algerian War for Independence, Canudos demonstrated from a historical perspective that, in the confusion of unbridled ideologies, words often fall short. Worse still, Vargas Llosa began to question his own ideals for literature and even his contribution to the world's shortcoming. In the aftermath of the Padilla Affair, Vargas Llosa seems to have recognized in da Cunha and *Os sertões* his own reflection, as an idealist who was struggling with the frailties of his own system of beliefs. Besides textual evidence of Vargas Llosa's concern with the potential of literature to bring about socio-political change in the here-and-now, the temporal and geographical context of *La guerra del fin del mundo* also demonstrates that he had already departed significantly from his earlier concept of literature.

Castro-Klarén describes *La guerra del fin del mundo* as “a relentless sequence of scenes of violence and dazzling action interrupted only by moments of sheer physical

exhaustion” (*Understanding* 167). Similar to *Os sertões*, Vargas Llosa’s novel also addresses the basic history of the backlands inhabitants of the Bahia province in northeastern Brazil who devotedly follow the charismatic leadership of Antonio Conselheiro. As he describes the four military expeditions to silence their opposition to the new Republic, Vargas Llosa also develops fictional storylines that personalize the central themes of the narrative. Throughout *La guerra del fin del mundo*, the recurring verbs *entender* and *ver* create a literary motif that speaks to the writer’s concerns with the ontological failure inherent in blind adherence to ideology. Furthermore, he addresses the incapacity of his own writing to comprehend Canudos through an entirely objective lens. Indeed, the nameless *periodista miope* who is sent to record the history of the rebellion becomes an insignificant detail, as the struggle between life and death is overpowering. Similar to the conclusions of Sartre in recognition of the gravity of the Algerian Nationalist Movement, Vargas Llosa reads and then depicts the Canudos rebellion as a circumstance wherein the vocation of the writer does not have the revolutionary importance that he had previously supposed. Despite Vargas Llosa’s adamant defense of literature as revolution in previous years, the impact of the Padilla Affair, in tandem with his exposure to the brutalities of Canudos, causes the novelist to resign himself to a more subdued literature that acts as the collective memory of the people.

Between the publications of *La guerra del fin del mundo* and *La fiesta del Chivo*, the novelist described his concerns as he wrote about Canudos. Vargas Llosa’s question, which he has repeated in other forums, continues to exacerbate him:

How is it possible for the intellectual in Latin America—people of ideas, cultured people, people who are closely informed about what is going on in our countries, people who generally have traveled a great deal and for that reason can compare what happened in one country with what happened in another and can have a

general outlook or perspective on Latin American problems—to have been responsible so many times for the conflicts and troubles Latin America has faced in its history? (*Writer's Reality* 124–25).²⁹

Such a conception of the irresponsibility—and even culpability—of Latin America's intellectual elite ultimately led Vargas Llosa to doubt the persuasive power of his literature. Could literature be characterized with the impotence that Sartre attributed to it in the mid-1960s? Vargas Llosa's consideration of these types of questions led not only to modifications in his concept of literature, but also disturbing voids in his search for suitable methods of achieving socio-political reform. Such frustrations were likely impetuses for the writer's decision to relegate literature to cultural concerns as he embraced the immediacy of professional politics.

As is the case with other novels, *La guerra del fin del mundo* employs a writer-protagonist who voices the preoccupations of his author. Critics have associated the nameless *periodista miope* with Euclides da Cunha, and others have also established the important relationship between the character and his author.³⁰ James W. Brown notes: “La voz del periodista se aproxima a la de Vargas Llosa en el reconocimiento de su cegura—la del escritor, la del contador de historias—cuando se enfrenta con los

²⁹These preoccupations are cited nearly verbatim by the intimate narrator who reveals the thoughts of Urania Cabral in *La fiesta del Chivo*: “Lo que nunca has llegado a entender es que los dominicanos más preparados, las cabezas del país, abogados, médicos, ingenieros, salidos a veces de muy buenas universidades de Estados Unidos o de Europa, sensibles, cultos, con experiencia, lecturas, ideas, presumiblemente un desarrollo sentido del ridículo, sentimientos, pruritos, aceptaran ser vejados de manera tan salvaje (lo fueron todos alguna vez) como esa noche, en Barahona, don Froilán Arala” (82). Besides yet another example of intertextuality, Vargas Llosa's tendency in his more recent novels to incorporate direct citations from his essays demonstrates a waning from his former notion that the writer should not consciously incorporate political positions into a work of literature.

³⁰ While it is certain that Vargas Llosa's life experiences—even in his historical novels—are readily present in each of his narratives, it is important to note also that the writer-protagonists within these works do not necessarily espouse the same ideals as the author. Despite the contrary claims of criticism, Vargas Llosa has insisted on various occasions that his literature “rushes out spontaneously [. . . and] impregnates that which we are narrating with a meaning or symbolism which, in some cases, not only does not coincide with our ideas but can even go so far as to substantially contradict them” (*Literature and Freedom* 4). For this reason, the critic must tread carefully when evaluating the literary and political opinions of Vargas Llosa as compared with those of the writer-protagonists in his novels.

problemas del mundo, más obviamente en su rechazo al fanatismo [. . .]” (175). While Brown captures Vargas Llosa’s recognition that ideologies often blind histories as well as fictions, Booker takes the analysis a step farther in recognizing that “Vargas Llosa’s important reformulation of many aspects of da Cunha’s text, together with his sometimes parodic depiction of da Cunha as a scrawny, squeaky-voiced weakling, suggests a postmodernist skepticism toward da Cunha’s sincere modernist belief in the power of his art to instigate change” (98). The impotence of the journalist amidst the violence of Canudos provided Vargas Llosa with an enticing forum through which he could investigate his own insecurities with the power of the word. However, as Köllmann clearly notes, “[. . .] *La guerra del fin del mundo* cannot be reduced to an expression of postmodern skepticism” (225). Indeed, the implications run deeper. Vargas Llosa expresses his doubts regarding the possibility of revolutionary writing, but does not discount the power of literature in absolute terms. The true shift that the novelist proposes is to divorce literature from “el optimismo excesivo en el que caímos en los años 50 y 60” (qtd. in Forgues, *Escritor* 254) in favor of a literature that comments on the future as it remembers the past.

At the conclusion of the novel, the nearsighted journalist confronts the Baron of Cañabrava with his demand to document of the Canudos massacre. Most scholars cite this scene as one of the weaknesses of the narrative. “Ese Barón de Cañabrava es uno de los puntos débiles de la novela,” writes Ángel Rama. “Siendo, en el esquema de fuerzas diseñado, quien representa a los ricos hacendados monárquicos y tradicionalistas, es a quien caben comportamientos realistas, interpretaciones lúcidas de la situación y, sobre todo, quien está exceptuando del tratamiento dual a que son sometidos los restantes

personajes, oponiendo componentes positivos y negativos” (240). Sara Castro-Klarén also views the characterization of the Baron as a “defecto [en] una gran obra” (*Análisis* 124). She claims, as does Ángel Rama, that the attitude of the Baron is not consistent with the political position that he holds. She then concludes: “La propuesta de interpretación final que le ofrece al endeble periodista y, por ende, al lector, sobre el significado de la carnicería de Canudos—que ese holocausto está más allá de la razón y que, por lo tanto, lo mejor es olvidarlo y vivir en paz—debilita no sólo el personaje del Barão sino también el posible significado de la narración sobre los sucesos de Canudos” (123–24). Vargas Llosa admits that the characterization of the Baron was not the one that he had expected (Köllmann 205; Souza 86; Bernucci 111); nonetheless, this is not without significance. The Baron’s conclusion regarding the Canudos tragedy, “Olvidémosla, es lo mejor” (340), contrasts the resolve of the blind writer to remember the scene through “la única manera que se conservan las cosas [. . .]. Escribiéndolas” (341). Interestingly, the Baron and the *periodista miope* are both representations of the uncertainties that the author Vargas Llosa was experiencing at the time. On the one hand, the writer embodies Vargas Llosa’s resolve to continue writing despite his doubts regarding the potential of his literature to produce change in the world. On the other, the Baron is not unlike Vargas Llosa the politician of the near future.³¹ For example, the Baron’s resentments, “Veinticinco años de sucia y sórdida política, para salvar a Bahía de los imbéciles y de los ineptos a los que tocó una responsabilidad que no eran capaces de

³¹ Vargas Llosa almost dropped out of the Peruvian presidential race, when he claims that he realized that handing the presidency to Fujimori with specific conditions could be the best option for the country. A series of events, including a visit from a Catholic Archbishop to Vargas Llosa’s home, inspired the novelist to continue the race. It is interesting that the “unrealistic” actions of the Baron, who retreats from politics as “the only possible solution in time of changing values” (Köllmann 205), became Vargas Llosa’s personal reality a decade later in his political campaign (see *El pez en el agua*, chapter 10). For an excellent comparison of the novel and political campaign, see Köllmann (203–26).

asumir, para que todo termine en un festín de buitres” (502), echo, although with a harsher tone, Vargas Llosa’s own sentiments at the conclusion of his disappointing presidential campaign. Analogous to Forgues’s comment that “El periodista miope sobrevivirá al miedo que lo hace imponente y accederá al valor de la autocrítica, pasando de la condición de niño irresponsable a la de adulto responsable en su conversación con el Barón” (*Escritor* 126), Vargas Llosa’s concept of literature also *matures* in Canudos in terms of its relationship to political circumstances. “Canudos,” the blind reporter states, “ha cambiado mis ideas sobre la historia, sobre el Brasil, sobre los hombres. Pero, principalmente, sobre mí” (401). *La guerra del fin del mundo*, then, represents more than a fictional revisiting of a historical moment. Rather, it dramatizes in a distinct circumstance a time of serious introspection for Vargas Llosa with regard to his personal ideologies, his promotion of socialism, and, most importantly, his role as a writer.

Vargas Llosa’s depiction of Canudos is replete with concerns and uncertainties. During this period, the novelist grappled with the improbable character of his literature as a direct means to socio-political reform and the failed Cuban experiment that should have been the realization of his former ambitions. Furthermore, it is possible that the *periodista miope*’s confession that Canudos produced in him “un concepto muy pobre de mí mismo” (401) is a reflection of Vargas Llosa’s evaluation of his own shortsighted devotion to a Revolution that left him disillusioned. As the novelist summarizes:

Si algo quiere demostrar la novela es el fracaso de las ideologías, al explicar el fenómeno humano, individual o social. La ideología es un esquema que puede explicar una zona de la realidad, pero nunca agotar la totalidad de ella, que es compleja, sutil, imprevisible. Si la ideología no es flexible y no trata de adaptarse a esa complejidad cambiante de la realidad, entonces no le queda otra cosa que tratar de recortarla y ahí empieza la violencia. Eso se ve en Canudos. (qtd. in Coaguila 129–30).

It is not surprising, therefore, that the totalizing *La guerra del fin del mundo* approaches its themes from a multitude of perspectives, each one individually limited. Neither is it without reason that the novel produces more questions than definite answers, as “Vargas Llosa distanced himself from his socialist ideals, but he [had] not yet reoriented his political position” (Kristal 109). Beyond politics, his basic literary theories, if not in a moment of crisis, were in the process of significant change. Throughout the 1980s, Vargas Llosa’s position on the role of literature is not entirely clear, despite the fact that, through his readings of Isaiah Berlin, Friedrich Hayek, and Karl Popper,³² his revised political views became more solidified in opposition to authoritarian socialist regimes (Kristal 102–09).

As Brown concludes: “En *La guerra del fin del mundo* la brújula ideológica de Vargas Llosa, después de haber girado y vacilado desde haber perdido su norte hacia ya una década, empezó a buscar un nuevo rumbo” (175). These doubts indeed resulted in Vargas Llosa’s transition to both a new role for literature and his entrance into professional politics. Once more, the shortsighted journalist, a characterization of Euclides da Cunha as well as Vargas Llosa, does not indicate a complete failure for literature, but rather repositions its socio-political role in a new circumstance, one that is characterized by cultural memory. Disillusioned with the failures of the Cuban Revolution, Vargas Llosa’s concept of literature transitions from its revolutionary

³² Vargas Llosa stated: “Si tuviera que nombrar los tres pensadores modernos a los que debo más, no vacilaría en segundo: Popper, Hayek e Isaiah Berlin” (*Desafíos* 103). The novelist also confirms his special interest in Karl Popper during his political campaign: “Desde que en 1980 cayó en mis manos *La sociedad abierta y sus enemigos*, me había prometido estudiar a Popper. Lo hice en esos tres años, cada día, temprano en la mañana, antes de salir a correr, cuando empezaba a clarear y la quietud de la casa me recordaba la era prepolítica de mi vida” (*Pez* 211).

character to its new role as the guardian of a collective memory that must be constantly revised and never forgotten.

Historia de Mayta

Historia de Mayta is one of Vargas Llosa's most explicit reflections on the creative process within the pages of his own narratives. Similar to his self-inclusion as a writer-protagonist within *La tía Julia y el escribidor*, the novelist is also auto-referential as he recounts the creation of a novel based upon the "real life" of Alejandro Mayta, a Peruvian revolutionary who zealously follows his comrade Vallejos into an uprising that ultimately results in failure. As yet another nameless writer-protagonist—a character presumably intended to resemble Vargas Llosa—interviews family members and others who knew Mayta, he finds that one story contradicts another, as individual memories are distorted by personal interests.³³ Some laud his courage as a true revolutionary, but others defame him as a CIA agent. These disparate accounts not only complicate the task of the writer, but also evidence uncertainties regarding the failure of Mayta's revolutionary activities. Furthermore, these contrasting views of the real world underscore the novel's central preoccupation, the distinction between truth and fiction. Vargas Llosa's title certainly captures the complete meaning of the Spanish word *historia*, as his novel evaluates the relationship between traditional histories and creative storytelling. Criticized by some as an overt right-wing political track, the novel at times explicitly reveals Vargas Llosa's shifting political views. Despite whatever controversies the

³³ Through the articulation of these varied levels of reality, the writer becomes a type of translator for the people's memories. As Vargas Llosa explains: "The historical Mayta is one person, the Mayta he has been writing about is another person, and the real Mayta is still another person, a third person, someone who appears only in the last chapter of the novel as the extreme confirmation of the presence of fiction in the world in which this narrator has been operating" (*Writer's Reality* 157).

narrative might have caused politically, its central theme remains the creative process. Beyond the significance of its literary attributes, Vargas Llosa's sixth novel can also be considered an essay in prose that evaluates his own concept of literature.

As Vargas Llosa's writer-protagonist attempts to comprehend his literary subject, or the "true story" of Mayta, he discovers and confronts himself in the process. Mayta—at least according to the accounts that the narrator records—is a homosexual³⁴ Peruvian revolutionary from the late-1950s who acts under the precepts of Trotsky in his failed attempt to overthrow the government. This time period is typical of the majority of Vargas Llosa's novels; however, the *actual* time is markedly distinct. Similar to the temporal shift in *La guerra del fin del mundo*, Vargas Llosa further distances himself from revolutionary writing in favor of one that remembers the past with its implications for the future. *Historia de Mayta* is set "in a Peru of the future, where American marines and Cuban-backed revolutionaries struggle for control of the county" (Weiss). The novel, therefore, demonstrates a radical diversion from the author's former Sartrean stance that the past was devoid of influence over contemporary affairs. Vargas Llosa struggles with these themes throughout his novel and concludes that writing as a reflective and perhaps revisionist mode is not only able to amend the *official* histories of the past, but also shape the course of the future.

Discussing the implications of revolution with two of his principle informants, María and Juanita, the writer of Mayta's *historia* concludes that his insurrection spawned

³⁴ Vargas Llosa's conscious incorporation of Mayta's sexual preferences into the narrative provides an apparent commentary on the sexual politics of the Cuban Revolution. As Robert E. Quirk writes: "Homosexuals were harassed by the authorities, and there were periodic clampdowns, leading to widespread arrests. No true revolutionary could be a 'deviant,' said Castro. His government would assure that the children and youths would never find themselves 'in the hands of homosexuals.' And *El Mundo* warned its readers that the practice of homosexuality, a 'legacy of capitalism,' has become a 'political and social matter'" (525).

those that followed. Juanita interrupts him, when she states: “Esa violencia sólo ha traído más violencia. Y las cosas no han cambiado ¿no es cierto? Hay más pobreza que nunca, aquí, en el campo, en los pueblos de la sierra, en todas partes” (68–69). Conclusions such as these invited left-wing criticism, and perhaps with reason, as they certainly demonstrate a shift in Vargas Llosa’s political thinking.³⁵ Though the novelist has always spoken out against indiscriminate violence, he seems to ponder the validity of even revolutionary action through the dialogues of his protagonists. Vargas Llosa further complicates his position in a debate between Mayta and his comrade Anatolio. When the latter demands that “Lenin y Trotski condenaron siempre el terrorismo,” Mayta responds:

La acción directa no es terrorismo [. . .], sino, puro y simplemente, la acción insurreccional revolucionaria. Si Lenin y Trotski condenaron eso, no sé qué hicieron toda su vida. Convéncete, Anatolio, nos estábamos olvidando de lo importante. Nuestro deber es la revolución, la primera tarea de un marxista. ¿No es increíble que nos lo recuerde un alférez? (95)

Contrary to Vargas Llosa’s intransigent support for socialist revolution in the past, Mayta’s response to Anatolio’s insistent question, “¿Aceptas por lo menos que Lenin y Trotski condenaron el terrorismo?”, is more concessionary than resolute. “Guardando las

³⁵ Vargas Llosa seemed perplexed by it all: “I had a strange experience with his novel. I am aware that a writer does not the last word about what he has written. I know that in many cases a critic or reader can have a better picture or understanding of what a writer has done in a novel or poem. Only in this case, in his book, I had the feeling of having written a novel perceived by the critics and readers as something very different from what I thought. [. . .] *Historia de Mayta* has been read mostly as a political book and in many cases has been considered a political essay about violence, revolution, upheavals, social unrest, and turmoil in Latin America; a political statement disguised as a novel, presented in the form of a novel, a book in which what is essential is the description of an objective and historical reality. That, of course, was not my intention when I wrote it. I knew I was using political matters, ideology, some historical facts and events as raw material in this novel; but my goal was literary, not political” (*Writer’s Reality* 143). Despite the author’s stated intentions, the result is something distinct. Though I agree with Vargas Llosa that his novel’s central concern is the production literature and its purpose in society, it is also highly political. Indeed, the writers statement that “if you want to make a political statement, it is much better to write an essay or article or deliver a lecture than to use a genre like the novel, which was created not to convey objective statements but instead to present an illusory feeling of reality” (143) is fundamentally challenged in his writing of *Historia de Mayta*, along with several subsequent novels that also seem to move toward the politicization of Vargas Llosa’s literature.

distancias, yo también lo condeno,” Mayta concludes with hesitance, “El terrorismo ciego, cortado de las masas, aleja al pueblo de la vanguardia. *Nosotros vamos a ser algo distinto* [. . .]” (95; emphasis mine). Mayta, then, becomes both a representation of Vargas Llosa’s former self and a warning against blind faith in revolutionary ideologies. The writer suggests through Mayta that prior revolutions, each claiming to be *distinct*, eventually became additional accomplices in a perpetual cycle of corruption. Through his writer-protagonist, the mature Vargas Llosa of the 1980s uses similar techniques as *La tía Julia y el escribidor* to dialogue indirectly with a younger alter-ego, the zealous revolutionary of two decades past.

As Juanita inquires regarding his writer-protagonist’s methods, Vargas Llosa clarifies the difference between realistic fictions and pure fantasy. Juanita realizes that his *history* “es una novela,” and then questions, “Entonces, para qué tantos trabajos [. . .], para qué tratar de averiguar lo que pasó [. . .]. ¿Por qué no mentir más bien desde el principio” (77). Vargas Llosa sets the stage to comment outright on his creative methods, specifically with regard to *La guerra del fin del mundo*, which he had recently written, and *La fiesta del Chivo*, which he would soon write. His protagonist responds, as if from one of Vargas Llosa’s own interviews: “Porque soy realista, en mis novelas trato siempre de mentir con conocimiento de causa [. . .]. Es mi método de trabajo. Y, creo, la única manera de escribir historias a partir de la historia con mayúsculas (77). Vargas Llosa’s incorporation of his literary theories into the pages of his novels commences early in his career; however, *Historia de Mayta* exceeds intertextuality. Though his novel has been criticized as a political tract, it is more accurately an explicit presentation of his concept of literature. *Historia de Mayta* also demonstrates a transition in Vargas Llosa’s writing

toward a more pedagogical style. As the novelist confesses: “In *Historia de Mayta* I used all of my experiences as a writer of fiction, and the book stands as a metaphor for my vocation as a writer. The story of Mayta, then, is my own story of a writer writing his fiction. What the narrator does with Mayta is what I do each time I write a novel” (*Writer’s Reality* 155). *Cartas a un joven novelista* (1994), which can be considered an epistolary novel, would bring this new tendency to its creative extreme. Vargas Llosa’s use of his narratives as a platform for expressing—or perhaps even teaching—his literary theories ironically reveals adherence to the same cognitive approaches to the creative process that he once criticized in the literature of Jean-Paul Sartre.

Vargas Llosa’s commentaries on the distinction between history and fiction continue when María wonders: “Me pregunto si alguna vez se llega a saber la historia con mayúsculas [. . .]. O si en ella no hay tanta o más invención que en las novelas” (77). Vargas Llosa does not confirm María’s suspicions until his writer-protagonist provides an explicit explanation toward the conclusion of the narrative:

En una novela siempre hay más mentiras que verdades, una novela no es nunca una historia fiel. Esa investigación, esas entrevistas, no era para contar lo que pasó realmente en Jauja, sino, más bien, para mentir sabiendo sobre qué mentía. [. . .] Por supuesto que he cambiado fechas, lugares, personajes, que he enredado, añadido y quitado mil cosas. Además, inventé un Perú de apocalipsis, devastado por la guerra, el terrorismo y las intervenciones extranjeras. Por supuesto que nadie reconocerá nada y que todos creerán que es pura fantasía. He inventado también que fuimos compañeros de colegio, de la misma edad y amigos de toda la vida. (302–21)

María’s doubts regarding history and literature lead the reader to both an important scene in the life of Mayta and one of the deeper preoccupations that Vargas Llosa faced at the time. As María starts to describe the true cause of revolutionary action, her voice is replaced with Mayta’s, who reveals Vargas Llosa’s concerns with the impotency of his

own literature. “La desesperación,” Mayta explains, “y la cólera que puede dar codearse día y noche con el hambre y con la enfermedad, la sensación de *impotencia* frente a tanta injusticia [. . .]. Sobre todo, darse cuenta que los que pueden hacer algo no harán nunca nada. Los políticos, los ricos, los que tienen la sartén por el mango, los que mandan” (77–78). *Historia de Mayta* expounds upon Vargas Llosa’s resentments with the irresponsibility of individuals with the means to produce change in the world. In a political and literary sense, Vargas Llosa also began to recognize in his own position of power as *uno de los que pueden hacer algo*. Such a realization might have caused the novelist to empathize with his revolutionary protagonist and eventually exclaim with him, “Por más fuerte que sea la fe, llega un momento en que uno dice basta” (78). Indeed, with the same trepidation with which the inexpert Mayta nervously grasped for the first time “la matralleta en sus manos” (79), his author began to entertain the idea of campaigning for the Peruvian presidency.

If one of Vargas Llosa’s conclusions in *Historia de Mayta* is that “Políticamente hablando, [el Perú] era un huérfano” (159), his disillusionments with the politics of the past and his doubts regarding the power of literature to change the Peruvian political landscape could have persuaded him toward professional politics. Vargas Llosa was caught amidst several competing ideologies, a maelstrom of ideas that commented on literature, history, politics, and the corruption “que a mí me ha costado trabajo establecer y que muy pocos de mis compatriotas ven” (284). Exploring the perils of competing ideologies, Vargas Llosa wrote *Historia de Mayta* as “a novel about fiction, about two kinds of fiction, ideological fiction and literary fiction” (*Writer’s Reality* 153). The novelist’s assessment that “[w]hen Latin American thinkers set out to write philosophy,

they usually write literature” (9) certainly applies in its own circumstance to *Historia de Mayta*, a creative narrative that evidences new directions in Vargas Llosa’s literary philosophies as it simultaneously demands more direct political involvement from those with the capacity to act.

¿Quién mató a Palomino Molero?

Besides its importance as Vargas Llosa’s first attempt at a Spanish America mystery novel, *¿Quién mató a Palomino Molero?* also provides additional commentary on the division between reality and fiction. Though the novel does not explicitly reference the role of the writer in society, it does describe some of Vargas Llosa’s most intimate concerns with the topic at this time. Written shortly after the novelist participated in an investigation of the eight murdered journalists in Uchuraccay in 1983, *¿Quién mató a Palomino Molero?* dramatizes his contemptuous life at that time. The short novel recounts the attempts of investigators Lieutenant Silva and his pensive “sidekick” Lituma to discover the truth behind the murder of a young military runaway, Palomino Molero. The officers are more than mere detectives, however, as they (and especially Lituma) are also storytellers who follow an investigative process that mirrors the creative theories that Vargas Llosa employs in fiction writing. Both Silva and Lituma—as well as the reader—learn that there are no certain truths in the real world and even factual evidence is held suspect by the townspeople who live their lives based upon the personal and collective fictions that they create and sustain. As the two detectives learn that Palomino enlisted with the Air Force to pursue a love interest with Alicia, the young and possibly deranged daughter of Colonel Mindreau, they also discover that truth

and fiction are intimate companions. At the conclusion of the novel, the Colonel and his daughter are found dead, after a note suggests that he took their lives due to their involvement in the brutal murder of Palomino, whom Mindreau did not deem worthy of his daughter's attention, and his shame regarding incestuous relations that were revealed in the investigation. Closure for this mystery, however, is indefinitely postponed, as the motives of the brutalities that occur throughout the novel are never entirely explained. Furthermore, Vargas Llosa inserts an additional level of complexity into his narrative as he subtly incorporates references to his own life. Indeed, there is something significant in the fact that that Palomino and his author share the same birth date. Certainly, the novel reflects Vargas Llosa's personal sentiments as he endured criticisms for his own role as investigator in Uchuraccay. Besides its import as a uniquely Spanish American detective narrative, *¿Quién mató a Palomino Molero?* is also a deceptively reflective piece that demonstrates some of Vargas Llosa's deepest personal preoccupations.

Following the refusal of the Peruvian Communist Party to support democratic elections in 1980, tensions between the government and the Shining Path began to escalate to the point of armed conflict. At times, these struggles for control involved the underdeveloped areas of Peru, including Uchuraccay. Occasional peasant deaths in these regions were caused by both groups, leading to unstable circumstances and often indiscriminate violence. Such was the case on January 23, 1983, when a group of eight journalists—led by their guide Juan Argumedo—traveled to Uchuraccay to report on the mentioned conflicts. Neither Argumedo nor Jorge Sedano, Eduardo de la Piniella, Willy Retto, Pedro Sánchez-Gavidia, Amador García, Jorge Luis Mendivil, Félix Gavilán, or Octavio Infante ever returned, as each was murdered and buried in shallow graves outside

of Uchuraccay (“Peru Journalists”). Vargas Llosa was selected by the Peruvian government to head a commission to investigate these mysterious murders and he concluded that the local inhabitants of Uchuraccay—who mistook the reporters’ cameras for weapons—acted out of fear for their own lives. Despite an in-depth report³⁶ and the eventual conviction of Dionisio Morales, Simeon Aucatoma, and Manuel Ccsani in 1987 as three of the murders, both family members of the victims and the Peruvian public have remained unsatisfied with Vargas Llosa’s anthropologic description of the barbarism that resulted in the murders.³⁷

Despite the intrigue of this unsolved mystery, the details of Vargas Llosa’s report are less essential to our discussion of his concept of literature than is the novel that he wrote immediately following its polemic reception. Vargas Llosa’s involvement in the Uchuraccay investigations is an important critical context to the novel. As Kristal explains: “The novel succeeds [. . .] in conveying a deep sense of irritation and bewilderment like the one Vargas Llosa must have felt when he was personally maligned and slandered by journalists and academics after he participated in the investigation of the Uchuraccay tragedy” (156). Though the writer’s Uchuraccay report claims objectivity

³⁶ The complete “Informe sobre Uchuraccay” (1983) can be found in Vargas Llosa’s collection of essays *Contra viento y marea* (vol. 3), and perhaps appropriately so, as criticism has responded to the report as if it were a personal essay from the author. Together with the *informe* are two interviews, a revised summary of the report for the *New York Times*, and letter correspondences that shed additional light on Vargas Llosa’s involvement in the investigation and its influence on the writer. His basic conclusion in each of these documents is also demonstrative of his general position on civilization and barbarism: “En medio de su gratuidad y su horror, el asesinato de los ocho periodistas sacó a la luz el verdadero problema peruano: el de la incomunicación que existe entre quienes, algunos mejor, otros peor, disfrutamos de condiciones de vida moderna, y esa mayoría que languidece en la más pavorosa miseria, cuya vida es u solo puede ser «bárbara» y a la que, por lo mismo, exigirle comportamientos «civilizados» resulta una obscenidad. En esa tragedia había una lección que los peruanos todavía no queremos escuchar” (204).

³⁷ As Vargas Llosa participated in the Uchuraccay investigations, he witnessed a side of Peru that he had not previously experienced. Indeed, the apparent barbarism of the people, to which he attributed their violent tendencies, seems to have incited in the author and his writings a fascination with fictional violence that becomes evident in his novels. Such observations could also correspond to Vargas Llosa’s conclusion in his detective novel *¿Quién mató a Palomino Molero?* where he writes: “Hay un fondo bestial, en todos. Cultos o incultos, todos” (159).

in its conclusions, Vargas Llosa has been criticized for blending fact and fiction. The novelist would have empathized with the detectives in his novel who could not convince the locals that their investigative reports were based upon clear evidence. As townspeople and military leaders alike suggest that the detectives are distorting the facts “[p]ara tapar a los culpables” or due to threats from “un contrabando de muchos millones” (177), Lieutenant Silva can only exclaim in his exasperation: “Puta que son inventivos” (178).

Similar to several of Vargas Llosa’s other novels, the relationship between truth and fiction takes center stage in *¿Quién mató a Palomino Molero?*. As Lieutenant Silva explains to Lituma: “Es otra cosa que tienes que aprender. Nada es fácil, Lituma. Las verdades que parecen más verdades, si les das muchas vueltas, si las miras de cerquita, lo son sólo a medias o dejan de serlo” (107). Vargas Llosa’s interest in real-life truth and fictional lies during this period demonstrated the beginning of his concerns with the fictionalization of politics, wherein the entire system participated in a web of deceit. Furthermore, the author’s concept of literature during this period—and even more so around the new millennium—reflected the necessity of lies to cope with the realities of the world. Vargas Llosa’s broad characterization of fiction not only escorted his literary theories toward diverse cultural studies, but also shifted his concept of literature away from the utility of its revolutionary function and toward cultural traditions.

As the townspeople continue to grow suspect of the *real* intentions³⁸ of the two detectives, Silva, in particular, grows weary of the accusations, false pretenses, and local

³⁸ Throughout *¿Quién mató a Palomino Molero?*, Vargas Llosa emphasizes there are no “puros” in the world. In a detective fiction, where motives are central to the plot and eventual denouement of the narrative, the intentions of the major characters are indeed significant. Lituma and others, for example, are suspicious of Palomino’s choice (despite a waiver from the otherwise obligatory service) to enlist in the Peruvian military voluntarily. Lituma confesses: “Se presentó voluntario. Su madre no lo entiende. Y yo tampoco” (22). Doubts with regard to purity of intention—especially when supported by ideologies—

entanglements. Besides delineating between truth and lies, the narrative also makes an important distinction between fiction and politics. As Vargas Llosa addresses the role of each in the lives of the people, his characters suggest that artists have their own set of rules. Lituma explains regarding Palomino: “Que hubiera sido un artista, uno de esos que cantan por la radio y hacen giras. Todos lo dicen. Los artistas no deberían hacer servicio militar, deberían estar exceptuados” (15–16). Such exemptions were never part of Vargas Llosa’s vision for fiction writers and their social responsibilities. On the contrary and notwithstanding criticisms, Vargas Llosa’s involvement in the Uchuraccay introduced the possibility for more explicit political action in Peru. Moreover, his experience undoubtedly expanded his notion that the world was a convoluted blend of fact and fiction. Perhaps, Vargas Llosa could have echoed Lituma’s question regarding his own search for the truth, “¿Sería cierto?”, and his ultimate fiction-based conclusion in the absence of concrete alternatives: “Sí, debía ser” (188).

El hablador

Similar to *La tía Julia y el escribidor* and *Historia de Mayta*, Vargas Llosa also writes himself into his tenth novel as yet another nameless³⁹ writer-protagonist who voices his political and literary opinions. Despite the relative simplicity of the novel’s plot, the narrative nonetheless maintains reader interest throughout, as one of the two alternating narrators slowly discovers that the mysterious Machiguenga figure that he

correspond with Vargas Llosa’s own realization that the political ideals that he once supported did not always concord with the actual motives of others who also purported to espouse them.

³⁹ Vargas Llosa’s use of *nameless* writer-protagonists, who are often self-reflective, lends credence to the supposition that the likewise nameless *periodista miope* of *La guerra del fin del mundo* provides more than an intertextual reference to Euclides da Cunha. Similar to Vargas Llosa’s other writer-protagonists without names, the shortsighted journalist also has much in common with his author.

sees in a photograph on a vacation trip to Florence is actually a former university colleague who has denounced the modern world in favor of a more primitive lifestyle.⁴⁰ Though the writer-protagonist cannot determine definitively that this is the case, the doubt provides a point of a departure for a novel that alternates between the lives of the novelist and the experiences of Saul Zuratas (known as “Mascarita” for a birthmark on his face), who appears to have become a Machiguenga Storyteller. As the titles suggests, *El hablador* is Vargas Llosa’s most explicit literary commentary on the act of storytelling. Furthermore, the narrative introduces new themes into the Peruvian’s literary canon, including an overt concern with the preservation of indigenous culture and a contrast between written and oral narratives.

As Vargas Llosa alternates between the stories of a reflective writer who contemplates the validity of indigenous cultures and Saúl Zuratas, a social outcast who becomes a Machiguenga Storyteller, he demonstrates contrasts between theory and practice in ecological, social, and literary matters.⁴¹ One conversation between the two protagonists recalls concerns from the Vargas Llosa of the 1960s. Responding to Saúl’s insistence to safeguard Peru’s indigenous peoples, the narrator nonetheless retorts:

⁴⁰ The photograph that the narrator sees at the beginning of the novel commences his written reflections. Furthermore, this image represents a blurring between reality and fiction, as it also focuses the writer’s wonderment at the unlikely possibility that Saúl could abandon modernity for his new life as a Machiguenga Storyteller. As Susan Antebi writes: “The photograph that at once is and is not Saúl, thus expresses both a unique identity and personal journey of transformation, and the repetition of a generic mark of alterity that takes its place in the predetermined structure of privileged center and neglected peripheries” (275).

⁴¹ Through the fictional voice of Dr. Porras Barrenechea, whom Vargas Llosa describes as “the most brilliant teacher I have ever had” (*Writer’s Reality* 21), the author questions the ethics of academic approaches to some of society’s most serious concerns. We read: “Bueno, si Zuratas se ha dado cuenta que la etnología es una suedociencia inventada por los gringos para destruir las Humanidades, es más inteligente de lo que podía esperar” (355). These sentiments are contrasted, however, with a caution that a fanatical opposing view could be equally damaging: “¿Resucita el indigenismo fanático de los años treinta en los patios de San Marcos?” (356). Common to Vargas Llosa’s novels are the distinctive perspectives to these and other socio-political issues; interestingly, some correspond with the writer’s personal opinions and others that contradict them.

No, Mascarita, el país tenía que desarrollarse. ¿No había dicho Marx que el progreso vendría chorreando sangre? Por triste que fuera, había que aceptarlo. No teníamos alternativa. Si el precio del desarrollo y la industrialización, para los dieciséis millones de peruanos, era que esos pocos millares de calatos tuvieran que cortarse el pelo, lavarse los tatuajes y volverse mestizos—o, para usar la más odiada palabra del etnólogo: aculturarse—, pues, qué remedio. (344)

Such a position should not be read as a literal commentary on Vargas Llosa's view on modernization, but rather as a literary portrayal of a writer who is uncertain regarding solutions. Through Saúl's responses, which are perhaps closer to the author's views at the time, Vargas Llosa entertains diverse perspectives through an intermediary narrative that at times challenges his former theories. Saúl passionately asks:

¿Nos dan derecho nuestros autos, cañones, aviones y Coca-Colas a liquidarlos porque ellos no tienen nada de eso? ¿O tú crees en lo de «civilizar a los chunchos», compadre? ¿Cómo? ¿Metiéndolos de soldados? ¿Poniéndolos a trabajar en las chacras, de esclavos de los criollos tipo Fidel Pereira? ¿Obligándolos a cambiar de lengua, de religión, de costumbres, como quieren los misioneros? ¿Qué se gana con eso? Que los puedan explotar mejor, nada más. Que se conviertan en zombis, en las caricaturas de hombres que son los indígenas semiaculturados de las calles de Lima. (349)

Following Vargas Llosa's investigation of the Uchuraccay murders, his commission proposed a similar question: “¿Tiene el Perú oficial el derecho de reclamar de esos hombres?” (“Uchuraccay” 124). The response of the Commission to its own rhetorical question demonstrates also Vargas Llosa's subtle defense of the *barbarism* perceived in these groups of people.⁴² The Commission Report reads:

Dentro de este contexto, la brutalidad de la matanza de los ocho hombres de prensa no resulta menos atroz, pero es, sí, más entendible. Quienes lanzaron las piedras y blandieron los garrotes no sólo eran hombres empavorecidos y rabiosos que atacaban a un supuesto enemigo; eran también los ciudadanos de una

⁴² One might note some degree of contradiction in Vargas Llosa's treatment of indigenous cultures. Though the writer has claimed to “defender al indio de visiones caricaturescas y folklóricas que lo perjudican,” his commission report seems to perpetuate the stereotypical characterization of violence amongst those considered to be barbarous. In any case, Vargas Llosa has consistently rejected the literary movement of *indigenismo*, which has otherwise been popular in Peru, stating that it could not represent “una verdad histórica como hacía Arguedas, sino como lo que es, una mera ficción” (Anabitarite).

sociedad en la que la violencia asume diariamente las manifestaciones más elementales y primarias y en la que, por la precariedad de los recursos, la defensa de lo propio [. . .]. (125)

As the report indicates, Vargas Llosa does not advocate the violence that occurred in Uchuraccay, but he does provide explanation for it, based upon his evaluation of violent response as necessary to survival, physically as well as culturally. The Commission's recognition that "los periodistas fueron enterrados en un lugar periférico a la comunidad, como queriendo recalcar su condición de forasteros" (126), demonstrates one of the overarching concerns of Vargas Llosa in both *La guerra del fin del mundo* and *El hablador*. As he wondered whether peoples so distinct in culture, history, and even language could cohabitate, he also increased his consideration for and defense of *les damnés de la terre*.

Besides Vargas Llosa's anxieties with regard to the clash between civilization and barbarism in his own country, he also introduces a new medium for the delivery of his fictions. Though *El hablador* incorporates a writer-protagonist who is a shadow of Vargas Llosa, more attention is provided to the oral Storyteller of the Machiguenga tribe. Indeed, orality takes its place—and a prominent one—in an individual literary history that formerly focused on the power of writing. As Saúl speaks with the writer, he is accompanied by a parrot named Gregor Samsa. Apart from its association with the monstrous protagonist of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, the parrot also highlights the oral attributes of Mascaritas's role as Storyteller. Perhaps similar to the descriptions of Uchuraccay civilization, Vargas Llosa portrays the Machiguenga people as primitive yet able to provide the weaver of fictions with a prominent place in their society. As O'Bryan-Knight writes: "As the narrator imagines him, the storyteller enjoys the most

privileged position in the community. Privilege, however, brings responsibility” (96). Such a depiction of a communal society that comprehends the significance of creative fiction recalls Vargas Llosa’s earlier ambitions vis-à-vis socialism and his own literature. Saúl, however, is hardly a revolutionary figure. More accurately, as O’Bryan-Knight also observes, the Storyteller initially “draws on the collective memory of the people,” but later we find that “this voice becomes more individual, and we begin to imagine it emanating from the mouth of Mascarita” (96). And yet, Saúl remains a translator of sorts for the collective Machiguenga voice; and thus, he is accepted into that society. Vargas Llosa’s true concern—or at least the theoretical question that he entertains regarding his concept of literature—also comes from the Machiguenga Storyteller: “Pasan cosas buenas y pasan malas cosas. Mala es que se esté perdiendo la sabiduría” (521). Though Vargas Llosa’s concept of literature as collective remembrance surfaces in his previous novels, it becomes central to *El hablador* and his subsequent narratives. True also is the writer’s subtle confession that “La transformación debió de ser muy lenta, algo que fue operándose de manera inconsciente [. . .]” (575). For Vargas Llosa, his transition from a concept of literature based upon revolutionary action and socialist ideals to a Flaubertian transgression of societal norms to its most recent place as the guardian of collective memory is one that changed slowly over several decades.

Conclusion

Vargas Llosa’s uncertainties with regard to his own concept of literature during the 1970s ultimately caused him to experiment with new theories and fictional forms. Novels such as *Pantaleón y las visitadoras* and *La tía Julia y el escribidor* introduced

humor and a new level of autobiographical writing respectively. *La guerra del fin del mundo* radically altered the Peruvian's literary landscape as he departed for the first time from Sartre's temporal and geographic constraints. Moreover, additional intermediary narratives such as *¿Quién mató a Palomino Molero?*, *Historia de Mayta*, and *El hablador* demonstrate yet another transition in Vargas Llosa's concept of literature. Specifically, as he addressed the writing process through metafiction and other techniques, his concept of literature embraced oral narrative as an alternative mode of storytelling and the role of the writer as the protector of culture tradition.

Another of Vargas Llosa's central preoccupations during this period was the distinction between truth and lies. Replacing his concept of literature as a revolutionary force, he argued in his writings of the 1980s and 90s that individuals lied instinctively as a survival mechanism. Through literature, authors could facilitate this process by providing readers the opportunity to live alternative lives.

Los hombres no están contentos con su suerte y casi todos—ricos o pobres, geniales o mediocres, célebres u oscuros—quisieran una vida distinta de la que viven. Para aplacar—tramposamente—ese apetito nacieron las ficciones. Ellas se escriben y se leen para que los seres humanos tengan las vidas que no se resignan a no tener. En el embrión de toda novela bulle una inconformidad, late un deseo insatisfecho. (16)

As Vargas Llosa maintains his notion that literature originates in a writer's dissatisfactions, he also transports these disconformities from the writer to the reader, suggesting that besides the personal exorcism that literature provides, the Storyteller is also the voice of the collective. When the people choose conformity, Vargas Llosa concludes that "las novelas no suelen cumplir servicio alguno." Amidst social crisis, however, he describes the character of his fictions as "un arte de sociedades." Such a

vision would cause the writer to conceptualize his narratives through a collective cultural memory rather than the individualistic protests of his earlier novels.

As Vargas Llosa explains in *La verdad de las mentiras*, “Pues los seres [. . .] de todas las ficciones [. . .] han sido fraguados a imagen y semejanza de su creador” (89). Similar to the writer-protagonists of his narratives—and oral Storytellers as was the case with *El hablador*—Vargas Llosa has struggled to determine clear parameters for reality and fiction within his concept of literature. Recognizing that the *real* world is composed of socio-political lies, the novelist challenges these positions through the recreation of such societies in his fictions. At the same time, however, he realized in the 1970s and 80s that literature did not have the revolutionary capacity that he had previously supposed. As a consequence, Vargas Llosa began to reconceptualize literature as a cultural phenomenon while he also entertained thoughts of a political campaign for the Peruvian presidency. As political demons continued to haunt the writer, he ultimately replaced his literary ideals with the immediacy of professional politics.

CHAPTER IV

THE ERA OF DICTATORS

Vargas Llosa founded the Frente Democrático (FREDEMO) in 1988, thus giving him the future option to run as a candidate in that party for the Peruvian presidency. Despite his personal promise to write at least two hours daily during his campaign, he only published one short novel, *Elogio de la madrastra* (1988), between the announcement of his candidacy and his eventual run-off election loss to the political newcomer Alberto Fujimori. Following his campaign, his literary production slowed from the quantity of creative works that Vargas Llosa producing in the 1980s. Indeed, he would not craft his next *great work* until the new millennium, a second historical novel based upon the thirty-one-year dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo. Despite a controversial reception in the Dominican Republic, *La fiesta del Chivo* (2000) would receive the acclaim of critics throughout the world. *La fiesta del Chivo* is a powerful novel with deep political implications, but it strays significantly from the “La literatura es fuego” speech with which some critics have associated it. Vargas Llosa’s narrative does hearken back to this period in the development of the writer’s concept of literature, but not in the manner that most suppose. Curiously, Urania Cabral, a Dominican exile who was raped by Trujillo in her youth, exemplifies the postcolonial theories described in Frantz Fanon’s *Les damnés de la terre* (1961). By the publication of *La fiesta del Chivo*, Vargas Llosa’s theories on literature had come full circle in a sense, although the distinctions between competing concepts of literature were also significant. Drawn to and repelled by Sartre,

Vargas Llosa began to entertain the same theories on literary impotence and revolutionary violence that he censured during the Algerian War for Independence. Regardless of actual reception and influence, it is significant that the postcolonial overtones in Urania's story resemble Fanon's words. Though I do not argue that Vargas Llosa consciously incorporated *Les damnés de la terre* into the pages of *La fiesta del Chivo*, the similarities between the works certainly indicated that the Peruvian's concept of literature has followed a similar path as did his creative mentor in the mid-1960s. Vargas Llosa articulated his doubts regarding the potential of his writing to combat Peru's socio-political shortcomings throughout the 1980s. Consequently, he placed his literature aside for a time to dedicate his efforts to a more direct recourse of action in the political arena.

El pez en el agua

Vargas Llosa's novels in the 1970s and 1980s demonstrate a gradual departure from his former concept of literature as revolution. Moreover, the writer's 1990 campaign for the Peruvian presidency directly contradicted his earlier statements regarding the need for a clear division between political activism and creative writing. Both an autobiographical memoir and a creative narrative, Vargas Llosa's *El pez en el agua* (1993) is indispensable to any discussion on this transition. Whereas the campaign indicates Vargas Llosa's entrance into professional politics, writing about the experience, ironically, denotes his return to narrative. As Birger Angvik comments: "El procedimiento literario que aquí se observa, la alternancia entre dos o más historias, es una de las marcas de fabricación en la producción de las novelas de Vargas Llosa" (255).

Vargas Llosa's use of dialogue and the characterization of the "protagonists" in his personal narrative are unquestionably drawn from his creative techniques. Certainly, the fictional characteristics of this autobiographical narrative could occupy the attention of a separate critical study. However, the work's importance in the present context resides in Vargas Llosa's attempts to respond to his wife's rhetorical question: "¿Te acuerdas todavía que *fuiste* escritor?" (Pez 182). Vargas Llosa's temporary departure from literature emphasizes once more the incompatibility of politics and literary creation, but also provides evidence that the novelist, once adamant in his defense of literature as a direct means to change in the world, replaces his role as author for the more immediate course of political activity. Needless to say, once Vargas Llosa returned to his writing, his perspective was distinct. Disillusioned with both political and literary solutions to the world's deficiencies, Vargas Llosa began to communicate a new definition for the writer's vocation, one that could *teach* a new generation of readers to remember the past and its implications for the future.

Prior to Vargas Llosa's entrance into professional politics, Ricardo A. Setti published a series of interviews, entitled *Diálogo con Vargas Llosa* (1989), wherein the novelist describes his position on literature and political action. These words provide an interesting contrast between Vargas Llosa's sentiments prior to his campaign and those expressed in *El pez en el agua*. In response to Setti's questions regarding Vargas Llosa's statement in 1982 that "la literatura importa más que la política," he commented:

[C]reo que la literatura es algo más permanente que la actividad política, que un escritor no puede poner la política y la literatura en un pie de igualdad, porque si lo hace va a fracasar como escritor seguramente y tal vez como político. Uno tiene que llevar en cuenta que la actividad política es bastante efímera, transitoria, y que la actividad literaria tiene que ser entendida como algo mucho más permanente. (135)

As Vargas Llosa clarifies these divisions between literature and politics, he proceeds cautiously. Despite his still resolute defense of literature, he also states that

[. . .] es muy importante que un escritor participe, opine, intervenga, pero al mismo tiempo no deje que la política invada y destruya el campo específicamente literario de su trabajo, el campo creativo; porque cuando eso ocurre el escritor muere, el escritor se convierte en un mero propagandista, deja de ser un creador. Por eso es muy importante señalar ciertos límites a la política en la actividad de un escritor, sin prescindir de ella, sin regir al compromiso de pronunciarse continuamente. (137)

Interestingly, Vargas Llosa's warning that political limits were necessary to ensure the integrity of a writer's literary vocation was published one year before he announced his candidacy for president of Peru.¹ Vargas Llosa's statements are not necessarily to be read as the negation of political action, especially since his political campaign had already commenced, but rather as an insistence that literary creation and political agendas remain separate, thus ensuring that one does not compromise the other. Such conclusions are important to understanding the significance of Vargas Llosa's entrance into politics at the exclusion of his literature as well as his attempts to distance his fictions from the political ideals of his own campaign.

El pez en el agua provides important insights into the socio-political circumstances that prompted Vargas Llosa into professional politics. Under the pressures of inflation and imminent economic disaster, Alan García, the president of Peru (1985–1990; 2006–present) from the left-wing Peruvian political party APRA (*Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana*), attempted a widespread nationalization of banking systems

¹ Vargas Llosa also commented in an interview with Alfonso Tealdo in 1996: “Soy escritor realista y prefiero el Perú. Pero, eso sí, no estoy dispuesto a sacrificar la literatura por el Perú. Por nada. Quiero salvar mi vocación y que nada me aparte de la literatura” (qtd. in Coaguila 32). These comments indicate Vargas Llosa's concern that a political life has the potential to destroy a writer's career, and his determination to reestablish himself as a writer after his brief intermission as a presidential candidate.

in Peru. Vargas Llosa wrote an article in opposition to the plan, and, to his surprise, it was received with a favorable public response. With the success of this first political statement, Vargas Llosa drafted a manifesto in opposition to García and received signatures from numerous influential Peruvians. The result of these efforts was a death blow to García's expressed desire to remain in office indefinitely and, although passed by Congress, the nationalization bill was never implemented. Despite the warnings of his wife Patricia that his flirtation with politics would mean the end of their quiet and comfortable life, Vargas Llosa continued to express his political sentiments openly to the public. Indeed, the writer-politician's life would change significantly as he opposed socialist solutions that would redistribute Peru's scarce wealth in favor of increased national production through free-market means.²

Given Vargas Llosa's insistence that political agenda should not consciously enter into a writer's creative narratives, it is interesting to consider as well his claims to safeguard his political positions from literary technique. Early in the campaign, Vargas Llosa noted that, within the Peruvian political system, ideas and programs were not as important as power and patronage. Disillusioned by a nation that seemed to vote "por imágenes, mitos, palpitos, o por oscuros sentimientos y resentimientos sin mayor nexo con la razón" (*Pez* 84), Vargas Llosa renounced his intention to run for president and returned to live in Europe. This abandonment of his candidacy and general leadership in the *Movimiento Libertad* caused uproar throughout the country and, ironically, Vargas Llosa's departure from and subsequent return to Peru increased his popular base. Though

² Vargas Llosa's perspective of the role of countries such as the United States is distinct from many past and present Latin American intellectuals. He states: "Uno de los mitos más dañinos de nuestro tiempo es el que los países ricos, que se las arreglan para mantenerlos en el subdesarrollo a fin de explotarlos. No hay mayor filosofía para eternizarse en el atraso" (*Pez* 49).

some believe that this was a brilliant political tactic on the part of Vargas Llosa to gain support, it seems that his intentions to walk away from the campaign were sincere.

Through the encouragement of his wife Patricia,³ Vargas Llosa returned to what he has described as his “moral obligation” to set aside his writing vocation for the more immediate and direct means of reform through political intervention.

Vargas Llosa recounts that the progress of his *Movimiento Libertad* was slow, and that the voting body preferred platitudes to policies. Despite his best attempts, the writer-politician states that he failed in his efforts to *teach* the distinction between “movement” and “party,” as the nation was not accustomed to reform without accompanying interests. Clichés and biases, as a consequence, often became the basis of political discussion. “El buen orador político latinoamericano,” reports Vargas Llosa, “está más cerca de un torero o de un cantante de rock que de un conferencista o un profesor: su comunicación con el público pasa por el instinto, la emoción, el sentimiento, antes que por la inteligencia” (*Pez* 173). Through these commentaries, Vargas Llosa describes his frustration in attempting to communicate to the less-than-intellectual masses the opportunities and demands of true national transformation. Realizing that the price could be an election defeat, Vargas Llosa states that he nonetheless attempted to remain true to his notion that platforms should not be fictionalized for political expediency. However, Vargas Llosa also confesses:

Pero no tuve mucho éxito en ninguna de las dos cosas. Porque los peruanos no votaron por *ideas* en las elecciones y porque, a pesar de mis prevenciones,

³ Once Vargas Llosa returned to Peru from Italy, Patricia took an active role in the politics of her husband and started the women’s service organization *Acción Solidaria*—Patricia being named as its first president—where, according to memories of Vargas Llosa, classes on cooking, mechanics, sewing, weaving, leather working, business, family planning, construction, “era[n] para mí una emulsion de entusiasmo. Esas visitas me devolvían la seguridad de haber hecho bien metiéndome en políticas” (*Pez* 167).

muchas veces noté —sobre todo cuando la fatiga me vencía— que, de pronto, resbalaba también por el latiguillo o el exabrupto para arrancar el aplauso. (173)

In terms of Vargas Llosa's concept of literature, these commentaries demonstrate his commitment to the integrity of literature and politics.⁴ Nevertheless, his adherence to this principle also indicates a conscious decision to leave his literature due to a socio-political predicament that words could not remedy. That is, one of the most important lessons of Vargas Llosa's candidacy for president was that he viewed literature, as did Sartre in the Algerian Nationalist Movement, as an inadequate means to bringing about desired reform. Resigned to accept his election loss to Alberto Fujimori, Vargas Llosa returned to his vocation as a writer. After the elections, he reemphasized that his entrance into the realm of professional politics was:

Por una razón moral. Porque las circunstancias me pusieron en una situación de liderazgo en un momento crítico de la vida de mi país. Porque me pareció que se presentaba la oportunidad de hacer, con el apoyo de una mayoría, las reformas liberales que, desde comienzos de los años setenta, yo defendía en artículos y polémicas como necesarios para salvar el Perú. (*Pez* 46)

Vargas Llosa's words imply that his move toward the political scene was based upon a desire to put into action deep-rooted revolutionary desires that had formerly been words. Given Peru's history of socio-political abuse, Vargas Llosa's response was hardly surprising, although it nonetheless countered his earlier position that words *were* action. Vargas Llosa's separation from literature was impermanent; however, he accurately

⁴ Despite Vargas Llosa claims that he was loyal to his commitment to refrain from fictionalizing his political campaign, some critics have expressed distinct opinions. Marzorati recalls: "Mario had said that it is not so different, literature and politics. In literature you must manage your characters. In politics you must manage people, get them to go in the direction you want them to go. The only difference, Mario said, was that in politics you have no use for imagination" (100). As Will Corral concludes: "It seems that the Peruvian people have not wanted to become part of whatever novel Vargas Llosa is writing now. In other words, like most intellectuals are wont to do, he manages different publics and alters his message accordingly" (503–04).

concludes throughout his creative memoir that his concept of the writer's vocation could never be the same.

Don Rigoberto

During and following his presidential campaign, Vargas Llosa wrote two erotic novels, *Elogio a la madrastra* (1988) and *Los cuadernos de Don Rigoberto* (1997) that center on the sexual fantasies of Don Rigoberto and those around him. Given that these novels address similar themes, they are appropriately discussed in tandem. Vargas Llosa has explored sexuality to some degree in each of his previous novels; however, *Elogio a la madrastra* introduced an entirely new mode of writing, as the author discovered with his protagonist “la poesía naciente del cuerpo” (53). *Elogio a la madrastra* tells the story of Don Rigoberto and his wife Lucrecia, who enact outrageous sexual situations to fulfill their personal passions. When Rigoberto's precocious son Fonchito discovers his own sexual appetites, his desire turns toward his stepmother, and the result is an adulterous affair that completes the perverted love triangle. Lucrecia eventually leaves the house when he learns of the affair through an essay that Fonchito shamelessly reads to his father. The opening scene of *Los cuadernos de Don Rigoberto* contains Fonchito's plea to his stepmother to return to the house. Besides the young man's attempts to reconcile the rift that he has caused in the family, the novel also addresses fantasy through writing as Don Rigoberto records memories from his relationship with Lucrecia in personal notebooks. As Vargas Llosa characterizes literature as a rebellion against social norms, he also demonstrates new directions in his concept of literature through the extremities of the fictions that his protagonists engender.

Flaubertian transgression lies at the heart of both of Vargas Llosa's erotic narratives. As if taking Emma Bovary's need for sexual identification to excess, Don Rigoberto and Lucrecia, though married, are not satisfied with their relationship unless it is reborn in the adulterous recreation of their actual selves. True, Don Rigoberto does declare: "[A] pesar del tiempo de casados que llevamos, Lucrecia, ni señora, no me hastía." Nevertheless, his claim that "[n]unca me ha aburrido" (30) is only earnest inasmuch as he obsessively recreates her as other women. His infidelity, then, is not physical, but creative, just as Vargas Llosa has declared that his writing is a rebellion against his own disappointments in the real world. As Don Rigoberto "corroe la vida" through fantasy (138), he creates "espejismos de perfección" (47). These tendencies resonate with his author's attempts to challenge his real-life surroundings through the creation of more perfect fictional realities. Don Rigoberto's conclusion, "Sé realista: tarde o temprano, acabará mal. La realidad nunca era tan perfecta como las ficciones, Lucrecia" (114), suggests that *Elogio a la madrastra* and *Los cuadernos de don Rigoberto* were more than erotic pastimes for Vargas Llosa during his political activities. On the contrary, scholarship should rediscover these narratives as important statements on the boundaries of fiction writing.

Throughout both novels, Vargas Llosa uses characters to embody the fictionalization of the real world. Alfonso ("Fonchito"), Lucrecia's deviant stepson who originally seduces her in *Elogio a la madrastra*, expands his creative role as a master of erotic fiction in *Los cuadernos de don Rigoberto*. For example, he convinces both Lucrecia and a servant named Justiniana to pose as a live reenactment of one of the many paintings in the home. Once the sexual game is complete, the narrator indicates

Lucrecia's wonderment at her almost spontaneous involvement in these intrigues. "¿Qué había pasado para que, sin dars cuenta—o, dándose—este niño las hubiera hecho jugar a esto? Ahora, no le importó. Se sentía muy a gusto dentro del cuadro" (82). Lucrecia's conformity provides an important confession from a protagonist who is characterized as living art throughout Vargas Llosa's two novels. The subtle comparison between the rational and irrational forces involved in the creation of fiction perhaps suggests a similar position for Vargas Llosa, especially given recent tendencies for explicit theoretical commentaries within the pages of his fictional narratives, a strategy that would have been unacceptable to the author in the 1960s. Such overlaps between fiction and the real world are important to the narrative and Vargas Llosa's concept of literature. We learn in *Elogio a la madrastra*, for example, that despite Rigoberto's excessive imaginings, his malleable wife Lucrecia was nonetheless "[. . .] real, concreta, viva como una rosa sin arrancar de la rama o una avecilla que canta. ¿No es una mujer hermosa? Sí, hermosísima" (104). As Vargas Llosa explores the innerworkings of the real world and fictional creation, he also warns against the disconnect between both *realities* that his characters often epitomize.

From the 1970s to the present, Vargas Llosa has cautioned against the dangers of fanaticism. Each time Don Rigoberto "estalló [. . .], perdido en su sueño" (*Elogio* 23), the eventual outcome of "la felicidad que supimos inventar" (161) is unalterably negative.⁵

Ashamed of his actions, Rigoberto assuages his sexual addiction with new extremes. As

⁵ As the characters of Vargas Llosa's erotic novels become hopelessly lost "en un bosque de conjeturas, divagaciones, sospechas, fantasías" (*Cuadernos* 281), they attempt to escape the fictional webs that they have spun. "Estoy harta," exclaims Lucrecia, "[. . .] Quisiera irme de esta ciudad, de este país. Donde nadie me conozca. Lejos de Rigoberto y de Fonchito. Por culpa de ese par he caído en un pozo y nunca podré salir al aire libre" (281–82). Vargas Llosa has also expressed the negative impact of the writer's vocation, and has commented on the occasional need for personal exile and creative distance.

an apparent counter to his promiscuous excesses, Rigoberto creates the following, equally outrageous fantasy:

Y, súbitamente, su maltratada fantasía deseó, con desesperación, transmutarse: era un ser solitario, casto, desasido de apetitos, a salvo de todos los demonios de la carne y el sexo. Sí, sí, ése era él. El anacoreta, el santón, el monje, el ángel, el arcángel que sopla la celeste trompeta y baja al huerto a traer la buena noticias a las santas muchachas. (176–77)

Vargas Llosa, then, clearly does not condemn Rigoberto's sexuality (as chastity is the focus here), but rather the fanaticism that is the pedestal of his imaginings. The writer has condemned all such excesses, whether sexual, political, religious, or otherwise. On the other hand, Vargas Llosa also believes that imposed social controls are counterintuitive. “[By] repressing and censoring the literary genre specifically invented to give the necessity of lying a place in the city,” Vargas Llosa cautions, “the Inquisitors achieved the exact opposite of their intentions” (*Writer's Reality* 24). Through the interactions among Lucrecia, Rigoberto, and Fonchito, Vargas Llosa comments on the balance between the loss of freedom through social regulation and the dangers of unbridled fanaticism.

Caught in his darkest fantasies, Rigoberto reveals a truth that weighed on Vargas Llosa's mind during this period, “Mírame bien, amor mío. Reconóceme, reconócete” (*Elogio* 125). One of Vargas Llosa's messages to his readers is that literature can reveal some of the most disturbing truths about ourselves and our societies. As Fonchito concludes in *Elogio de la madrastra*: “Aunque [sea cochinada], es la verdad, madrastra” (149). Rigoberto's introspective question regarding his son's scandalous stories, “Qué significan estas... fantasías” (175), is the one that Vargas Llosa also challenges his readers to consider. Despite the novelist's repeated disillusionments with the socio-

political function of his literature, he, like the title character of *Los cuadernos de Don Rigoberto*, will undoubtedly continue to return to his true love, as was the case after his coquetry with politics.

Lituma en los Andes

Vargas Llosa's doubts regarding literature, politics, and the capacity of humanity to supersede its socio-political shortcomings expanded in the years following his unsuccessful political campaign. As a mode of homecoming, Vargas Llosa returned to a protagonist who has remained with him throughout his entire writing career.⁶ The reincarnation of Lituma from his first appearance in *Los jefes* (1959) to his most recent one in *Lituma en los Andes* (1993) does something more than indicate the intertextual nature of Vargas Llosa's writings. Lituma also represents the evolution of his author's literary and political sentiments throughout a half-century of writing. Corporal Lituma and his partner Tomás Carreño investigate the mysterious disappearance of three individuals from various social and racial backgrounds. Through their struggles to understand the truth of the situation, Vargas Llosa exposes the layers of Peruvian corruption that have occasioned violence between the Peruvian military and Shining Path insurgents. *Lituma en los Andes* revisits the central themes of the detective novel *¿Quién mató a Palomino Molero?* through the aesthetics of violence. Vargas Llosa's disillusionments with the immediate revolutionary potential of literature escorted the writer into his presidential campaign. His disappointing loss to Fujimori made him also

⁶ Lituma was first introduced as a minor character in *Los jefes* and then took a more prominent role in *La Casa Verde*. Following that novel, the character has reappeared in several other works with distinct but related characterizations, including, *¿Quién mató a Palomino Molero?*, *La Chunga*, and *La tía Julia y el escribidor*. An extensive critical investigation of this single character would be beneficial to our understanding of the development of Vargas Llosa's literature over the past five decades.

doubt the efficacy of political intervention. Vargas Llosa's portrayal of indiscriminate violence is reminiscent of Flaubert, but also echoes Sartrean tendencies to explore the darker side of humanity. *Lituma en los Andes* is another transition piece that evidences a new consideration of violence as it prefaces similar concerns in *La fiesta del Chivo*, a post-colonial commentary that resembles the liberation theories of Frantz Fanon.

Vargas Llosa's clear distaste with the decision of the Peruvian electorate to select Alberto Fujimori as their new president is also evident in *Lituma en los Andes*. As the politician attempted to articulate his ideals for a liberal revolution, he was disappointed by the apparent apathy of a people whom he believed were blind to the need. Similarly, Vargas Llosa dramatizes these sentiments in a critical scene wherein Tomasito (the diminutive indicates Carreño's earlier years) shoots a man who is beating a prostitute. Marcela, who is also a reincarnation of a character from Vargas Llosa's play *La Chunga* (1986), is liberated from the heavy hands of her abuser, but then proceeds to condemn her own rescuer. "¿Por eso le has disparado?" she demands crossly. "¿Porque me estaba pegando? ¿Y quién te dio a ti vela en esto, se puede saber? ¿Y quién eres tú, se puede saber? ¿Quién te pidió que me cuidaras, se puede saber?" (17). Apart from the import of this scene in the development of a love interest between the two protagonists, Tomasito is disillusioned by Marcela's denunciation of his services. Vargas Llosa has confessed analogous sentiments when describing his intended advocacy for Peru.

Throughout the narrative, Vargas Llosa offers varied reactions to the violence that surrounds his protagonists. As Lituma questions Carreño, "¿No te remuerde la conciencia ese salvajismo?," the guard responds that "Los primeros días me remordía mucho," but that with the passing of time, "se me fue lavando la mala conciencia" (35). Vargas

Llosa's portrayal of a desensitized Peru is compared with his own use of fiction to moderate against the at times cruel realities of the world. As he confesses in *La orgía perpetua*, "El sufrimiento ficticio neutralizaba el que yo vivía" (16). Fictions aside, Vargas Llosa also desired reform in the real world, and his feelings of impotency, especially during the 1980s, only intensified his frustrations with literature and politics in the succeeding decade. In contrast to Tomás's constant attempts to "borrámela de la memoria" (35) those events in his life that are painful to him,⁷ Vargas Llosa also confronts his most demonic passions through the writing process. Despite personal benefits, neither literature nor politics remediated the misfortunes of his native Peru. Indeed, Vargas Llosa might have commiserated with Lituma's lamentable conclusion: "Por más que lleve uniforme, yo no existo" (50).

Vargas Llosa's struggles with the incapacities of his literature have at times led the author to a pessimistic outlook on the future of humanity. Often these sentiments are dramatized in his literature through some of his most disturbing characters. From a lecture read at the University of Syracuse in 1988, we discover that Vargas Llosa learned to explore man's most disturbing tendencies from his readings of Sartre: "In Sartre there was an unconscious fascination for the dark side of personality, for mischievous behavior, for torturous kinds of acts of inclinations or drives in human beings" (*Writer's Reality* 50). Additional sources of inspiration—including César Moro, Georges Bataille, and Gustave Flaubert—also enlightened Vargas Llosa's investigation of a literature wherein "the uncensored imagination is free to explore a writer's most disturbing

⁷ Vargas Llosa often references other works as a subtle form of intertextuality. At other times, this technique is more explicit. Tomás's attempts to erase his negative memories from his consciousness is reminiscent of similar desires in *La guerra del fin del mundo* from the Baron. In both of these novels, and later in *La fiesta del Chivo*, Vargas Llosa's message seems to be that an individual's and a nation's more disturbing memories are those that must be addressed in order to ensure that they are not repeated.

obsessions” (Kristal 4). As Vargas Llosa records with regard to his personal readings of Merleau-Ponty:

Recuerdo haber leído, en las páginas iniciales de un libro de Merleau-Ponty, que la violencia casi siempre era bella en imagen, es decir, en el arte, y haber sentido cierta tranquilidad. Tenía entonces diecisiete años y me asustaba comprobar que, pese a mi naturaleza pacífica, la violencia explícita o implícita, refinada o cruda, era un requisito indispensable para que una novela me persuadiera de su realidad y fuera capaz de entusiasmarme. (*Orgía* 736–37)

Vargas Llosa’s portrayal of violence in *Lituma en los Andes*, however, is markedly distinct from his fictionalization of violent acts in the past. Discussing Vargas Llosa’s former tendency to condemn or at least explained the motives for violence in previous works, Kristal observes:

As in the novels of the 1980s, political fanatics produce unnecessary violence, and fantasy and eroticism are compensations for the mediocrity of life. But *Death in the Andes* offers elements that point to an unprecedented turn in Vargas Llosa’s fiction. For the first time the violent instincts of some characters no longer have any rational explanation whatsoever; violence just happens. It is no longer an instrument of those who exploit or the result of political fanaticism. (187)

Vargas Llosa, it is true, suggests with *Lituma en los Andes* his pessimism with regard to the capacity of man to eliminate violence. For this reason, his aesthetic turn toward violent activity remains ambivalent. Vargas Llosa does not condone the violence of the Peruvian interior regions, for example, but neither does he condemn it outright in his essays, recent literature, or report of the Uchuraccay tragedy. Certainly, the author’s rapport with his protagonist Lituma is significant in his straightforward confession: “Lituma no sabía qué hacer. Se sentía incómodo” (66). As Vargas Llosa’s previous deterrents to the evils of humanity began to unravel, he started to move toward alternative conclusions regarding violence and freedom. Though the writer still has not openly spoken in defense of violence as a legitimate liberating force, his novels do seem to

indicate another subtle transition in his concept of literature toward a new tolerance for violence as a liberating mode of reform.

Cartas a un joven novelista

During the 1980s, Vargas Llosa evidenced an understudied shift toward a new role as teacher. Besides his numerous assignments as Visiting Professor at several prestigious universities, the novelist also incorporated his literary theories more explicitly into works such as *La tía Julia y el escribidor* and *La historia de Mayta*. Vargas Llosa's creative essay *Cartas a un joven novelista* (1997) is an example *par excellence* of this pedagogical impulse. Disguised as a series of letters to an interested young novelist, Vargas Llosa outlines some of the basic points of his concept of literature. Though commentaries on style and technique clearly dominate its pages, *Cartas a un joven novelista* nonetheless provides a clear moment of reflection in our discussion of Vargas Llosa's concept of the socio-political function of literature. Interestingly, the writer's *expressed* concept of literature is often a step behind its more progressive application in his actual fictions. Nonetheless, *Cartas a un joven novelista* does highlight specific alternations to his earlier concept of the writer's vocation, as Vargas Llosa highlights some of the significant changes of the previous decades.

Vargas Llosa starts his correspondences by commending his fictional addressee for requesting guidance. He then explains that he lacked the courage to approach his most esteemed writers, despite an ardent desire to “[. . .] escribir historias que deslumbraran a sus lectores como me habían deslumbrado a mí las de esos escritores que empezaba a instalar en mi panteón privado: Faulkner, Hemingway, Malraux, Dos Passos, Camus,

Sartre” (7). Throughout his letters, Vargas Llosa mentions the influence of these writers, but also describes how his techniques have departed from them. From the opening pages, he comments on Sartre, explicitly mentioning his objection to the notion that a writer’s vocation was an *election*, the conscious choice of an individual to write. Though Vargas Llosa confesses that he does not believe that a passion for writing is necessarily “inscrito en los genes de los futuros escritores” (10), he nevertheless believed that it also involved something more than a simple *decision* to create fictions. Specifically, he cites rebellion as a motivating force in that choice, thus producing echoes of his earlier concept of literature as a protest against the existing world. Vargas Llosa’s remaining nine letters describe standards for the form and function of his literature. Though the work is extremely conservative theoretically, it does reveal some variations on his former concept of literature.⁸

Answering his own question regarding the origin of a writer’s disposition to invent new realities, Vargas Llosa explains: “Creo que la respuesta es: la rebeldía. [Es un rechazo y crítica de la vida tal como es, del mundo real, y su deseo de sustituirlos por aquellos que fabrica con su imaginación y sus deseos” (12). Throughout *Cartas a un joven novelista*, Vargas Llosa draws upon some of his most classic statements on writing. Distinct from his original views, however, he also is clear to make the following amendment to a rebellious literature that he previously described in absolute terms:

De otro lado, es una rebeldía *bastante pacífica* a fin de cuentas, porque ¿qué daño puede hacer a la vida real el oponerle las vidas impalpables de las ficciones? ¿Qué peligro puede representar, para ella, semejante competencia? A simple vista,

⁸ Some of the terms that Vargas Llosa uses in this work replace his previous concepts: “fantasmas” is introduced instead of “demons”. Other concepts are coined in *Cartas a un joven novelista* and should be followed to see how they develop in the future: “saltos cualitativos” (106), “dato escondido” (127), and an increased emphasis on “vasos comunicantes” (139–48).

ninguno. Se trata de un juego⁹ ¿no es verdad? Y los juegos no suelen ser peligrosos, siempre y cuando no pretenden desbordar su espacio propio y enredarse con la vida real. (13; emphasis mine)

Such concessions for the influence of his literature would have been as intolerable to Vargas Llosa in the 1960, as were similar commentaries that he denounced from Sartre. As he continues, the writer recognizes the potential disillusionment that some have experienced, including himself, with the notion that there is a direct correlation between fiction and the real world. Comparing such a stance with the insanity of Don Quixote, Vargas Llosa concludes that the same literature that attempts to counteract one's personal dissatisfactions "[. . .] es también fuente de malestar y de insatisfacción" (14). Certainly, Vargas Llosa's disappointments have shaped his recent commentaries on writing.

Another important departure in *Cartas a un joven novelista* from Vargas Llosa's earliest concept of literature deals with the irrational and independent nature of the creative process. From the beginning, Vargas Llosa took issue with Sartre on this point, claiming that *demonic* impulses were responsible for his literary themes. Once challenged by writers such as Ángel Rama, he compromised his original position by stating that a writer was entirely responsible for the form of a narrative and, at times, there was an explicit consciousness involved in the selection of its themes. These basic notions are clearly sustained in *Cartas a un joven novelista*, but Vargas Llosa also subtly distances his concept of literature from demonic muses. Beyond replacing demons with the term "fantasmas" (30), he also concludes regarding the false sovereignty of any creative narrative: "*Alguien* escribe las novelas. Ese hecho, que no nazcan por generación

⁹ Such statements directly contradict others in *Cartas a un joven novelista*: "La vocación literaria no es un pasatiempo, un deporte, un juego refinado que se practica en los ratos de ocio" (16) or "[Q]uien ha hecho suya esta hermosa y absorbente vocación no escribe para vivir, vive para escribir" (17). These are only two of other contradictions that demonstrate a concept of literature that is constantly being redefined.

espontánea, hace que sean dependientes, que todas tengan un cordón umbilical con el mundo real” (37). Admittedly, Vargas Llosa was describing the distinction between reality and fiction, and not the spontaneous generation of creative themes. Nevertheless, his comments reveal a waning in his former defiance of Sartre’s insistence that writers explicitly incorporate their viewpoints, whether political or otherwise, into their narratives. As Vargas Llosa the author has become increasingly visible within the pages of his own fictions, his acceptance of the rational composition of literature has also seemed to enlarge.

As a third point, Vargas Llosa provides fascinating insights on memory as an essential element of the creative process. Whereas his former concept of literature tended to characterize the creation of literature as a revolutionary impulse against the abuses of capitalism, his more recent descriptions have corresponded with the increased importance of memory within his novels. Providing indirect commentary on works such as *La tía Julia y el escribidor*, Vargas Llosa writes: “[L]o importante no está en lo que ocurre en el mundo real, sino en la manera como la memoria retiene y reproduce la experiencia vivida, en esa labor de selección y rescate del pasado que opera la mente humana” (98). Memory, then, is the mode through which the raw material of a writer’s lived experiences is converted into fiction. Given that memory does not always produce a mimetic portrait of reality, a work of fiction does not necessarily need to be *true* to produce *truth*. Furthermore, Vargas Llosa’s transition toward memory as a central component of his literature becomes more complicated in his historical narratives, wherein cultural memory most accurately belongs to a nation. Such a position has resulted in the

developing notion that the writer stands as a gatekeeper of collective memory through the relentless reshaping of the past.

Cartas a un joven novelista discusses the role of literary criticism in its concluding pages. Given that Vargas Llosa was highly scrutinized in the 1970s and 80s, his concern with critics is understandable. Despite the length of the following citation, its importance merits its inclusion, as it not only speaks to Vargas Llosa's position on criticism, but also his recognition of a maturing concept of literature.

Pero, al mismo tiempo, me parece importantísimo dejar en claro que la crítica por sí sola, aun en los casos en que es más rigurosa y acertada, no consigue agotar el fenómeno de la creación, explicarlo en su totalidad. Siempre habrá en una ficción o un poema logrados un elemento o dimensión que el análisis crítico racional no logra apresar. Porque la crítica es un ejercicio de la razón y de la inteligencia, y en la creación literaria, además de estos factores, intervienen, y a veces de manera determinante, la intuición, la sensibilidad, la adivinación, incluso el azar, que escapan siempre a las redes de la más fina malla de la investigación crítica. Por eso, nadie puede enseñar a otro a crear; a lo más, a escribir y leer. El resto, se lo enseña uno a sí mismo tropezando, cayéndose y levantándose, sin cesar. (150)

Despite Vargas Llosa's confession that the creative process "es tan complejo y minucioso que, muchas veces, ni el propio autor es capaz de identificar en el producto terminado, esa exuberante demostración de su capacidad para inventar personas y mundos imaginarios" (22), he also explains, perhaps as a mode of protection against further criticism, that an author has some advantages over the most astute scholar in the interpretation of his or her own fictional creations. Furthermore, Vargas Llosa admits that one cannot learn to create through the use of theoretical handbooks, which would include Sartre's *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*. As Vargas Llosa demonstrates in works such as *Cartas a un joven novelista*, he has graduated from student to teacher of the creative process. Through the numerous experiences and disillusionments that have accompanied

a prolific half-century of writing, Vargas Llosa's concept of literature, though still evolving, can now be called his own.

La fiesta del Chivo

Throughout *La fiesta del Chivo*, Vargas Llosa produces echoes of a colonial past that extend the Trujillo Era to a general discussion on an authoritarianism that has existed in multiple forms and faces in Latin America since 1492. Vargas Llosa divides *La fiesta del Chivo* into three alternating storylines. The first is dedicated to Urania Cabral, a purely fictional character who returns to the Dominican Republic after living in the United States for thirty-five years, the second to the final weeks of the life of the Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo, and the third to the motivations and life histories of Trujillo's assassins. Throughout the novel, an intimate third-person narrator offers insights into the psyche of each character. Especially revealing are the memories that torment Urania as she struggles to understand the decision of her father, Senator Cabral, to offer her virginity to the sexual appetites of Trujillo. Besides a powerful depiction of a difficult period in Dominican history, *La fiesta del Chivo* also elucidates our understanding of Vargas Llosa's concept of literature as it seems to revisit theories that occupied the writer's mind during the 1960s. Specifically, the characterization of Urania suggests an intertextual dialogue with Frantz Fanon's post-colonial masterpiece *Les damnés de la terre*. More noteworthy than mere influence and reception, however, is Urania's use of theories that Vargas Llosa formerly rejected as she constructs a powerful oral testimony that condemns the abuses of her life history. Specifically, I argue in the following sections that Urania personally experiences the three phases that Fanon

describes as necessary to the production of national culture. Previously, Vargas Llosa resisted Fanon's notion that literature could only find a place in a society that was prepared to receive it. However, as the author has abandoned his earlier concept of literature, he also seems open to a literature that finds its place in a post-revolutionary setting. Throughout *La fiesta del Chivo*, Urania's struggle to find a voice for her narrative is analogous to Vargas Llosa's efforts to define his own literature. By the conclusion of the narrative, however, Urania is able to produce a powerful oral testimony that suggests new directions in Vargas Llosa's literary theories and concept of the writer's vocation.

Assimilation Phase

Urania Cabral is a purely fictional character who returns to the Dominican Republic for the first time after living alone in the United States for the past thirty-five years. As she recounts the details of her past, the protagonist discloses her rape at the hands of the dictator Rafael Trujillo.¹⁰ Although her oral account is personal in nature, it also exposes the brutalities of the Trujillo Era in a more generalized context. Vargas Llosa develops the historical events of the novel with relative accuracy; however, his purpose is not an exact mimesis of the past. His comments on the Trujillo Era are generalized—through his protagonists—to address some of the most disturbing socio-political realities of Latin America. Through the recasting of her personal experiences, Urania modifies the existing perceptions of her father, her relatives, the Dominican

¹⁰ The use of the word "rape" in the context of this novel is problematic, since the dictator, because of his deteriorating health, cannot complete the sexual act. Unable to maintain sexual arousal, he robs Urania's virginity with his hand. Although Vargas Llosa emphasizes Trujillo's sexual impotence he never denies the impact of this abuse on his female protagonist who sees herself as a target of rape without making such a distinction. As such, I also use the term "rape" throughout this investigation to refer to Urania's cruel sexual violation by the dictator Rafael Trujillo.

Republic, and even Vargas Llosa's own readership. She does not change the actual historical events that she describes, but expresses her concern that the Republic has forgotten the brutalities of its own history, as she most certainly has not. As Urania speaks, therefore, she assumes the role of the Vargasllosan Storyteller, that of an authoritative first-person narrator who arouses the collective, cultural memory of her listeners. Through Urania's oral narrative, Vargas Llosa further characterizes a literature that must recover, and even restructure, the past from a personal, contemporary, and even reflective perspective.

Similar to Vargas Llosa, Frantz Fanon was outwardly concerned with the role of the intellectual—specifically the *native* intellectual—in the formation of national cultures and identities. Fanon states that the function of the native intellectual in the struggle for liberation is secondary to violence. Nonetheless, the theorist also recognizes the need for a national culture, as he maintains that it places the responsibility of the nation-building project into the hands of the once-colonized masses. In *Les damnés de la terre*, Fanon discusses three phases that recently liberated nations experience as they attempt to create an autonomous national culture. In *La fiesta del Chivo*, Urania experiences these phases in her search for a voice that is independent of her rape and the dictator Trujillo. The first is the assimilation phase in which Fanon states that “[. . .] the native intellectual gives proof that he has assimilated the culture of the occupying power. [. . .] This is the period of unqualified assimilation” (222). Fanon explains that this period corresponds to the desire of the native intellectual to become human as he or she copies the cultural patterns of his or her former master. In the case of Urania, she does not initially intend to become a representative voice for the national culture of the Dominican Republic. However, as

the protagonist conforms to her status as a victim of rape, she eventually moves from this phase of assimilation to an independent expression that reshapes the perspectives of her listeners. In the verbalization of her most pained memories, Urania also reveals an attempted assimilation to the culture of the United States that seems to indicate a subtle Inter-American critique of semi-colonial powers in the present.¹¹

From the perspective of her relatives in the Dominican Republic, Urania has obtained the “American dream.” She receives a law degree from Harvard and maintains a successful legal practice in New York. However, these successes are mere indications of her most personal failures. Despite the outward achievements of the protagonist, Urania cannot escape her past and therefore remains the colonized victim of 1961. She finds herself doubly trapped between the superficial life that she leads in the United States and the rape that defines her past and present realities. Urania thus consumes the culture that surrounds her in an attempt to “become human” once more. In other words, Urania as victim strives to assimilate to the culture of the United States and even to the image of the dictator in search of an identity that *controls* rather than *conforms* to the demands of the colonial—and in her case patriarchal—powers that have shaped her identity.¹²

Urania first assimilates to her new culture in the United States through excessive studies. The narrator clarifies: “No era el deseo de aprender, de triunfar, lo que te

¹¹ Although Vargas Llosa addresses the political abuses of the Trujillo regime, he seems concerned with United States capitalism as a neocolonial power in Latin America. In *Les damnés de la terre*, Fanon also expresses his preoccupations with the economic and militaristic power of the United States in the world scene. The theorist summarizes: “Two centuries ago, a former European colony decided to catch up with Europe. It succeed so well that the United States of America became a monster, in which the taints, the sickness, and the inhumanity of Europe have grown to appalling dimensions” (313). Vargas Llosa does not provide extensive commentaries on the United States in the novel; nevertheless, Urania’s assimilation to the culture of the northern neighbor implies a colonial characterization.

¹² Vargas Llosa emphasizes the relationship between Senator Cabral and Rafael Trujillo (*Padre de la Nueva Patria*) as the dual-patriarchs of Urania’s violated persona. She returns to the Dominican Republic to confront both her father and her fatherland. Furthermore, the last name “Cabral”—based in the Spanish *cabra*—indicates that Urania is not only the daughter of the Senator, but also of the “Chivo” that raped her.

confinaba en la biblioteca, sino de marearte, intoxicarte, perderte en esas materias—ciencias o letras, daba igual—para no pensar, para ahuyentar los recuerdos dominicanos” (215). At this point in the narrative, Urania has not become the autonomous Storyteller that she is at the end of the novel. Therefore, the protagonist responds in a manner that is similar to Fanon’s notion of the native intellectual that remains colonized yet desires liberation. He explains: “The native is an oppressed person whose permanent dream is to *become the persecutor*” (53; emphasis mine). As Urania eventually returns to condemn her father—the once-distinguished Senator Cabral who has become both decrepit and mute—for his involvement in her rape, she does so in her role as “persecutor” in order to replace those authoritative figures who continue as her tormentors through memory.

Throughout Urania’s confrontation with Senator Cabral, Vargas Llosa indicates an inversion of roles between father and daughter. Before Urania arrives at her former home, she anticipates and even rehearses the imminent dialogue. “Hola, papá. Cómo estás papá,” the protagonist practices. “¿No me reconoces? Soy Urania. Claro, qué me vas a reconocer. La última vez yo tenía catorce y ahora cuarenta y nueve. [. . .] ¿No era ésa la edad que tú tenías, el día que me fui a Adrian? Sí, cuarenta y ocho o cuarenta y nueve” (18). Apart from the fact that Urania is the exact same age as her father at the time of her departure from the Dominican Republic, she also assumes the right to his authoritative voice, as the influential politician is now voiceless. Vargas Llosa continues to develop an inversion between father and daughter in the scene where Urania feeds the former Senator. “Muy bien, muy bien,” the attendant nurse notes, “se comió su fruta como niño bueno” (139). Throughout the attempted conversation, Urania acts in a position of dominance and the Senator becomes the helpless child. Formerly, Vargas

Llosa characterized his protagonists as individuals who were forced into conformity by circumstance. Urania's case, however, presents a new literary paradigm. Through her oral testimony, Vargas Llosa suggests that storytelling does not have to be revolutionary in the political sense to have an influence on the future. As Vargas Llosa creates a new creative space for his protagonist, he also concedes the validity of Fanon's notion that a nation must be prepared to receive the creative writer.

As Urania presents the despicable national and personal histories in which the former Senator's role is central, her father's eyes petition: "[C]állate, deja de escarbar esas llagas, de resucitar esos recuerdos." Throughout the narrative, various and varied authoritative voices will demand the same. However, as the narrator notes: "No tiene la menor intención de hacerlo. ¿No has venido para eso a este país al que habías jurado no volver?" Urania continues: "Sí, papá, a eso debo haber venido [. . .]. A hacerte pasar un mal rato" (149). As evidenced throughout this stage of assimilation, Urania, albeit unnaturally, assumes the role of her former violators. The inversion that Vargas Llosa develops provides the protagonist both the space and the confidence that she needs for her oral narrative to take shape. As Urania progresses through the subsequent phases of Fanon's theories, she also moves toward the personal expression—ultimately turned national—that she has desired for more than three-and-a-half decades.

Pre-Combat Phase

Fanon identifies the second phase, known as precombat, as a precursor to an autonomous national culture and voice. "In the second phase," the theorist explains, "we find that the native is disturbed; he decides to remember what he is" (222). For years,

Urania attempts to repress her past through her assimilation into the mainstream culture of the United States. However, the memories of her rape ultimately require her to confront the past that she suppresses. From the opening word of the novel (“Urania”), she expresses an ontological preoccupation that she attempts to moderate through her near obsessive historical readings. In accordance with Fanon’s philosophies, Urania does not search out her own *personal* past, but rather she embarks on an incessant search for the national character of the Dominican Republic. Throughout her studies, and even in her return to the island that hosted her rape, Urania feels detached from the people who were once her own. As Fanon states: “But since the native is not a part of his people, since he only has exterior relations with his people, he is content to recall *their life only*” (222; emphasis mine). Urania is not prepared to confront her own past directly, as evidenced by her refusal to reply to the numerous letters received from her relatives; thus, she searches for answers in traditional histories of the Republic. Moreover, as Fanon indicates: “This period of creative work approximately corresponds to that immersion which we have just described” (222). Although Urania is unwilling to return to the true source of her frustrations—the rape that she suffered years before—her internal dissatisfactions are the impetus to her future discourse. Urania’s readings undoubtedly prepare the developing Storyteller for the oral testimony that she eventually offers. Through Urania’s precombat phase, she discovers the central preoccupation that likewise torments Vargas Llosa. As Urania becomes an expert on the Dominican past, she cannot tolerate the intellectual indolence that has consequently enabled Trujillo’s abuses.

Once Urania arrives at her home in the Dominican Republic, she realizes that her memories do not resemble the realities before her. “¿Eran los mismos muebles?” the

narrator questions. “No reconocía nada” (69). She remains downstairs for some time before she ascends to the bedroom of her father. As Urania enters the room, she becomes aware of her father’s deteriorated health and once more questions the purpose of her return. “Soy Urania,” the protagonist declares. “¿Te acuerdas de que tienes una hija? [. . .] Yo tampoco te reconozco. [. . .] No sé por qué he venido, qué hago aquí” (71). As Urania surveys the living space, she notices that the bookshelves are empty and states: “La casa estaba llena de libros. ¿Qué fue de ellos? Ya no puedes leer, claro.” She reveals her obsession with historical accounts of the Trujillo Era as she comments on her own reading habits. Specifically, Urania contrasts the absence of texts in the house with her apartment in New York: “Mi departamento de Manhattan está lleno de libros [. . .]. Testimonios, ensayos, memorias, muchos libros de historia. ¿Adivinas de qué época? La Era de Trujillo, cuál iba a ser. Lo más importante que nos pasó *en quinientos años*. [. . .] En esos treinta y un años cristalizó todo lo malo que arrastrábamos, *desde la conquista*” (71; emphasis mine). Urania clearly indicates that the Dominican past that she describes has colonial implications. She likewise contrasts the voice that she has started to develop through her studies with the authoritative figures from her past who had demanded her silence. Urania communicates to her father that she is no longer too young to understand the complexities of Dominican politics, clearly stating: “Me he convertido en una experta en Trujillo” (72).¹³ Even though reading does not provide answers to Urania’s personal dilemmas, these studies are nonetheless indicative of the pre-combat phase that prepares her to recast the past from her own perspective. Urania is no longer the innocent victim of

¹³ Sabine Köllmann notes that Urania’s “[. . .] obsessive search for the truth reflects Vargas Llosa’s recent statement that his ‘invincible repugnance’ for totalitarian regimes has turned him against his will into a specialist in dictatorships” (298).

1961, but rather an educated woman with an extensive understanding of the regime that left her violated.

Urania returns to her father in an attempt to confront him with the information that she has consumed in her studies. Her words initiate the transition from historical account to personal narrative. Urania's subconscious preoccupations surface in her personal precombat phase and these become the motivation for the future themes of her oral discourse. As Fanon's words confirm: "Past happenings of the bygone days of his childhood (sic) will be brought up out of the depths of his memory; old legends will be reinterpreted in the light of a borrowed estheticism and of a conception of the world which was discovered under other skies" (222). Through the words of Urania, Vargas Llosa reveals the internal concerns that drive him to write the narrative. Both the protagonist and the author are troubled with the role of the intellectual *vis-à-vis* socio-political failures. More particularly, Urania comments on the "intellectual laziness" that Fanon also describes. Similar to the theories of Fanon, Urania returns to certain incidents of her childhood that serve as representative examples of her general commentaries on the unwillingness of those with authority to counteract socio-political abuses.

Urania articulates her disgust with the Spanish American intellectual as she recalls an experience at the home of her former neighbor Don Froilán Arala. Froilán was a political advisor to Trujillo and his wife served as one of the few female figures in Urania's life. As a young child, Urania visits the wife of Froilán. Though she cannot remember her first name years later, she vividly recalls her feelings when Trujillo unexpectedly arrives at the door. Urania is promptly dismissed and she returns home to recount the scene to her father. The encounter alarms the Senator and he attempts to

conceal the true significance of the dictator's visit to their neighbor's home. The narrator later reveals that Trujillo repeatedly sent Froilán on distant political assignments in order to enjoy sexual adventures with his exceptionally beautiful wife. "Hijita, hay cosas que no puedes saber," Urania's father insists, "que todavía no comprendes. Yo estoy para saberlas por ti, para protegerte. Eres lo que más quiero en el mundo. No me preguntes por qué, pero tienes que olvidarlo." The young Urania promises to conform to her father's mandates. More than thirty-five years later, however, she cannot maintain her silence. "Así era de inocente," the protagonist recalls, as later in her life, "[. . .] descubrí por qué visitaba el Generalísimo a sus señoras" (77). Though Urania has learned much about the Dominican Republic in her studies, she remains perplexed by the willingness of the intellectuals and political figures in the Trujillo regime to endure these types of personal abuses from the dictator.

Urania indicates her contempt for Trujillo's sexual addiction as she describes her brief encounter with the dictator at the home of Don Froilán. Furthermore, she cites this incident as representative of her concern with the unresponsiveness of some Dominican intellectuals to misuses of power. Urania describes a feast conducted in honor of Trujillo, as heard from the mouth of her father's political nemesis, the once Senator Henry Chirinos. During the dinner conversation, the dictator attributes his political successes to his sexual conquests. "Yo he sido un hombre muy amado," the tyrant boasts. "Un hombre que ha estrechado en sus brazos a las mujeres más bellas de este país. Ellas me han dado la energía para enderezarlo." Trujillo concludes: "¿Saben ustedes cuál ha sido la mejor, de todas las hembras que me tiré? [. . .] ¡La mujer de Froilán!" Though Urania expresses her disgust with the dictator's declaration, she is more disturbed by the reaction of Don

Froilán to the comment. Using the words of Chirinos, Urania states: “Froilán había heroicamente sonreído, reído, festejado con los otros, la humorada del Jefe” (81). Apart from the obvious distaste of the exchange, Urania cites this incident as an outward expression of her internal concerns: (1) her frustration with the conformity of Dominican intellectualism to the extraordinary demands of Trujillo and (2) her own father’s involvement in her rape. Urania’s words echo those of Vargas Llosa, especially with regard to intellectuals who have actually contributed to the abuses of authoritarian regimes. As is apparent in *La guerra del fin del mundo*, Vargas Llosa also seems concerned with his own role in the establishment of dictatorial systems as a young intellectual who was stubbornly bound to literary and socialist ideologies.

At the conclusion of Urania’s conversation with her father, she is frustrated that the former Senator is unable to respond to her diatribe. Though she initially comes as the persecutor to punish her father for his role in her rape, she nonetheless remains empty after the one-sided conversation concludes. She repeatedly poses rhetorical questions that reveal her deepest preoccupations. Indeed, these desperate expressions indicate her desire for concrete answers that neither her mute father nor her historical readings can provide. “¿Cómo era posible, papá?” the protagonist questions. “Que un hombre como Froilán Arala, culto, preparado, inteligente, llegara a aceptar eso. ¿Qué les hacía? ¿Qué les daba, para convertir a don Froilán, a Chirino, a Manuel Alfonso, a ti, a todos sus brazos derechos e izquierdos, en trapos sucios?” (82). The narrator reiterates Vargas Llosa’s recurrent concern through this description of his protagonist:

Lo que nunca has llegado a entender es que los dominicanos más preparados, las cabezas del país, abogados, médicos, ingenieros, salidos a veces de muy buenas universidades de Estados Unidos o de Europa, sensibles, cultos, con experiencia, lecturas, ideas, presumiblemente un desarrollo sentido del ridículo, sentimientos,

pruritos, aceptaran ser vejados de manera tan salvaje (lo fueron todos alguna vez) como esa noche, en Barahona, don Froilán Arala. (82)

Copying pages from his own essays, Vargas Llosa restates his concern with Spanish American intellectualism through Urania. Certainly, she has progressed significantly through her studies and has even come to terms with the fact that the uneducated were manipulated into their blind devotion to the dictator. Similar to Vargas Llosa, however, Urania cannot accept the commitment of the more prepared, educated members of the Republic to a dictatorial regime that has unabashedly abused them. Both the protagonist and her author are avid students of history; and, these readings serve as confirmations of their concerns. Once Urania begins to challenge the past through her voiced narrative, she transitions once more toward the final phase of Fanon's theories, which he calls the fighting phase. Urania embodies an important synthesis of Vargas Llosa's concepts of literature as she demonstrates that a narrative based upon cultural memory can also be powerfully rebellious. Scholarship has further confused Urania's voice, suggesting a return to Vargas Llosa's concept of literature as revolution. Urania did not participate in the revolutionary actions that resulted in the death of the dictator; however, her post-revolutionary oral narrative is not strictly aesthetic either. Her story, then, becomes an integration of several of Vargas Llosa's literary theories. As a composite of her author's previous Storytellers, Urania is able to remember the past as her testimony also begins to shape the future.

Fighting Phase

As Urania concludes her monologue with her father, her cousin Lucinda arrives at the home to care for her uncle. With reason, Lucinda is outwardly surprised to see Urania

in the Dominican Republic after a thirty-five-year absence. Urania accepts a dinner invitation at the home of her aunt Adelina; however, she also expresses doubts with regard to a positive outcome. Urania's concerns could be read as an expression of the pessimism toward humanity that Vargas Llosa has also felt in recent years. "¿Qué haces aquí?" the narrator incessantly questions. "¿Qué has venido a buscar en Santo Domingo, en esta casa? ¿Irás a cenar con Lucinda, Manolita y la tía Adelina? La pobre será un fósil, igual que tu padre" (227). Urania assumes that her visit to the home of her relatives will resemble the failed conversation that she has concluded with her father. As she assumes some of the feelings of impotence that Vargas Llosa was also experiencing, Urania reverts to the internal suppression of her past experiences that has been characteristic of her life since leaving the Dominican Republic as an adolescent. As Fanon indicates: "Thus, if a local defeat is inflicted, he may well be drawn back into doubt, and from thence to despair" (50). Urania repeatedly returns to the "doubt" and "despair" of her earlier years as she attempts to find an authentic voice in her present setting. Similar to the emerging nations that Fanon describes, psychological trauma is still her companion. Urania's new listeners, however, cause a transformation in the protagonist from her former status as victim of the past to an empowered role as Storyteller, or one who *dictates* her own future.

Urania's personal narrative begins as the verbal indictment of the living symbol of her rape, Senator Cabral. In the home of her aunt Adelina, however, Urania words focus on a new audience. Surrounded entirely by women, she makes a symbolic return to *her own people*.¹⁴ Fanon comments: "While at the beginning the native intellectual used to

¹⁴ Both Fanon and Vargas Llosa were specifically concerned with abuses inflicted upon women in most authoritarian regimes. Vargas Llosa expresses the precarious condition of the woman within male-

produce his work to be read exclusively by the oppressor [Urania's father], whether with the intention of charming him or of denouncing him through ethnic or subjectivist means, now the native writer progressively takes on the habit of addressing *his own people*" (240; insert and emphasis mine). As Urania addresses her female relatives, she protests the male-dominated Dominican past through a personal perspective that also represents in the broader scope of the novel the collective memory of the Republic.

Only in the fighting stage does Urania recognize the greater purpose of her storytelling. She condemns the complacent intellectuals who, according to the protagonist, support the dictator in their impassiveness. Fanon comments:

Instead of according the people's lethargy an honored place in his esteem, he turns himself into an awakener of the people; hence comes a fighting literature, a revolutionary literature, and a national literature. During this phase a great many men and women who up till then would never have thought of producing a literary work, now that they find themselves in exceptional circumstances—in prison, with the Maquis, or on the eve of their execution—feel the need to speak to their nation, to compose the sentence which expresses the heart of the people, and to become the mouthpiece of a new reality in action. (223)

Urania does not face the same circumstances that Fanon describes; however, her personal struggles for liberation from the history that defines her are likewise intense. As her audience misrepresents her most pained realities, Urania realizes the necessity of her personal narrative, a potent oral account that is replete with the pedagogical tendencies that her author was also discovering at the time.

At the home of her aunt Adelina, Urania senses that her relatives desire an explanation for her prolonged absence. After the expected pleasantries, their discussion

dominated Latin America dictatorships as he states: "Urania para mí es un personaje muy conmovedor. [. . .] La dictadura fue particularmente cruel con la mujer. Como todas las dictaduras latinoamericanas tuvo un contenido machista; el machismo es un fenómeno latinoamericano" (qtd. in Luna Escudero Alie). Urania serves as a representative character that both demonstrates the woman as an individual "objeto vulnerable a los peores atropellos," and becomes a feminized symbol of abuse in a traditionally masculine Latin American history.

moves toward Urania's guarded secret. She is notably uncomfortable and even questions: "¿Ha pasado ya el tiempo prudente de sobremesa para despedirse?" As the narrator mentions: "Urania no se ha sentido cómoda en toda la noche. *Más bien tensa, esperando una agresión*" (296; emphasis mine). She has returned to Fanon's original descriptions of the colonized native: "The native's muscles are *always tensed*. You can't say that he is terrorized, or even apprehensive. He is in fact ready at a moment's notice to exchange the role of the quarry for that of the hunter" (53; emphasis mine). Urania still does not intend to reveal her personal history to her relatives. But, when Lucinda comments, "Algún bien resultó para ti, Uranita. No estarías donde estás, si no. En cambio, para nosotros, fue el desastre" (286), she responds in a manner that is characteristic of Fanon's theories. Given that Urania has endured her memories alone, Lucinda's misrepresentation of the past instigates her bold responses. As Adelina questions, "Ahora, que ha pasado tanto tiempo, ¿se puede saber por qué, muchacha?", Urania's answer is both pointed and confident: "Porque no era tan buen padre como crees, tía Adelina" (299). As she challenges the realities that her relatives present, she also gains the strength and determination that have long escaped her. Urania's subsequent explanation becomes a potent oral testimony that counteracts the authoritative powers that once demanded her silence.

Once Urania starts to recount the abuses that she has endured, both she and her relatives are outwardly bothered. At one point in the dialogue, Manola invites: "Si hablar de esa historia te ofusca, no lo hagas, prima." Urania replies: "Me molesta, me da vómitos [. . .]. Me llena de odio y de asco. Nunca hablé de esto con nadie. Quizás me haga bien sacármelo de encima, de una vez. Y con quién mejor que con la familia" (372).

Urania's need to share the past with her relatives once again associates her actions with the post-colonial theories of Fanon. He explains:

Because he feels he is becoming estranged, that is to say because he feels that he is the living haunt of contradictions which run the risk of becoming insurmountable, the native tears himself away from the swamp that may suck him down and accepts everything, decides to take all for granted and confirms everything even though he may lose body and soul. The native finds that he is expected to answer for everything, and to all comers. (218)

Urania's thirty-five-year estrangement in the United States is replete with the haunting contradictions that Fanon describes. Besides Fanon, however, Urania can also be read in light of previous Vargasllosan Storytellers, as in the case Alberto from *La ciudad y los perros*. As Alberto confesses the misdeeds of the cadets at the Leoncio Prado Military Academy, he starts with hesitance and then gains the strength to tell his story in the act of articulating it.

Alberto tosió y se limpió la frente con el pañuelo. Comenzó a hablar con una voz contenida y jadeante, silenciada por largas pausas, pero a medida que refería las proezas del Círculo y la historia del Esclavo, e insensiblemente deslizaba en su relato a los otros cadetes y describía la estrategia utilizada para pasar los cigarrillos y el licor, los robos y la venta de exámenes, las veladas donde Paulino, las *contras* por el estadio y «La Perlita», las partidas de póquer en los baños, los concursos, las venganzas, las apuestas, y la vida secreta de su sección iba surgiendo como un personaje de pesadilla ante el capitán, que palidecía sin cesar, la voz de Alberto cobraba soltura, firmeza y hasta era, por instantes, agresiva. (*Ciudad* 255)

Urania's contradicting story is corrective in function and emphasizes the importance of her narrative in providing answers for her and her audience.

In a previous conversation, Urania attempted to conceal her true situation by informing Lucinda that her life in the United States was ideal. She even invents the story of a secret lover to satisfy Lucinda's demand for the secrets of her love life. Urania's true secret, however, is the rape that has dictated the course of her life. One might read

Urania's achievements in her studies and legal practice as a triumph over the abuses of her past. However, the narrative reveals the emptiness that Urania feels in these accomplishments. As Urania eventually admits to Lucinda:

Te mentí, no tengo ningún amante, prima [. . .]. No lo he tenido nunca, ni lo tendré. [. . .] Mi único hombre fue Trujillo. [. . .] He estudiado, trabajo, me gano bien la vida, verdad. Pero, estoy vacía y llena de miedo, todavía. [. . .] Yo las envidio a ustedes, más bien. Sí, sí, ya sé, tienen problemas, apuros, decepciones. Pero, también, una familia, una pareja, hijos, parientes, un país. Esas cosas llenan la vida. A mí, papá y Su Excelencia me volvieron un desierto. (564)

More than a need to recover and overcome her personal demons, Urania also returns to reestablish an important relationship with the family that she has lived without throughout most of her life. As Urania converses with her relatives, she confronts her imminent departure to the United States, which, at this point in the narrative, still signifies a return to her previous condition of solitude. Similar to the theories of Fanon, Urania recognizes the insurmountable contradictions of her past and present realities, and therefore decides to *risk all* in revealing her most disturbing secrets.

As a characterization of Vargas Llosa's own creative practices, Urania's testimony is an expression of dissent that does more than reveal her own experiences. It also challenges the previous perspectives of her relatives. Urania's oral protest is most troublesome to her aunt Adelina, who refuses to believe that her brother, Agustín Cabral, could have offered his daughter's innocence to Trujillo's sexual appetites. As Urania begins to reveal the details of her rape, her aunt exclaims: "¡Basta, basta! Para qué más, hija. Ven acá, persignémonos, recemos. [. . .] ¿Crees en Dios? ¿En Nuestra Señora de la Altagracia, patrona de los dominicanos? Tu madre era tan devota de ella, Uranita" (559). As Adelina recalls the most sacred likenesses available—deity and Urania's deceased mother—she pleads for her niece to abandon her storytelling. Despite these petitions,

Urania demonstrates no intention to withdraw from her course. “Son palabras horribles, ya lo sé, cosas que no debería decir, tía Adelina,” she comments. “No lo hago nunca, te lo juro. ¿No querías saber por qué dije esas cosas sobre papá? ¿Por qué, cuando me fui a Adrian, no quise saber más de la familia? Ya sabes por qué” (560). Urania understands that her depiction of the past contradicts her relatives’ perception of the Trujillo Era. At this moment in her storytelling, Urania embraces the basic tenets of Fanon’s fighting phase: “Finally in the third phase, which is called the fighting stage, the native, after having tried to lose himself in the people and with people, will on the contrary *shake the people*” (223; emphasis mine). Such tendencies also recall Vargas Llosa’s own words in “La literatura es fuego” wherein he declares that the central role of literature “[. . .] es agitar, inquietar, alarmar, mantener a los hombres en una constante insatisfacción de sí mismos: su función es estimular sin tregua la voluntad de cambio y de mejora” (135). Despite the pain that her aunt experiences, Urania recognizes that the conflict is nonetheless productive, and even necessary, to the critical attitude that she hopes to inspire for the future.

Whereas Adelina represents the perception of the Trujillo Era that Urania denies, the Storyteller’s young niece Marianita embodies the potential for a better tomorrow. Throughout her recounting of the past, Urania expresses concerns that the rising generation of the Republic has either forgotten or is unaware of the atrocities of its own history. Through Urania’s conversation with a young nurse in the home of her father, for example, she learns of the necessity to voice her experience. Responding to Urania’s inquires as to whether the nurse remembered the dictator, she replies: “Qué me voy a acordar, yo tenía cuatro o cinco añitos cuando lo mataron. No me acuerdo de nada, sólo

lo que oí en mi casa. [. . .] Sería un dictador y lo que digan, pero parece que entonces se vivía mejor. Todos tenían trabajo y no se cometían tantos crímenes. ¿No es cierto, señorita?” (139–40). As she leaves the room, Urania immediately counters: “Se cometían, papá. [. . .] No entrarían tantos ladrones a las casas [. . .]. Pero, se mataba, se golpeaba, se torturaba y se desaparecía” (140). Urania, therefore, adopts the role of teacher as she attempts to inspire in Marianita a *new* critical perspective. Besides resembling Vargas Llosa’s theories, Urania’s intentions also mirror Fanon’s notion that the native intellectual in the fighting phase will desire to place the responsibility of the future into the hands of the rising generation. Fanon writes that the native intellectual will attempt “[. . .] relentlessly and passionately, to *teach* the masses that everything depends on them [. . .]” (197; emphasis mine). Urania also finds in the fixed stare of Marianita the continuation of her own personal narrative, and the possibility for a brighter future for the Dominican Republic. For the first time, Urania sheds her previous character as victim in order to promote a new “national consciousness” that she hopes will ensure that the same atrocities do not reoccur.

As Urania prepares to leave for her hotel, her cousin Manolita questions: “Ahora, ya no será como antes ¿verdad, Uranita? [. . .] Nos vamos a escribir, y contestarás las cartas.” Similar to Vargas Llosa in his own transitions, Urania has her reservations: “Pero, no está segura. Tal vez, saliendo de esta casa, de este país, prefiera olvidar de nuevo esta familia, esta gente, su pasado, se arrepienta de haber venido y hablado como lo ha hecho esta noche. ¿O, tal vez, no? ¿Tal vez querrá reconstruir de algún modo el vínculo con estos residuos de familia que le quedan?” (566). Despite her uncertainties, Urania’s perception of her family has changed considerably by the end of the novel. At

the outset, she explains that “[. . . Se] siente más distante de [su familia] que de las estrellas. Y comienzan a irritarla los grandes ojos de Marianita clavados en ella” (296). By the conclusion of the narrative, however, Urania comes to recognize in her niece the future of the Republic.

Although one representative member of the nation cannot be considered the whole, through Marianita, Urania is certain that her experiences will survive as an open correspondence with her relatives. One might view these letters as a continuation of *Cartas a un joven novelista* in the sense that Urania, similar to Vargas Llosa, will continue to instruct through the telling of his personal stories. As creative Storytellers, Vargas Llosa and Urania share a similar purpose, and, interestingly, their common intent in revisiting the Dominican past is summarized in the words of Fanon:

There is a tendency to bring conflicts up to date and to modernize the kinds of struggle which the stories evoke, together with the names of heroes and the types of weapons. The method of allusion is more and more widely used. The formula ‘This all happened long ago’ is substituted with that of ‘What we are going to speak of happened somewhere else, but it might well have happened here today, and it might happen tomorrow.’ (240)

Through Urania, Vargas Llosa is able to evaluate one moment in the Dominican Republic as a vivid recognition that colonialism is a monster of multitude faces that still continues in the present. As Urania attempts to inform her people of the realities of her past, Vargas Llosa provides a new perspective on the capacity of language to combat socio-political failures. Regardless of actual intention, Vargas Llosa characterizes Urania using creative theories that resemble those of Frantz Fanon. Contrasting his former opposition to the notion that literature should find its place in a post-revolutionary circumstance, Vargas Llosa seems to demonstrate that a fighting literature can be as essential to a people as the revolutionary conception that he previously proposed.

La fiesta del Chivo is a powerful vindication of the Vargasllosan Storyteller that extends its creative reach to an expansive international readership. “Una de mis preocupaciones cuando escribí la novela,” the novelist affirms, “era mostrar como lo que ocurre en la República Dominicana de ninguna manera es privativo ni de ese país ni, en consecuencia de ese personaje [Trujillo]” (qtd. in Köllmann 245). Urania’s story is an extended metaphor for a larger context of socio-political abuses. Vargas Llosa references the island’s colonial past in order to indicate that the Trujillo regime is one of numerous examples of abuse that have existed in the New World since the Discovery. Urania’s rape powerfully represents the symbolic and at times literal rape of America by colonial powers and the dictator Trujillo is an emblematic figure that denotes the numerous Latin American strongmen who have abused their respective nations.

More than a political statement, *La fiesta del Chivo* is the story of the Storyteller. Through the fictionalization of the past in the voice of his protagonist, Vargas Llosa repositions his concept of literature. Certainly, the text produces echoes of his earliest concept of literature, wherein the writer declared: “Nuestra vocación ha hecho de nosotros, los escritores, los profesionales del descontento, los perturbadores conscientes o inconscientes de la sociedad, los rebeldes con causa, los insurrectos irredentos del mundo, los insoportables abogados del diablo. [. . .] Ésta es la condición del escritor y debemos reivindicarla tal como es” (“Fuego” 136). Nevertheless, Vargas Llosa also endows Urania with his more recent positions on the writer’s vocation, thus giving life to a complex character who embodies her author’s creative theories. Together with her protagonist, Vargas Llosa seems to rediscover his confidence in the potency and place of a literature in a new post-revolutionary setting. As the writer employs theories that

resemble the views of one of post-colonialism's most eminent theorists, Vargas Llosa extends his narrative past the specific history of the Trujillo Era to a five-hundred-year search for identity that is both universal and powerfully specific. Regarding his concept of literature, Vargas Llosa seems to reconcile his disillusionments with the perceived impotency of his literature by suggesting that writing in a post-revolutionary setting can be equally rebellious.

Conclusion

Vargas Llosa's literary and political activities from the late-1980s to the present are difficult to evaluate because his concept of literature is currently evolving. As the writer also seems to suggest, criticism will be able to appraise Vargas Llosa's recent literary trends more acutely with the passing of time. Certainly, his concept of literature has been and remains in constant transition. At the beginning of the 1980s, Vargas Llosa began to read political theorists, such as Karl Popper, who modified his views on society and inspired his entrance into more explicit political activities. As Vargas Llosa started to accept the limitations of his role as a writer, he made a moral decision to run for the Peruvian presidency. The candidate's disappointing defeat at the hands of a man whom he would later describe as a dictator resulted in further disillusionment with the political system. Vargas Llosa's pessimism regarding the future of humanity moved his literature from a brief experimentation with eroticism to disturbing portrayals of indiscriminate violence. With the publication of *La fiesta del Chivo*, however, Vargas Llosa seems to have turned yet another page in the evolution of his concept of literature. As criticism has noticed, Urania recalls several of the basic notions of literature that Vargas Llosa

described in “La literatura es fuego.” And yet, she is distinct from former writer-protagonists. Using theories that resemble those of Frantz Fanon, Vargas Llosa establishes a post-revolutionary place for a literature that restores some of the rebellious characteristics of his writings in the 1960s.

One might conclude that Vargas Llosa’s theories on literature have completed a complicated literary cycle from Sartre’s original declarations on the revolutionary potential of literature to his own disillusionments with literary impotency to a new position for his writing based upon the post-colonial theories that he formerly denounced during the Algerian War for Independence. Vargas Llosa is currently at a critical crossroads, wherein his concept of literature vacillates between impotence and a newfound capacity for protest against the realities of the world. Should his views on literature continue Fanon’s model, then he must also consider the revolutionary implications of violence, which he undoubtedly has addressed in his forthcoming novel on the Irish revolutionary Roger Casement. Though Vargas Llosa still has not openly declared tolerance for violence as an acceptable form of revolutionary politics, his literature from this point forward will determine whether such a theoretical stance is indeed on the horizon.

CONCLUSION

From the publication of his first literary work, *La huida del inca* (1952), to his forthcoming novel *El sueño del celta* (2010), Vargas Llosa has depicted the most despicable faces of humanity and some of its most inspiring struggles to endure. Throughout the years, Vargas Llosa has also made great efforts to define the relationships between fiction and reality, civilization and barbarism, and, perhaps most germane to our discussion, literature and politics. With the advantage of distance, we are also able to review the literary contributions of one of the world's master storytellers in retrospect. Vargas Llosa's literary production has never been predictable, as he has continuously challenged the limits of his own canon. With surprising consistency, however, Vargas Llosa's most significant literary and political achievements have occurred at the end or commencement of each new decade: *Conversación en La Catedral* (1969), *La guerra del fin del mundo* (1980), his presidential campaign (1991), *La fiesta del Chivo* (2000), and, tentatively, *El sueño del celta* (2010). Despite my hesitance to divide artificially Vargas Llosa's extraordinarily cohesive literary canon into specific temporal periods, the following sections outline some of the most noteworthy conclusions that can be drawn from each decade of Vargas Llosa's prolific writing, including speculations as to the direction of his future narratives.

1952–1969

From the beginning, politics have been at the heart of Vargas Llosa's literary concerns. During this initial period in his career, Vargas Llosa believed that writing could

influence the political affairs of nations. His concept of literature was clearly based upon his dedicated readings of Jean-Paul Sartre. Specifically, Sartre's *What is Literature?* served as a handbook for Vargas Llosa's developing theories on the writer's vocation. Despite the fact that these years produced some of his most enduring narratives, it was also an apprentice period, wherein the young writer searched for models to develop his own views on literature's role in society. Believing that literature had revolutionary implications, and inspired by the theories of Sartre, Vargas Llosa conceptualized the writer's vocation as one that could accept no compromises. Sartre taught that writing was a tool that should be utilized consciously to counteract the maladies of this world; therefore, when Vargas Llosa's mentor determined that his literature was impotent in the revolutionary struggle, the emerging novelist experienced his first of a series of disillusionments that would significantly alter his views on literature and politics.

Following Sartre's confession to Madeleine Chapsal that his literature was useless before a dying child on the street, Vargas Llosa's concept of literature as revolution was in a crisis condition. Determined that Sartre's conclusions were temporary, he increased his insistence that literature had a role to play in combating socio-political abuses. As noted in "La literatura es fuego," Vargas Llosa believed that there was no room for conformity in literature. Nevertheless, with the passing of years, the Peruvian began to believe through personal experience that Sartre's statements regarding the insignificance of his literature in revolutionary concerns were valid. Despite his doubts in the 1970s, Vargas Llosa nonetheless held to his basic Sartrean beliefs for several years. Interestingly, the incompatibility of his literary theories and their practical application has inspired some of his most significant narratives and critical essays.

During Vargas Llosa's literary career, the fame of his first three novels built in crescendo. Once *La ciudad y los perros* was released it received immediate critical acclaim throughout the world, as it also secured Vargas Llosa a place as the up-and-coming star of what would soon develop into the Spanish American Boom. Such commendations were substantiated with the increased complexity of his second narrative, *La Casa Verde*. The fame of the developing novelist was only augmented by his political activities, making his reception speech of the Rómulo Gallegos Prize, "La literatura es fuego," a potent declaration of intent for his future narratives. By the time he wrote *Conversación en La Catedral*, however, Vargas Llosa was beginning to self-associate with his frustrated writer-protagonist Santiago Zavala. Despite his desires to contribute to revolution through his writing, Vargas Llosa soon began to comprehend that the freedom to write would not always be granted in the socialist societies that he supported. As critics wondered where Vargas Llosa's writing would lead him, his world suddenly changed. Due to the Padilla Affair and other confrontations with a Cuban Revolution that increasingly resembled Soviet models, Vargas Llosa was increasingly disillusioned with the possibility of creating a literature based upon his revolutionary ideals. Vargas Llosa's optimism for a clear correlation between his literary endeavors and political ideals was severely challenged in the early 1970s. These new realities led to a period of serious introspection that also resulted in new directions for his creative narratives.

1970–1981

During the 1970s, Gustave Flaubert was a significant counter to Vargas Llosa's literary discipleship to Sartre. Following the controversies of the Cuban Revolution,

Vargas Llosa sought answers with regard to the revolutionary potential of his literature. Realizing that theory and practice were distinct, Vargas Llosa opened his concept of literature to alternative views, the result being the publication of *La orgía perpetua*. Through his writings on Flaubert, Vargas Llosa learned that literature, if not revolutionary, could still be rebellious. Emma's transgressions against the social taboos of her time in *Madame Bovary* not only informed Vargas Llosa's shift toward social commentary in *Pantaleón y las visitadoras* and *La tía Julia y el escribidor*, but also emboldened the author to depart from his former literary standards in the face of severe criticism. Flaubert's influence was not as permanent as that of Sartre; nevertheless, Vargas Llosa's readings of *Madame Bovary* and its accompanying literary theories were crucial in the transition of his concept of literature from revolution to an increased emphasis on writing as transgressor of social norms.

During this time of turbulence, Vargas Llosa wrote *Pantaleón y las visitadoras* and *La tía Julia y el escribidor*, two short narratives that were notably distinct from his political masterpieces of the 1960s. These narratives were experimental in nature and transitional in function, thus establishing one of the early trends in Vargas Llosa's developing *oeuvre*. As the writer experienced opposition to his concept of literature, he often wrote what I have termed "intermediary" novels. These concise yet important narratives are creative sounding boards that served as intermediaries between Vargas Llosa and his own concept of literature. Indeed, through the conversations of his characters, he provided opportunities to creatively dialogue with himself. At the same time that Vargas Llosa discovered humor and a new autobiographical voice, he was rediscovering the writings of Gustave Flaubert. Distancing his writing from the literary

precepts of Sartre, these transition pieces enabled Vargas Llosa to explore new avenues that were not possible when he believed that his literature served a strict revolutionary purpose. Specifically, Sartre's notion that literature should necessarily speak to the contemporary concerns of a writer's own people dictated a clear direction for his earlier narratives. Vargas Llosa's first true diversion from this standard in the 1970s, however, ultimately led him to leave the contemporary Peruvian context for the Brazilian backlands in his creative rendering of the turn-of-the-century tragedy at Canudos. *La guerra del fin del mundo* is the culmination of this period and is arguably Vargas Llosa's magnum opus at present. This premiere historical narrative is a clear departure from his former contemporary Peruvian narratives. Through the pages of his epic novel, Vargas Llosa denies the fanaticism of ideology and confesses the extremes of his own political and literary theories during the 1960s. By the conclusion of the 1970s, Vargas Llosa began to speak out against Sartre as he also established the foundations of an independent concept of literature. Similar to the 1970s, the subsequent decade would bring its own challenges and disillusionments. As has been common in Vargas Llosa writings, such complications caused the writer to (1) search out new literary models through the writings of other authors, (2) experiment within the pages of his intermediary narratives, and (3) rearticulate new positions on literature in his most significant creative works.

1982–1992

Following the publication of *La guerra del fin del mundo*, Vargas Llosa continued his intermediary trend by publishing several shorter novels. Between 1984 and 1988, he wrote *Historia de Mayta*, *¿Quién mató a Palomino Molero?*, *El hablador*, and *Elogio de*

la madrastra. Each of these narratives explore distinct aspects of writing, including an increased use of metanarrative, a more complete development of writer-protagonists, and the aesthetics of eroticism. Perhaps most importantly, these intermediary narratives questioned the role of the writer and explicitly challenged three primary contrasts: (1) truth/fiction, (2) civilization/barbarism, and (3) writing/politics. Through the voices of his writer-protagonists, Vargas Llosa dramatized his deepest literary and political concerns more explicitly than before. Whereas he previously condemned Jean-Paul Sartre for his views on the conscious incorporation of a writer's perspectives in his or her creative literature, Vargas Llosa's writings during the 1980s seemed to model this concept of literature. *Historia de Mayta*, for example, has been interpreted by some critics as an overt political tract. Distinct from the intermediary novels of the 1970s, which were preparatory to some of his most impressive literary achievements, his writing in the 1980s escorted Vargas Llosa into professional politics. Certainly, a work such as *El pez en el agua*, which can be cautiously considered as an autobiographical novel in the tradition of *La tía Julia y el escribidor*, further indicating Vargas Llosa's preoccupation with literary impotence in political concerns. Though his political campaign was intended to place in action the reforms that mere words could not enact, Vargas Llosa's disappointing loss to Alberto Fujimori only compounded his frustrations, as the writer also became pessimistic with regard to the influence of politics.

As we revisit the 1980s and early 1990s, it seems that Vargas Llosa diverts from the patterns of previous and subsequent decades. His typical use of intermediary novels to prepare for his next work, for example, was interrupted by his entrance into professional politics, a decision that Vargas Llosa described as a moral obligation. During this period,

and certainly in the pages of novels such as *La guerra del fin del mundo* and *La fiesta del Chivo*, Vargas Llosa expressed his concern with Spanish American intellectuals who have comprehended the problems of this world and nonetheless gratify their vanity by contributing to them. Vargas Llosa's *great work* during this period, then, was a presidential campaign that he believed would appease the disappointments that he was experiencing with the failure of literature to produce socio-political reform. Moreover, instead of publishing a work on another writer's theories, as was the case with previous literary transitions, Vargas Llosa opted to explore his own life and literature through his creative memoir. Vargas Llosa's departure from his writing was indeed temporary, as *Lituma en los Andes* (1993) was published in the same year as *El pez en el agua*. Once Fujimori was declared president of Peru, however, Vargas Llosa entered yet another transitional stage in his writing and socio-political views, one that will be more completely understood with the passing of time.

1993–2000

Prior to the publication of *La fiesta del Chivo*, Vargas Llosa's next masterpiece narrative, he produced two markedly distinct novels, *Lituma en los Andes* and *Los cuadernos de don Rigoberto*. Whereas the later is a continuation of a previous writing period, and is a sequel to his first erotic experiment in *Elogio de la madrastra*, Vargas Llosa's reviving of his most recurrent protagonist in *Lituma en los Andes* indicates a frustration with the tendency of humanity toward violence. Violent acts have permeated the pages of Vargas Llosa's creative narratives; however, the indiscriminant nature of the violence in *Lituma en los Andes* evidences the extreme pessimism that the writer

experienced during the early 1990s. Despite his claims that the aesthetics of violence was not indicative of any advocacy of these types of actions, there is something distinct in his position that remains unresolved.

Vargas Llosa's publication of *La fiesta del Chivo* only complicates these concerns. Indeed, his frightening portrayal of the closing days of the Trujillo regime in the early 1960s harkens back to a historical period complete with the writer's most recurrent literary and political demons. Through his narrative, Vargas Llosa explicitly articulates his concerns with the failures of both literature and politics within corrupt societies. His principle protagonist, Urania Cabral, comes to represent her author's voice; however, it is not she, but violent revolutionary action, that removes the dictator Trujillo from power. Vargas Llosa affords Joaquín Balaguer a prominent role in the post-Trujillo political transition, as he also endows Urania with a post-revolutionary creative voice. Both of these examples suggest a new dynamic in Vargas Llosa's concept of literature that remains in a developmental stage. Similar to Jean-Paul Sartre's turn toward the theories of Frantz Fanon, his creative prodigy, Vargas Llosa, seems to have come full-circle to embrace the notions of revolutionary violence that he formerly denounced. We cannot state with certainty that Vargas Llosa used Fanon's theories to conceptualize *La fiesta del Chivo*; however, the similarities between Urania's struggle to liberate herself from the past through the articulation of her personal narrative and Fanon's views on a national literature in the post-revolutionary period merit our critical attention. During this important period, Vargas Llosa's theories were challenged on two fronts: the writer-politician had lost his faith in both literary and political endeavors. Urania's oral testimony, however, seems to provide answers to her author's extended conundrum. As

she reveals her disturbing life experiences, she ultimately adopts Vargas Llosa's pedagogical mode and even resolves to extend her conversation with the rising generation through the letters that she promises to write to her young niece. *La fiesta del Chivo*, then, seems to indicate that a literature that remembers the past does not have to be revolutionary to have an important place in the world.

2001–2010

Similar to other periods in Vargas Llosa's writing, his most recent novels indicate that the novelist's concept of literature is still a work in progress. Following the trends that have been discussed in the preceding sections, it seems that *El paraíso en la otra esquina* and *Travesuras de la niña mala* are significant intermediary novels that can direct our critical attention toward what I predict will be remembered as Vargas Llosa's next great work, the forthcoming *El sueño del celta*. *El paraíso en la otra esquina* is an impressive literary achievement that balances Vargas Llosa's literary and political uncertainties through the stories of two historical characters, Flora Tristan and her grandson Paul Gauguin. Though the two characters never meet, their stories interrelate, perhaps providing additional commentary on the capacity of literature to bridge generation gaps. Each of the protagonists searches for an ideal, one socio-political, as Tristan desires human equality, and the other creative, as the painter Gauguin seeks an artistic utopia. Though neither character is entirely satisfied with his/her quest, the title of Vargas Llosa's critical work on the writings of Victor Hugo, *La tentación de lo imposible* (2004), captures one of the apparent messages in the novel. Despite the uncertainties that he expressed previously, Vargas Llosa seems to have come to terms with his (dis)beliefs

regarding the capacity of art and political activity to have a significant influence on the world. Given Vargas Llosa's previous tendency to adopt the literary theories of certain novelists each decade, scholarship should pay particular attention to the influence of Hugo and *Les Misérables* on his forthcoming narratives.

Travesuras de la niña mala is a noteworthy novel, especially with regard to Vargas Llosa's evolving concept of literature. The narrative can be read as an allegory of the writer's relationship with literature. Depicting writing metaphorically as a *bad girl* who demands the attention of Ricardo Somocurcio, despite his best attempts to forget her, Vargas Llosa demonstrates the power of the writing vocation to at once enrich and complicate his life. As the two protagonists travel from Lima to Paris, London, Tokyo, and Madrid, we also travel as readers through some of the most critical moments in Vargas Llosa's life as a writer. During these adventures, the bad girl changes names and identities in the same way that his concept of literature has evolved over the past five decades of writing. Moreover, it is interesting to note that Vargas Llosa's protagonist is employed as a translator, perhaps indicative of another role for the writer, especially with regard to the need for interpretation (cultural translation) in the creation of his narratives. Based upon a tradition established in novels such as *La tía Julia y el escribidor* and *Historia de Mayta*, Vargas Llosa's depiction of his romantic and tortuous relationship with the bad girl is the novelist's most provocative dramaticization of his concept of literature to date.

Recently, Vargas Llosa has announced the forthcoming publication (November 3) of his most recent novelistic venture, *El sueño del celta*. According to press releases, the 464-page novel is based upon the political and literary activities of the Irish revolutionary

Roger Casement. Beyond the evident blend of Vargas Llosa's literary and political concerns in the fictionalization of a historical character who was not only politically active but was also a poet, the Peruvian further demonstrates that he is a citizen of the world as he traces Casement's revolutionary activities in several areas throughout the world. Casement's charge from the British government to investigate human rights conditions in the Congo perhaps reminded Vargas Llosa of his own Uchuraccay report. Whatever the case, Casement's resistance of imperialism and the misuse of power will provide rich material for Vargas Llosa's novel. Given the increase in Vargas Llosa's political writings in recent years (*Diario de Irak* [2003], *Israel/Palestina. Paz o guerra santa* [2006], etc.), it is reasonable to suppose that his new historical novel will present a political intrigue on par with *La fiesta del Chivo*. Certainly, all critical projections are predictions at best; however, it is likely that *El sueño del celta* will not only address some of the former disillusionments that Vargas Llosa has experienced throughout his writing career, but should also provide insights into a new position on violence and revolution.

On the morning of October 7, 2010, Vargas Llosa received a phone call from the Swedish Academy informing him that he had been selected as the most recent recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature. Though he has expressed in numerous interviews over the past three weeks that the announcement surprised him, critics and readers have expressed their enthusiasm for this long-awaited moment in his career. With the decision to award the Nobel Prize to Vargas Llosa "for his cartography of the structures of power and his trenchant images of the individual's resistance, revolt and defeat" ("Nobel"), it is certain that these themes will continue to permeate his future novels. Furthermore, they will now reach a more expansive audience, as his new status as a Nobel laureate will

undoubtedly inspire another generation to read his narratives. Moreover, it will be important for criticism to observe the influence of the prize on his concept of literature. Echoing Myron I. Lichtblau's conclusion that "Vargas Llosa's fiction, in synthesis, tries to answer the question of what happens when two different and separated worlds are placed in confrontation" (xvi), I also foresee that the world's most prestigious literary award will both revitalize Vargas Llosa's confidence in the potential influence of his literature and renew his political activities. As he does so, new complications will arise in his attempts to conceptualize a clear politics for his literature. What is certain is that Vargas Llosa's concept of literature—from "La literatura es fuego" to his highly anticipated Nobel Prize acceptance speech—has evolved from its revolutionary character in the 1960s to its current status as guardian of cultural memory throughout a tumultuous lifetime of writing that has been anything but impotent.

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