

Textual Interventions of Power and Ideology: A New-Historicist Study of Vargas Llosa's Left-Wing Novels

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Abstract

Drawing on New Historicist theory, this paper rereads Mario Vargas Llosa's first three novels *The Time of the Hero* (1963), *The Green House* (1966), and *Conversation in the Cathedral* (1969) as active interventions in the contest over Peruvian historical discourse. Following Stephen Greenblatt's "poetics of culture" and Hayden White's claim that history is constituted through emplotment, rhetorical figuration and ideological investment, I argue that these texts function as micro-historiographical machines: they calibrate narrative tempo, redistribute focalisation, and encode political violence in metaphoric regimes that manufacture socially circulating memories of the 1950s–1960s. Close analysis shows that polyphonic form simultaneously amplifies subaltern voices and folds their difference into a single, assimilationist timeline of modernity, thereby supplying a cultural script for the exclusionary logic that would characterise Peru's neoliberal 1990s. The constitutive contradiction of this "left-wing historiographical apparatus", denouncing power while reproducing its ideological surplus, guarantees the novels' continuing public value: after the collapse of grand narratives they preserve an open, self-interrogating historical consciousness that offers readers a reusable critical protocol for re-imagining Latin America's past and future.

Keywords

new historicism, Mario Vargas Llosa, left-wing narrative, historical discourse

1. Introduction

Since the 1980s, New Historicism has risen in European and American academia, becoming a major current in literary criticism and cultural studies. Initiated by Stephen Greenblatt, it first sought to reinterpret Renaissance literature and later expanded into broader investigations of history and culture (Greenblatt, 1980). Breaking with the limits of formalism, structuralism, and traditional historical materialism, New Historicism rejects the notion that literature merely mirrors history, insisting instead on their mutual constitution and ongoing negotiation. Literary texts, in this view, do not passively reflect the past; they collaborate alongside legal, religious, commercial, penal, and other social discourses in producing and interpreting it. As later scholars have summarized: Cultural Poetics assumes that texts not only document the social forces that inform and constitute history and society but also feature prominently in the social processes themselves which fashion both individual identity and the sociohistorical situation (Veenstra, 1995). Within this theoretical framework, history is no longer conceived as a transparent, linear, or objectively recoverable reality, but as a symbolic formation wrought through the contested interplay of multiple power structures and economies of symbolic capital.

In *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Hayden White observes that every historical narrative is processed through filters: emplotment, rhetorical figuration, ideological implantation.” (White, 2014). Rather than treating the novel as a “secondary archive” to be checked against the documents, we should regard it as a self-fashioning micro-historiographical machine: one that distributes the emotional weight of violent events through narrative tempo, decides who may speak and who must be silenced through focalization, and encodes revolution as storm or carnival through its metaphoric system. From this perspective, White’s lesson for literary studies is clear: once history itself is recognized as a narrative form, literature ceases to be history’s passive recipient and becomes an active producer of it.

Guided by this problematic, the study concentrates on three early novels by Mario Vargas Llosa—*The Time of the Hero* (1963), *The Green House* (1966), and *Conversation in the Cathedral* (1969)—and analyses them as micro-historiographical devices. Proceeding from White’s proposition that history operates as text, I investigate the assignment of emotional weight to violent events through narrative tempo, the distribution and withdrawal of narrative voice via focalisation, and the metaphorical coding of the Peruvian revolution as a reiterable, commodified affective archive. Rather than evaluating the novels’ factual accuracy against documentary sources, the paper traces the mechanisms by which these fictionalised left-wing histories circulated in the public sphere and contributed to the configuration of Latin America’s emotional regime and prospective memory of the 1950s.

2. Emplotment, Figuration, Ideology: The Tripartite Filter of White’s Historical Narrative

Within the theoretical horizon of New Historicism, history is no longer treated as an objective chain of facts but as a discursive construct whose very existence depends on linguistic and narrative modalities. Hayden White observes in *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* that historical writing and novelistic composition share the same narrative armature and linguistic protocols; consequently, what we call “fact” is not an objective recovery but a product of selection, excision, and rhetorical processing. White’s insight dissolves the traditional frontier that equates “history with truth” and “literature with fiction,” thereby offering literary studies a fresh methodological optic. As he succinctly formulates the mechanism (White, 2014):

If, in the course of narrating his story, the historian provides it with the plot structure of a Tragedy, he has “explained” it in one way; if he has structured it as a Comedy, he has “explained” it in another way. Emplotment is the way by which a sequence of events fashioned into a story is gradually revealed to be a story of a particular kind.

Historical and literary narratives mobilize an identical repertoire such as plot structures, rhetorical devices, ideological orientations to organize materials and manufacture meaning. Put differently, historical truth is not an extra-linguistic given but a narrative effect produced through language. Therefore historiography ceases to be a neutral re-presentation of the past; it becomes, instead, the precipitate of power relations and axiological investments operative in a given conjuncture. At the close of *Metahistory*, White (2014) radicalizes his own plea: modern historiography can emancipate itself from the paralysis of irony only by re-owning its ineradicable poetic ground:

If it can be shown that Irony is only one of a number of possible perspectives on history, each of which has its own good reasons for existence on a poetic and moral level of awareness, the Ironic attitude will have begun to be deprived of its status as the necessary perspective from which to view the historical process. Historians and philosophers of history will then be freed to conceptualize history, to perceive its contents, and to construct narrative accounts of its processes in whatever modality of consciousness is most consistent with their own moral and aesthetic aspirations.

Stephen Greenblatt extrapolates this licence into what he will later call a “poetics of culture” (Greenblatt, 1980). The boundary between the literary and the historical is not a firewall but a membrane: texts do not obediently reflect a prior social reality; they are agents in its continuous production. Consequently, the difference between writing history and writing fiction is no longer ontological but tactical, a divergent calibration of narrative tempo, rhetorical appeal, and ideological horizon.

This theoretical lens opens a decisive hermeneutic path into Vargas Llosa's early fiction. On the surface, *The Time of the Hero*, *The Green House*, and *Conversation in the Cathedral* recount cadet brutality, contraband along the jungle frontier, or the political disenchantment of a generation of intellectuals; at the level of enunciation, however, they are less reenactments of reality than machines for *manufacturing* history. By mobilizing polyphonic focalization, temporal dislocation, and splintered narration, Vargas Llosa exposes how "history" is ceaselessly retold and repossessed by competing subjects. The Peru that emerges in his pages is not a social reality lying along a single chronological line, but a symbolic territory carved up by rival narrative claims and power-saturated discourses (Zhang, 2022). In short, his novels perform the very historiographical property White articulates: history is never an object available for direct presentation, but an ongoing contest over narration—whoever secures the right to tell the story secures the power to shape what will count as reality.

New Historicism's reconceptualization of "history" is inseparable from its simultaneous re-evaluation of the traffic between power and discourse. The writer is neither the sovereign inventor of meaning nor a passive ventriloquist of ideology, and studies on Vargas Llosa repeatedly underscore his sustained renovation of narrative method. Literature is no longer an ivory-tower refuge from reality; it is a nodal point within circuits of power-laden discourse and an active agent in the continual reproduction of culture. As Gladieu (2013) analyses:

El arte de escribir podría definirse como el de no admitir fronteras en los modelos ni en la creación de personajes, para denunciar mejor las fronteras que levantan entre ellos los seres humanos en la realidad: es una protesta universal contra los límites impuestos por los hombres.

The refusal to observe formal borders becomes the precondition for exposing the social borders that partition Peruvian society. By practicing what White (2014) would call a strategic. "modal consciousness" (romance, satire, tragedy) and what Greenblatt (1980) would term "cultural poetics," Vargas Llosa's early novels do not simply illustrate power, the texts perform the very intervention they theorize: they turn narrative form into a protest against the limits imposed by men, thereby converting the act of writing into an episode within the ongoing history that it helps to bring into being.

Scholarly praise for Vargas Llosa's avant-garde experimentation is far from unanimous. In *The Green House*, for example, the simultaneous staging of disparate nationalities, ethnicities and religions appears to celebrate Peru's "pluralistic unity"; yet, as the essay "Mad Land, My Land" argues (Henighan, 2003), the novel in fact carries out a state-directed assimilation surgery. By folding the Amazon, its indigenous peoples and urban shantytowns into a single, linear timeline labelled "modern Peru," the text erases their cultures, crushes their individuals and itself becomes both accomplice and witness to that violence—an instance of literature actively reshaping society.

That fantasy is not an accidental by-product of narrative exuberance; it is the cultural armature of a larger political trajectory. Misha Kokotovic's archival essay traces Vargas Llosa's ideological arc from the 1960s—when he still spoke the language of the Latin-American Left—to his 1990 presidential campaign on a neoliberal platform, showing how the fiction steadily encodes "indigenous culture" as an obstacle that modernization must clear away. "Vargas Llosa's representation of native peoples," Kokotovic concludes (Kokotovic, 2001), "functions as a discursive precondition for the neoliberal state he would later propose". The jungle is thus doubly instrumentalized: first as a reservoir of primitive excess that validates the civilizing mission, and second as a rhetorical externality against which the minimalist night-watchman state can justify its own austerity logic.

Read through the New-Historicist prism of power-discourse-cultural production, the early novels are not mere reflections of political reality; they are interventions that help fabricate the reality they appear to describe. By allocating narrative legitimacy to some voices (the military engineer, the entrepreneurial mestizo, the brothel-owner) and withholding it from others, Vargas Llosa's texts expose the fissures of Latin-American society during the Cold-War conjuncture while simultaneously slipping into those fissures, sutured by a rhetoric of inevitable modernization. The famous time-shifts, internal monologues, and cinematic cuts are therefore more than stylistic virtuosity: they are the technical protocol through which the national archive is re-sorted, the symbolic capital of subaltern groups devalued, and the future rendered safe for market citizenship.

3. Vargas Llosa's Early Fictions in the Cross-currents of Latin-American Leftist Imaginaries

Mario Vargas Llosa, a central figure of the Latin-American literary "Boom," is known for the pronounced left-wing stance and historical concern that mark his early work. In that phase literature is never mere mimesis of Peruvian reality; it is an intervention that interrogates the very architecture of society. Through his narratives he exposes how militarism, religious authority and rigid social hierarchies crush the individual, foregrounding the plight of the marginalized and tracing the historical and cultural roots of structural injustice (Chen, 2011a). By wielding fiction as a political tool, Vargas Llosa's first novels function within the horizon of 1960s Latin-American leftist thought, simultaneously as testimony to real violence and as a probing question about the possibility of social transformation.

In mid-twentieth-century Latin America, the region's nations were caught in a protracted post-colonial transition. Politically, military regimes rose and fell in rapid succession, while state violence, the heavy hand of police and army, and entrenched class domination became everyday realities. Economically, dependent capitalism deepened internal inequalities, widening the chasm between rich and poor and eroding the living standards of both middle-class and popular sectors. Culturally, the legacy of colonialism collided with the urgent need for a modern national identity, plunging societies into acute anxiety over who they were. Against this backdrop, left-wing thought spread swiftly among intellectuals, which is Marxist class analysis, dependency theory's critique of global and domestic power, and liberation theology's call to fuse faith with social justice (Chen, 2011a). These currents supplied not only the analytical tools to denounce the status quo but also the self-definition of the intellectual as social critic and historical actor. It was within this crucible that Left critical languages, Marxist class analysis, dependency theory, liberation theology, acquired their rapid intelligibility, offering intellectuals not merely analytic tools but a historically ratified vocation: to speak from and for the fracture.

Reality is not the product of an ideological phantasm. It is the result of history. And history is something we have created ourselves (Nunn, 1987). The sentence, slipped into an early essay on *La ciudad y los perros*, condenses the wager of Vargas Llosa's first fiction: the violence of the Leoncio Prado Military Academy is not a timeless rite of passage but a historical artifact that can be unmade by the same collective agency that produced it. Mario Vargas Llosa, in his early creative phase, was deeply marked by this left-wing intellectual tide, displaying an acute sensitivity to history and politics. Having personally experienced life under militarist rule, he took part in political debates within intellectual circles and openly voiced support for socialist revolution—most notably expressing sympathy for the Cuban revolutionary model during the 1960s (Chen, 2011b). In this period he welded literary creation to social critique; his fiction repeatedly uses concrete settings—military academies, border communities, urban *barriadas*—to lay bare the structural violence of the state, the power of the armed forces, the expansion of capital, and the legacies of cultural colonialism.

Critical vocabulary soon emerged to codify this double office of novelist-cum-historian. Latin-Americanist scholars routinely invoke the notion of the "committed writer" (*Escritor comprometido*): one half devoted to the craft of narrative, the other to the exposure of power. The formulation is useful, yet it risks reifying an inside/outside that Vargas Llosa's own practice collapses. A more apt metaphor is supplied by an investigator Martos (2019) who compares the cumulative impulse of the oeuvre to Balzac's *Comédie humaine*:

El conjunto de la obra de Vargas Llosa es, a nuestro juicio, con sus torrentadas y sus meandros, equiparable al esfuerzo de Balzac en *La comedia humana*. Una suma, sin prisa y sin pausas, de la experiencia humana trasladada a la literatura. Si aceptamos este punto de vista, las grandes novelas como *La casa verde*, *Conversación en la catedral* o *La guerra del fin del mundo* son expresión depurada de un gran río de belleza y de palabras, que tiene sus épocas imponentes, y otras de aguas y palabras específicas, focalizadas en un tema o asunto particular, uno de los cuales es la investigación.

Methodologically, Vargas Llosa's writing enacts the classic "double identity" of the left-wing intellectual: on one hand he is a narrator and artist who fashions language into fiction; on the other he is a historical observer and social critic who uses literature to lay bare the workings of power and injustice. The interweaving of these roles turns his early works into both literary practice and ideological intervention—violence, hierarchy, desire

and oppression are not simply narrative content but tools for a critical re-mapping of Latin-American social structures. In short, his first fiction is at once the product of historical observation and the cultural embodiment of left-wing thought.

The three novels that anchor this phase—*The Time of the Hero* (1963), *The Green House* (1966) and *Conversation in the Cathedral* (1967)—display a marked left-wing orientation in theme and narrative architecture, tightening the link between literature and social critique. They foreground injustice, abuse of power and class oppression, and through specific narrative strategies convert the novel into a micro-historiographical device for probing history and social structure.

In *The Time of the Hero* the enclosed space of the military academy becomes a laboratory where the hierarchical military system is shown grinding down individual psyches and extending social violence. Polyphonic narration and non-linear time allow the reader to watch power operate from multiple angles: student hazing, corporal punishment by officers, the rigid codification of internal rank—all condense state violence into miniature. The novel indicts militarism while exposing the disciplined, centralized mechanisms that systematically curtail individual freedom across Latin-American societies. In this novel, class and identity become the most deeply concealed yet most powerfully charged elements of expression, Just as analyzed in *The Cambridge Companion to Mario Vargas Llosa*:

Given that the two working-class characters enjoy the privilege of first-person narratives, their consciousness is brought much closer to *that* of the reader. Moreover, the strand relating to Jaguar continues the longest and is the novel's paramount example of a hidden datum, as most readers are unable to reconcile its sensitive first-person narrator – whose identity is not revealed until the very end – with the brutal Jaguar observed in the core narrative and through the eyes of the other cadets.

The Green House widens the lens to the borderlands and their religious spaces, interlacing its portrait of brothels, missions and small-town settlements to show how capital, desire and power are woven into everyday life. Depictions of ecclesiastical authority and social convention expose the shaping force of cultural colonialism and ideology on personal identity, while also foregrounding the predicament of repressed groups. Through a dense network of symbols and metaphors Vargas Llosa binds collective conflict to individual fate, intensifying political critique within the novel's aesthetic design. Klarén (1972) argues that the book's fragmented narrative structure and multi-layered thematics of alienation lay bare a comprehensive crisis of humanity under Peru's colonial-capitalist violence, transforming *La casa verde* into a modernist epic of estrangement rather than a conventional Latin-American realist text.

Conversation in the Cathedral shifts the focus to the interface between intellectuals and the political arena. By juxtaposing private existence with social reality, the novel exposes the tension between political ideals, social inequality and moral dilemma. Through its multi-layered narration, subaltern groups, women and other marginalised voices are granted space within the text; this polyphonic strategy demonstrates Vargas Llosa's sensitivity to the distribution of social power and discourse and underscores literature's potential as an instrument of social critique. The cumulative effect is to transform the private act of remembering "*¿en qué momento se había jodido el Perú?*" (Vargas Llosa, 1993) into a public interrogation of the economic and symbolic violence that continues to underwrite post-dictatorial democracy.

Viewed from the perspective of New Historicism, Vargas Llosa's narrative practice exemplifies literature's active participation in the construction of history. Acts of violence, social conflict and political change are not merely reproduced; they are reconfigured through narrative structure, symbolic metaphor and focalisation to produce a historically contestable experience (Harney, 2001). In reshaping readers' emotional and cognitive grasp of social reality, the novels insert themselves into historical discourse and social critique. Vargas Llosa's work thus demonstrates that left-wing writing addresses not only institutional power but also the ways in which culture and affect are textually fashioned, opening up new possibilities for social memory and political imagination.

At the same time, Llosa's narrative strategy enacts a redistribution of discursive power. Constant shifts among multiple focalisers and non-linear temporalities juxtapose voices from different classes and gender positions, fracturing the monolithic official story. This formal experiment is itself a cultural-political act that contests hegemonic discourse from within the text. Consequently, when read through New Historicism, the

early novels cease to be mere political reportage or historical reflection and are redefined as cultural practices that actively construct history and enter the struggle over social meaning. By investing events with emotional and symbolic charge, the narratives invite readers not only to “know” reality but to participate emotionally and cognitively in its reconfiguration. Thus the critical force of Llosa’s fiction derives less from any external political stance than from the internal logic of narration itself; the novel becomes a competitor in historical discourse and a site of cultural praxis, demonstrating literature’s social agency and its capacity for intellectual intervention.

4. Narrative Oscillations, Metaphoric Regimes, and the Social Memory-Machine of Vargas Llosa’s 1960s Novels”

Building on the preceding overview of Vargas Llosa’s early work and its dialogue with Latin-American left-wing thought, this chapter turns to the concrete textual practices of his three major novels—*The Time of the Hero*, *The Green House*, and *Conversation in the Cathedral*—to examine how narrative strategy, symbolic metaphor, and multiple focalisation intervene in the construction of social and historical experience. Read through New Historicism, these texts are no longer treated as transparent reflections of reality; instead, they are analysed for their capacity to produce historical experience, orchestrate power-laden discourses, and shape social memory.

The discussion will address three interlocking questions. First, how do the novels use narrative tempo and the distribution of focalisation to lend emotional weight to scenes of social conflict and violence? Second, what symbolic and metaphoric mechanisms translate political and historical themes into publicly intelligible and affectively charged cultural experiences? Finally, how does Llosa’s polyphonic narration and his foregrounding of marginal subjects open discursive space for groups suppressed by official historiography, thereby participating in the reconfiguration of history and social meaning? This analytic framework reveals that the early novels not only articulate left-wing ideological critique but also enact literature’s active role in the making of history and social imagination.

The Time of the Hero is the most representative text of Vargas Llosa’s early career; its governing concern is the military academy as a sealed micro-society in which hierarchy, routinized violence, and the minute mechanics of power are made visible. The novel’s polyphonic narration and fractured chronology distribute focalization among cadets, instructors, and senior officers, forcing the reader to watch the same incidents from angles that never quite converge and to observe domination as it is engineered cell by cell (Kerr, 1983).

The sign of the “dog” converts Peruvian society into a vast training ground: whoever first believes the myth that “man is dominator and dog is dominated” is instantly issued a license to bite. The novel itself is the autopsy for that myth (Montes, 2011). Symbolically, the academy becomes a stand-in for the national social order and its disciplinary logic. Hazing rituals among cadets, the corporal punishment administered by faculty, and the immovable procedural code together expose the brutality inherent in military culture while refracting the penetration of state power into civil life. By calibrating narrative tempo and shuttling between viewpoints, Vargas Llosa gives violence an affective mass: the reader feels fear, shame, and suffocation, and recognizes the systemic deformation of personality that the power apparatus requires.

The Time of the Hero is not a mirror held up to militarism but a narrative reconstruction of historical experience. Rhythm and metaphor splice the violence of the barracks to the macropolitics of Peru, making literature an indispensable conduit for understanding the nation’s political machinery. The novel’s polyphony simultaneously carves out a discursive space for the cadets—an otherwise muted subaltern collectivity—thereby enacting literature’s capacity to intervene in the field of social utterance. The novel is therefore less a “cadet novel” than a metaphor of Peruvian social anatomy; through fictional invention Vargas Llosa exposes the mendacity and brutality embedded in official discourse, producing an “alternative historiography” whose perceptual accuracy outstrips the historical record certified by the state (Nunn, 1987).

The Green House maps the social life of Peru’s northern frontier, braiding capital, religious authority, and private desire into a single, palpable space (Moody, 1976). By shuttling between the town, the brothel, and the mission, the novel’s multiperspectival, spatially interlaced narration exposes how institutional norms penetrate everyday gestures and intimate feeling while laying bare the deep grooves of inequality that structure

the region.

From a New Historicist vantage the text does not merely reproduce the borderlands; it re-engineers historical experience itself. Shifts in narrative tempo, the symbolic loading of space, and the constant redistribution of focalization convert the traffic among politics, culture, and individual livelihood into an intelligible social diagram. Literature thus becomes an instrument for grasping both the architecture of power and the circuitry through which it circulates. The novel's polyphony simultaneously carves out channels of enunciation for groups—rubber tappers, indigenous traders, prostitutes—routinely muted by official discourse, demonstrating literature's capacity to intervene in the public field of memory and meaning. Yet this apparent generosity of voice is not synonymous with cultural pluralism, just as the commentators have noted (Piñeyro, 2008):

... aunque el discurso narrativo de *La Casa Verde* muestre la explotación que sufren los jíbaros, no se pudo verificar un vínculo con una visión del mundo tolerante para con otras culturas. Tampoco pueden mostrarse valoraciones que remitan a la ideología indianista. Por el contrario, las connotaciones ideológicas remiten a una tradición nutrida por postulados marxistas y liberales que aboga por la asimilación de etnias y comunidades autóctonas con el propósito de transformar a sus miembros en trabajadores o empresarios en una sociedad dominada por los valores de la civilización occidental.

Consequently, *The Green House* stages the contradictions of a left-liberal project that exposes exploitation while remaining tethered to a civilizational teleology: the novel amplifies subaltern speech only to fold it into the long-term horizon of assimilationist modernity.

Conversation in The Cathedral centers on the intellectual as both narrator and symptom, staging the tense circuitry between private desire, political idealism, and social power. By juxtaposing domestic scenes with public political events, the novel renders the mutual inscription of class, gender, and political identity, allowing the reader to watch institutional power function in real time and at close range. Read through New Historicism, the text is less a reflection of dictatorship than a fabrication of historical experience: narrative strategy and symbolic compression braid social power, cultural norm, and individual act into a single representational field, turning literature into an active site of meaning-production (Vidal, 1987). The novel's polyphony and its foregrounding of marginalized figures open a discursive space for voices otherwise compressed within the social hieroglyphic, demonstrating the continuing social agency and cultural-political value of Vargas Llosa's writing.

Set in Lima during the Odría dictatorship (1948–1956), *Conversation in The Cathedral* presents “a closed circuit of defeat from which no one escapes.” Santiago, the self-defined “failed rebel,” discovers through endless self-interrogation that he has always already been a cog in the machine; whether aristocrat Fermín Zavala, henchman Ambrosio, prostitute Queta, or journalist Carlitos, every character is swallowed by the same social apparatus whose gears are precision-machined from corruption, cynicism, sexual repression, and violence. The novel keeps asking, “¿En qué momento se jodió el Perú?” and answers with the brutal axiom (Harney, 2001), thereby elevating the story from a specific historical tragedy to a pathological specimen of modernity itself: justice absent, hope exhausted, exits sealed, leaving only a labyrinth of anomie for characters to wander forever.

These texts do not merely replicate historical events; they participate in the construction of history and social meaning through narrative and symbolic praxis, disclosing literature's social agency. Vargas Llosa's early fiction fuses left-wing commitment with literary form, producing works that function simultaneously as critical anatomy of Latin American power structures and as generative sites of historical experience and cultural memory (Soto, 1990). Such practice demonstrates that literature is at once aesthetic artifact and instrument of social engagement and historical intervention, offering new protocols for grasping the politics, culture, and history of the region.

Yet the later 1970s witnessed a conspicuous ideological turn (Chen, 2011b): Vargas Llosa gradually moved from the Marx-inflected leftism of his early years toward a liberalism grounded in market individualism. This shift mirrors both the author's evolving political experience and the broader reconfiguration of Latin American culture and international politics. Even so, his sensitivity to institutional violence, social injustice, and the predicament of marginal groups remains undiminished. Late works continue to scrutinize the same pathologies;

what changes are the narrative protocols, the symbolic economy, and the manner in which historical experience is processed, resignified, and delivered to the reader.

Vargas Llosa's ideological turn after the 1970s furnishes a unique occasion to re-examine the relays among literature, history, and power. The shift does not mark a simple retreat from political engagement; rather, it recalibrates the modalities of narrative intervention (Pope, 1978). Late works retain their status as active social utterances, but they now operate through more intricately layered polyphony, a heightened aestheticization of symbolic economies, and an oblique, often ironic, processing of historical events. In so doing, they demonstrate both continuity and innovation in literature's participation within the contested arena of cultural memory.

Taken as a whole, Vargas Llosa's trajectory encapsulates the Latin-American passage from modernist commitment to post-modern skepticism: the move from "literature as instrument of knowledge" (Sartrean commitment) to "literature as instrument of doubt" (Camus-tinged suspicion); the acknowledgement that the failure of totalization is at once aesthetic, political, and philosophical (Sabine, 1998): we can no longer believe that a single narrator, a single ideology, or a single historical version can explain everything.

Consequently, the late novels do not abandon the field of social discourse; they re-enter it under new contractual terms. By exposing the fissures inside every master narrative, they keep open the possibility of an unfinished, self-interrogating historical consciousness. In this sense, Vargas Llosa's career offers a privileged laboratory for observing how Latin-American narrative continues to fabricate, fracture, and refashion the region's cultural memory long after the grand récits have forfeited their monopoly on truth.

5. Conclusion

Guided by New Historicism, this study has reread Vargas Llosa's three early novels of the 1960s and demonstrated that they do not passively reflect Peruvian reality but actively intervene in the contest over historical discourse and the shaping of emotional regimes. By calibrating narrative tempo, reallocating focalisation and charging events with metaphor, the texts translate scenes of violence into repeatable, circulate social memories, thereby exposing literature's generative role in the production of "historical truth".

Yet the investigation also uncovers a constitutive paradox within this "left-wing historiographical machine": while polyphonic writing opens channels for marginal voices, it ultimately folds indigenous and subaltern difference into a single, assimilationist timeline of modernity, thus furnishing a cultural script for the exclusionary logic that would characterise the neoliberal 1990s. Vargas Llosa's narrative experiment becomes emblematic of the Cold-War Latin-American intelligentsia's shared dilemma. Caught between denouncing power and reproducing it, literature cannot fully escape its own ideological surplus.

It is precisely this self-fissuring, however, that guarantees the works' continuing public value: once grand narratives collapse, the novels preserve an open, self-interrogating historical consciousness by formal means, offering readers an "unfinished cognitive toolkit". In this sense, Vargas Llosa's early fiction functions not only as a left-wing testimony but also as a reusable critical protocol reminding us that history is never closed, discourse is always re-arrangeable, and literature remains one of the arenas where the future is fought for.

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Conflicts of Interest

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