

THE JOURNALISTS OF MARIO VARGAS LLOSA

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— Abstract—

In Mario Vargas Llosa's novels a few journalist characters can be found. Sometimes they are just part of the environment, but at times they are just an important role in his work's development, for example, in *Conversation in the Cathedral* (1969), *Captain Pantoja and the Special Service* (1973), *Aunt Julia and the Scripwriter* (1977) and *The War of the End of the World* (1981), the perception of these novels does not necessarily converge with what Vargas Llosa thinks about them, since the novel transfigure the events and includes points of view which are not those of the author, who is interested on the verisimilitude of the his stories. These pages explore the journalists as characters, as well as journalism in press and on radio, in some of the Peruvian Nobel Prize's novels.

Keywords

Journalists; journalism; literature.

Mario Vargas Llosa has combined his writing career with that of collaborator of newspapers, radio and television stations. His first job, at age 15, was a reporter in Lima's newspaper *La Crónica*. In the three months that he worked for that medium, he had the opportunity to learn about the mannered style of the news of those years and the editors who made them possible; who were more devoted to parties than to journalistic and creative work: "There I learned, he shares in *A fish in the water*, what was journalism [...] and for the first and last time, I had a bohemian life"(Vargas Llosa [hereinafter VL], 1993: 203).

Those months of journalistic activity would serve the novelist during the composition of *Conversation in the Cathedral*, in whose plot a law student who becomes a reporter struggles to maintain his convictions amid typewriters, news of murdered and persecution of rebels.

He was 16 years old when he moved to Piura. There he collaborated in another newspaper, *La Industria*, where he wrote reports, published interviews, made political columns and even poems.

After a brief period in which he worked as a clerk to finance his law studies, he was hired in Lima as editor of *Turismo* magazine. With the salary he earned, about 400 soles per number, he recalls in *A fish in the water*, he could buy cigarettes and pay for *Les Temps Modernes* by Sartre, and *Les Lettres Nouvelles* by Maurice Nadeau. He collaborated for the clandestine newspaper *Cahuide*, a publication that set out to disseminate socialist ideas and denounce the military regime of Odría, Apra and Trotskyists. Then he founded *La Democracia*, a newspaper that was also critical but less orthodox.

Shortly after, in the sixties, the author of *The puppies* settled in Europe. In Paris he collaborated with Radio France International and, from the following decade, began to write weekly and fortnightly columns for various newspapers, including *El País*.

In this way, it can be seen that Vargas Llosa has been linked to journalism all his life, whether as editor, head of information, columnist, even as an interviewer and host of a television program in Peru, so it does not seem strange that through his narrative characters appear linked to the media.

2

In the first three works of Vargas Llosa (*The City and the Dogs*, *The Green House* and *The Puppies*), the mention of newspapers and journalists is

tangential. In *The City and the Dogs* (1963) it is scarcely mentioned that old teachers prefer to read newspapers than to teach, and that radio is used to capture dance music.

In *The Green House* (1966), a novel where stories of murders, prostitutes, religious, bohemians, *aguarunas*, criminals and corrupt politicians are interlaced, the newspapers are just sheets to carry the "social gossip" (VL, 1966: 65) of the Piura society and to publicize the crimes of *Fushía*, the Japanese smuggler of the Amazon. In this novel, newspapers are mentioned barely 14 times, but as an object to be enumerated, like chairs, pans or books. In his story *The puppies* (1967), the radio serves to entertain the dead hours, as well as to listen to the songs of Dámaso Pérez Prado.

On the other hand, the following four works explore the details of the journalist.

3

Of the aforementioned novels, the one that delays in making the most detailed portrait of the journalist is *Conversation in the Cathedral*, which narrates in turn four stories located during the government of Manuel Apolinario Odría (1948-1956), a stage where a strict control of radio stations, magazines, newspapers and news agencies in Peru was held.

The novel presents an authentic reference: Santiago Zavala is Vargas Llosa himself. Luis Becerra Ferreira, in real life, is Becerrita in the novel, and Carlitos is Carlos Ney Barrionuevo: the three were reporters for *La Crónica*.

Zavalita (or Varguitas according to the diminutive that Julia Urquidí Llosa, his first wife, later used when publishing *Lo que Varguitas no dijo*) is a law student, Marxist, rebel and opponent of Odría, who as to not depend on the support of his bourgeois family decides to become a journalist. In this profession he is trapped by bohemianism and mediocrity: "Drunken parties without conviction, Zavalita, powders without conviction, journalism without conviction. Debts at the end of the month, a slow, inexorable immersion in invisible dirt purge" (VL, 2007: 448).

It was enough for Vargas Llosa to work three months at *La Crónica* to learn about the permanent bohemian environment in which the reporters of the time performed their work. *Conversation in the Cathedral* has that name because it takes place precisely in the canteen called La Catedral, since "it had a huge door" (Barrionuevo en Méndez, 2009).

Although the Peruvian Nobel Prize generally starts off of autobiographical events to develop his novels, he always adapts and deforms the characters and circumstances, as befits any story, since it does not resort to truthful facts but is based on principles of credibility. Thus, in real life he starts as a reporter not to flee from a bourgeois family, as in the story of yore, but to be self-sufficient and get away from a parent who limits his freedom and makes his life bitter.

In *La Crónica*, Vargas Llosa meets Carlos Ney Barrionuevo, a journalist with aspirations of writer and poet, who had read a lot, especially modern literature, and had published poems in the newspaper's cultural section (VL, 1993: 2012). He quickly becomes his literary "director":

I owe my literary education to Carlitos Ney more than all my school teachers and most of the ones I had in college. Thanks to him I knew some of the books and authors that would mark with fire my youth -like *Man's fate* and *Man's hope* by Malraux, the North American novelists of the Lost Generation, and especially Sartre, of whom, one afternoon; he gave me the stories of *The wall*, in the edition of Losada prologued by Guillermo de Torre.

But, even more than what he made me read, I owe it to my friend Carlos Ney, during those bohemian nights, to let me know everything that I did not know about books and authors that were out there, in the vast world, without me even knowing that they existed; and made me understand the complexity and richness of literature; that for me, until then, was just fiction of adventures and some classical or modernist poets (VL, 1993: 213).

This way, Carlitos figures in the novel as a passionate writer, great reader of literature, caught in a pitiful job, as Vargas Llosa describes what journalism is like in his novels. In *A fish in the water*, referring to Carlos Ney, the author says that because of Ney's sensitivity and intelligence he expected him to publish a book of poems where he revealed the enormous talent that he seemed to hide:

Well, the truth is that, like Charlie Ney, I have seen other friends, who seemed called to be the princes of our literary republic, go inhibiting and withering, for that lack of conviction, that premature and essential pessimism that is the disease par excellence, in Peru, for most of those worth defending themselves from mediocrity, the impostures and frustrations offered by intellectual and artistic life in such a poor environment (VL, 1993: 214).

Both the character of the novel and the character in real life are immersed in the vortex of the daily note, the daily haste and the particular conflicts -and sometimes so insignificant- of journalism. And along that path Zavalita marches, always with the desire to return to the university, to conclude his career as a lawyer, to do something transcendent, but pressured by the constant demands of newspaper information and the demands of his wife.

Becerrita, on the other hand, finds his fulfillment in journalism. His is the red note, the truculent news, of quartered and hanged men, and women of bars and brothels: "Becerrita got up, lived and slept between murders, robberies, embezzlements, fires, robberies; he had lived for a quarter of a century with stories thieves, whores, bastards" (VL, 2007: 408).

The character in the real world was called Luis Becerra Ferreira, and according to *A fish in the water*, Vargas Llosa had to add little to make him the protagonist of the novel: he had "acid and granulated eyes, in perpetual vigilance, his shorn and shiny terns, smelling of tobacco and sweat, lapels full of stains and the microscopic knot of his greasy tie" (VL, 1993: 206).

With that stamp, says the author of *The perpetual orgy*, it was easy to guess that the head of the police page was a citizen of hell. He was flattered and feared in brothels "because scandalous news in *La Crónica* meant the fine or closure of the premises" (VL, 1993: 207). That's why he did not pay in the canteens either. Ney himself recalled in an interview with *Caretas* that on the alcohol tours he accompanied the chief of the police department, no one charged him: "They all shouted with emotion and kissed Becerrita. They idolized him. He took me to the second, to the third, to the seventh block. None charged him. Not even the fagot Carlota. Becerrita! -he shouted and made out with him" (Méndez, 2009).

For the historian Juan Gargurevich, the rogue Becerrita of *Conversation in The Cathedral* has little to do with the journalist of flesh and blood: "Luis Becerra Ferreira was a great chronicler of red notes and did not know how to deal with the pain of others, as supposedly Vargas Llosa describes him" (Gargurevich, 2005: 88).

Milton Von Hesse is Milton in the novel and favorite victim of the police chief. Becerra made jokes at his expense and pursued him, gun in hand, throughout the office: "One of those times, before the general horror, he missed a shot that was to be embedded in the cobwebs on the roof of the newsroom," writes Vargas Llosa in his memoirs (VL, 1993: 203).

According to Gargurevich, Milton was offended by the novel (2005:85) and expressed it through an article that he published under the pseudonym of Enrique Elías B. His anger was perhaps due to the fact that in *Conversation* he only appears in accommodations and canteens.

Maldonado (Alfonso Delboy) and Norwin (Norwin Sánchez Genie) have the same luck in the novel: they spend their free time between liquor and beer. On the other hand, the photographer Periquito (Félix Dávila), in the middle of the bohemian, photographs destroyed and hanged corpses. His camera is made for blood, for the morbid and for the violent spectacle.

The director of *La Crónica*, Mr. Vallejo, and the deputy director, Arispe, belong to another world. They do not coexist in the bars with the reporters. They are dedicated to reviewing the texts and ensuring that the newspaper is published on time.

Vallejo is a man rooted in reality and different from bohemian journalists, "very tame, very candid, very correct" (VL, 2007: 254). Journalism, for him, is a profession that requires dedication, is the worst paid and "the one that gives more regrets, too" (VL, 2007: 250).

He is in charge of instructing Zavalita, a novice reporter, with the basic "w" of journalism and the structure of the inverted pyramid:

All the important data summarized in the first three lines, in the lead, –Mr. Vallejo said lovingly–. That is: two deaths and five million losses is the provisional balance of the fire that last night destroyed much of Casa Wiese, one of the main buildings in downtown Lima; firefighters dominated the fire after eight hours of risky work. Do you see?

(...) Then you can color the news, –Mr. Vallejo said–. The origin of the accident, the anguish of the employees, the statements of the witnesses, etc. (VL, 2007: 250).

Carlitos, who knows the underworld and the reality of Lima's journalism, clarifies to Zavalita that the real condition for being a journalist is not knowing what the lead is, "but being a scoundrel, or at least knowing how to pretend to be one" (VL, 2007 : 254).

Such journalism, trapped in mediocrity, is a profession apt for ruffians. The few men with values that believe in it succumb to the insolence, routine

and information control of the State. "Journalism is not a vocation but a frustration" (VL, 2007: 277), says Carlitos.

–And why have not you left journalism? –Asked Santiago. You could look for something else.

–You come in and you do not go out, it's the quicksand, –Carlitos replied, as if walking away or falling asleep–. You go sinking, you go sinking. You hate it but you cannot get rid of it. You hate it and, suddenly, you are willing to do anything to get a scoop. To spend your sleepless nights, to get into incredible places. It's a vice, Zavalita (VL, 2007: 288).

Arispe is the one in charge, the one that gives orders of information, the one that has the spaces in the newspaper and the one that hierarchizes. According to Juan Gargurevich, in real life, Arispe was Gastón Aguirre Morales, "a gentleman without fault; he was a man of multiple respects both to his subordinates and to his directors" (Gargurevich, 2005: 89). He addressed his reporters with a "monsieur".

And that "monsieur" appears as a refrain in the work. Each order, Arispe closes them with a "monsieur".

Although Vargas Llosa alters the biographical data of his models to turn them into believable inhabitants of the fiction, the journalists of *Conversation in the Cathedral* bear great resemblance to those of real life, perhaps because there were not many changes to be made to an accommodating journalism with power, and submerged in addiction and bohemian.

4

In the story *Aunt Julia and the Scripwriter*, Vargas Llosa pays homage to radio soap operas. The very structure of the book presents the basic characteristics of that radio genre –tremors, grandiloquence, melodrama– that had an extraordinary audience in Hispano-America between the 1940s and the 1970s.

The women fell in love with the actors' voices and the men of the actresses, because they did not know that behind that sweet, passionate and angelic voice was a mature woman or because they ignored that grave sound of the strong man belonged in reality to a diminutive and puny artist:

Declining and hungry actresses and actors, whose youthful, caressing, crystalline voices differed terribly from their old faces, their bitter mouths and their tired eyes, "The day that television is installed in Peru, there will be no

other way for them than suicide", Genaro Jr. predicted, pointing to them through the study's glass, where, as in a large fish tank, script in hand, they could be seen gathered around the micro, ready to start chapter twenty-four of "La familia Alvear". And, in fact, what a disappointment those housewives who were moved with the voice of Luciano Pando would have taken if they had seen his disproportionate body and his squinting eyes; and what a disappointment the retirees to whom the rhythmic rumor of Josefina Sánchez awoke memories, if they had seen her double chin, her moustache, her flapping ears, her varicose veins. But the arrival of television in Peru was still remote and the discreet sustenance of the radioteatral fauna seemed, for the time being, assured (VL, 2010: 8-9).

Interleaved with the main story about his love affair with Aunt Julia, his wedding and the various works in his student life, Vargas Llosa presents several stories that could work as radio soap operas: a priest who's answer to everything is fighting, a girl who is pregnant by his own brother and a father who is beaten to death by his daughters.

Radio soap operas are the background against which national life and private life run. His grandparents, his aunts and even the president of the republic, Manuel Odría, follow with passion the daily dramas of *Radio Panamericana*, where the narrator makes cuts or news bulletins of five minutes.

From his office at *Radio Panamericana*, the journalist observes the people's contagious enthusiasm for the radio shows imported from Cuba, the great exporter of melodramatic radio stories, such as *El derecho de nacer*, which made thousands of Latin Americans cry.

I suspected that the radio shows were imported, but I was surprised to learn that the Genaros did not buy them in Mexico or in Argentina, but in Cuba. They were produced by the CMQ, a sort of radio-televise empire governed by Goar Mestre [...]. I had heard so much about the Cuban CMQ from radio announcers, entertainers and operators –for whom thought filmmakers' Hollywood time was something mythical– that Javier and I, once while having coffee at the Bransa, we had spent a good time fantasizing about that army of polygraphs that, in the distant Havana of palm trees, paradisiacal beaches, gunmen and tourists, in the air-conditioned offices of the Goar Mestre city, had to produce, eight hours a day, in silent typewriters, that torrent of adulteries, suicides, passions, meetings, inheritances, devotions, coincidences and crimes that, from the Caribbean island, spread throughout Latin America, crystallized in the voices of the Lucianos Pandos and the Josefinas Sánchez, exciting the afternoons of grandmothers, aunts, cousins and retirees in each country (VL, 2010: 9).

In 1955, year in which Vargas Llosa locates his story, *Radio Panamericana* had been on air for 2 years and was experimenting with its programming: it presented live shows, musical spaces, news programs, newflash and, of course, radio soap operas.

With the freedom the novel allows, the author goes so far as to say that Genaro Delgado and his son, also named Genaro -the owners of *Panamericana*- bought the scripts of the radio soap operas to CMQ of Havana by kilograms, because it was a measure less tricky than the number of pages or words:

But this system created problems. The texts were plagued by Cuban idioms, which, minutes before each broadcast, Luciano, Josefina and their colleagues translated to Peruvian as they could (always wrong). On the other hand, sometimes, on the way from Havana to Lima, in boats or airplanes, or in customs, the typed reams suffered deterioration and whole chapters were lost, humidity made them illegible, they were misplaced, devoured by mice from the Radio Central store. As this was noticed only at the last minute, when Genaro senior distributed the scripts, distressing situations arose. The issues would be resolved by skipping the lost chapter or in serious cases, making Luciano Pando or Josefina Sánchez sick for a day, so that in the next twenty-four hours they could patch up or reconstruct the grams of kilos disappeared (VL, 2010: 10).

In that scenario of radio soap operas, with a public of insatiable appetite for the genre, Genaro Jr. discovers Pedro Camacho, in La Paz, Bolivia, a prodigious screenwriter of radio plays.

Genaro takes him to Lima, where the "Bolivian and artist", as the writer likes to present himself, creates several successful radio soap operas. *Radio Panamericana* is filled with stories set in Peru that conquer audiences and bring Camacho to stardom, but the artist, who says he does not work for glory, but for the love of man, shies away from crowds, autographs and interviews, which is evident with a sign placed in his cubicle written by himself: "Journalists are not welcome nor are autographs granted. The artist works! Respect him!" (VL, 2010: 95).

The writer is completely dedicated to his work, writes all day, without breaks, with just a few hours free on Sundays, so as not to be distracted from his artistic creations. He is made for immortality and maintains an unconcealed contempt towards the public:

The local polygraphy has started to harass me, and if I do not put a stop, soon there will be queues of listeners out there –pointing out with disdain the Plaza San Martín–, asking for photographs and signatures. My time is gold and I cannot lose it in nonsense (VL, 2010: 95).

So many hours dedicated to writing lead Pedro Camacho to mix the characters. He changes their identity. He kills them. He makes them resurface without previous warning. Finally, the cataclysm: all die derailed or in infinite earthquakes.

The writer inhabits in a world of fiction. It is the mockery, along with the radio station, of rival journalists and even the audience itself. There is no other choice but to lock him up in an asylum and, in order to recover the public from tears, return to the Cuban scripts, acquired by kilogram.

Camacho, in the last pages of the novel, is an elderly person who does not remember his era of glory on the radio and survives as a *dater* that is to say as a collector of information about the wounded and murdered so that the editors can put notes with blood.

In the seventies, radio soap operas, radio shows and radio serials would leave their reign precisely to *telenovelas* and television series. Many of those radio soap operas, such as *La indomable* or *El derecho de nacer*, would be transformed into telenovelas with a plethora of stars that will flood the television sky.

5

Germán Láudano Rosales, the Sinchi, is a radio journalist grandiloquent, scruffy, cheesy, blackmailing and auctioneer of pathological praise. He describes himself as the "Terror of corrupted authorities, scourge of venal judges, whirlwind of injustice, voice that picks up and lavishes the popular palpitations" (VL, 2006: 124).

The Sinchi represents the opposite values to those of Pantaleón Pantoja, the logistics officer in charge of establishing in the Amazon a brothel for the troop of the Peruvian Army, which in military terms receives the name of Service of Visitors for Garrisons, Border Positions and Allied (SVGPFA).

Methodical, honest and disciplined, Pantoja turns the Service of Visitors –as prostitutes call it, *Pantilandia*– into a model of efficiency and entertainment organization for adults.

Success implies obstacles and these arise from the army itself, especially from a military chaplain, from the town of Iquitos and the media, with outstanding participation of the announcer and host of the program *La Voz del Sinchi*, of Radio Amazonas.

A company with so many battle fronts starts to march towards the drift. The Sinchi starts the first attack; looks for Pantaleón Pantoja to offer his advertising “services” to Pantilandia, because “if I point you out, the Service of Visitors will not last a week and you will have to leave the city of Iquitos. It's the sad reality, my friend” (VL, 2006: 125).

Threats, blackmail and praise are Sinchi resources, because his program, he reiterates, has a cyclonic force that “knocks out judges, marriages, what it attacks is disintegrated. For a few miserable suns, I am willing to defend radially the Service of Visitors and its creative brain; to fight the great battle for you” (VL, 2006: 126).

Pantoleón Pantoja does not shrink and dismisses the Sinchi by shoving him away. “Hey, do not kill yourself, do not be unconscious, I'm a superman in Iquitos (...). Let me go, what does this mean, listen, you will regret it, Mr. Pantoja, I came to help you. I am your friend!” And the forceful response of the officer in charge: “I prefer problems rather than giving in to dirty blackmail” (VL, 2006: 127).

The crusade for the progress and morality of Iquitos from the microphones of *La Voz del Sinchi* starts. He attacks Pantaleón Pantoja and his “hetairas”, “shameless sluts” or simply “prostitutes, as to not speak with euphemisms” because they aggravate “the most holy thing that exists, such as family, religion and barracks of the defenders of our territorial integrity and of the sovereignty of the Homeland” (VL, 2006: 171).

Criticism would disappear by punctual payment to the Sanchi. Thus, if Pantaleón collaborated with a quota, instead of lashing out against the Service of Visitors, it would justify that the Peruvian Army had a hobby and vent, since no one can live “in widowed chastity”. The Sinchi asks –demands– that the officer in charge be decorated with the Order of the Sun. The reasons: “For the praiseworthy work he does in pursuit of the satisfaction of the intimate needs of the sentinels of Peru” (VL, 2006: 213).

With the disappearance of the Service of Visitors and the transfer of Pantaleón Pantoja to the garrison of Pomata, the Sinchi remains without a patron: “there is no one to defend and nobody eases me –hits his belly,

twists, the Sinchi flicks his tongue—. There is a general conspiracy to make me die of hunger" (VL, 2006: 280).

The Sinchi symbolizes the journalist who uses a microphone to defame, but who is willing to reverse his criticism and praise the abjection by periodic delivery of money.

Vargas Llosa remembers with humor in *A fish in the water* that when he carried out his presidential campaign in Loreto, Peru, the government used his work *Captain Pantoja and the Special Service* to say that he had offended the Loreto woman with the military brothel, and the worst, he writes, was that his defender in the city's only opposition radio station was an announcer similar to his Sinchi character who believed "that the best way to do it was through a passionate apology of prostitution, to which he dedicated several programs" (VL, 2006: 115).

The Sinchi belongs to a huge legion of journalists who survive in many radio stations scattered by our continent.

6

It is not gratuitous that the journalist who covers the Canudos massacre in *The War of the End of the World* is short-sighted, and that in the bloodiest moment, he cannot see anything because his glasses have been broken.

With this character, Vargas Llosa presents an encrypted idea: the journalist, no matter how hard he tries to understand reality, will always offer a partial version of the facts, an often myopic version of the reality he inhabits. Once you have broken your glasses, you have to see through the eyes of others to tell "his truth". The journalist can see through a woman and a dwarf. He completes his picture with imagination: "But even though I did not see them, I felt, I heard, I smelled the things that happened," –said the journalist–. And, the rest, I guessed it" (VL, 1981: 269).

He is the caricature of the journalist. A scarecrow badly dressed, ungainly, skinny, and myopic. With bottle bottom lenses that, to top it off, take notes with a goose feather, which causes the mockery of his peers, since it uses an antiquarian. As a young man, he admired Victor Hugo, wished to be a playwright and become the Oscar Wilde of Brazil (VL, 1981: 267). He was half Bohemian; he spoke very badly of journalism, but he belonged to the profession of "gossip, infidelity, slander, devious attack" (VL, 1981: 163).

Unlike *Conversation in the Cathedral* in which journalists have names, the short-sighted and his five colleagues who accompany him in *The War of the End of the World* do not even have a name. The Baroness, who wants to know the name of that "very original young man", does not find the answer.

Canudos was a media war. The most important newspapers in Brazil sent their correspondents, many of whom were at the same time combatants, as happened with Euclides da Cunha who, apart from his journalistic reports, wrote the most memorable book of that military incursion: *Los sertones*.

After Canudos, everyone thinks that the myopic has died, but it is not like that. He is one of the seven survivors, only that in those four months he has aged a decade. The young man without jauntiness, who left, returns to become a weak old man, ailing and, to top it off, in love.

Canudos' war, says the myopic, was a general misunderstanding. And he contributed to the confusion, that is why he has wants to clarify what really happened in Belo Monte and, above all, to get him out of oblivion, because he believes that in just three years nobody remembers that cruel confrontation.

The newspapers told a partial story of events. That is why, says the journalist, the importance of Canudos' chronicles is not based on what they say, "but on what they suggest, what is left to the imagination" (VL, 1981: 313). The Baron of Cañabrava asks him: "Were you really so naive to believe what is written in the newspapers is true?" (VL, 1981: 313)

Despite the myopic, almost blindness, when the journalist understands the true interests and injustices committed in Canudos, he quits the News Journal, he wants to be congruent because there, in the middle of the war, has lived an atonement of his past and has been rewarded with the love of a woman.

He proposes to the Baron to write for his newspaper the true story of Canudos, but the Baron, who has lost half his estate and his wife because of the war, tells him that it is best to forget, that it is not worth bringing painful memories of the past.

As an honest journalist, with a desire to tell his truth, the short-sighted one is unable to do so due to lack of space. He knows that crimes were committed in Canudos, more than twenty thousand, that must not be forgotten; despite

the invitation of the Baron, his interlocutor, to stop talking about that military confrontation where all of Brazil has lost, the journalist is unhappy and says he will not allow that injustice to be forgotten.

–How will it be achieved? Baron de Cañabrava rejects. "The only way things are preserved –he heard the visitor grunt–, writing them”

With this decision, the short-sighted man passes from newspaper writer to writer of the country's memory, because Canudos is not a story, "but a tree of history", he sentences (VL, 1981: 345).

The rebellion, the desire to write the story closest to the truth, lead the myopic to tell that story but in a book, a book that, according to the Baron, will never write (VL, 1981: 400).

7

After The War of the End of the World, Mario Vargas Llosa published *The Real Life of Alejandro Mayta* (1984) and *Who Killed Palomino Molero?* (1986). In Mayta's story, newspapers, radio and television are barely mentioned; they are simply qualified as means to spread the lies of those in power. In *Who Killed Palomino Molero?* however, the scabrous story of the murder of the young aviator, love and troubadour, Vargas Llosa leaves journalists aside. The copies of newspapers are only used to scare away flies and heat.

In the following novel, *The storyteller*, Vargas Llosa again refers to journalism. On this occasion he narrates the sleeplessness and work that a producer and television host goes through. He says that, already with fame, he was invited to take charge of a television space in Lima. Thus, the novelist experiences for six months the hazardous work of addressing various social or cultural issues from a funny point of view. He soon discovers that his activity is not only focus on the creative aspect but also face administrative procedures such as, knowing the driver is on time with the vehicle and in good condition, or that the recording equipment is complete and with sufficient tapes.

The technical team of the channel is disastrous. The recorder, the monitor, the reflectors and the camera work with intermittences, and in those conditions it must produce one hour of weekly program.

After having gone through that experience, when I get to see a well-recorded and edited program on television, agile, original, my admiration has no limits. Because I know that, behind it, there is much more than commitment and

talent: sorcery, miracle. Some weeks, after having watched the edition of the program one last time, in search of the final retouching, we said: "Well, it finally came out". And yet, that Sunday, on the tv screen, the sound disappeared, the image was off...

What had been "fucked" this time? That the technician on duty, in charge of passing the tapes, had gotten drunk or asleep, pressed the wrong button or programmed everything upside down... For those who have a perfectionist mania in their work, television is risky, causes infinite sleeplessness, tachycardia, ulcer, heart attack... (VL, 1987: 135).

It is possible that Vargas Llosa, with his novelist imagination, exaggerates the conditions under which he developed the La Torre de Babel program, but he is not far from reality either. Producers, hosts or television reporters have experienced the technical and administrative difficulties of their daily activities in an electronic medium.

It is true that currently, due to the cheapening and modernization of recording equipment, a large part of the technical difficulties have diminished, but collective work –which must necessarily be carried out– continues to complicate the performance of a good television program.

8

In the novels published in the period from 1988 to 2013, Vargas Llosa did not deal with people linked to journalism, although he frequently spoke about radio stations, television channels, newspapers, even social networks and blogs

In *In Praise of the Stepmother* (1988) and in *The Notebooks of Don Rigoberto* (1997) –the most erotic novels of the Peruvian Nobel Prize, for that matter– newspapers, radio, television and cinema are consumer items of the protagonists, who have a special preference for books. The television is to watch newscasts and some program or movie that can be saved, such as *Senso*, by Luchino Visconti.

The protagonists of *The bad girl*, involved in adventures and misadventures, use the newspapers to find out what was happening with their co-religionists and with the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR). Vargas Llosa takes time to revive the misgivings that many intellectuals of the sixties had for television, which they criticized severely for considering it "anti-cultural".

In *Death in the Andes* (1993), newspapers are distant articles of consumption, which rarely reach the mines and lost mountains of Peru. The radio, of metallic stuttering, emits boleros, rock, Andean and the tropics music. In

these solitudes, without communication with the world, Lituma and his assistant Carreñito try to unravel the mysterious disappearance of three men.

Rafael Leónidas Trujillo, from *The Feast of the Goat*, uses newspapers, radio and television stations to slander and discredit his political enemies. He even gives information to the Foro Abierto column of the newspaper *El Caribe*, to sentence businessmen, religious or officials. There, many Dominicans read their sentence and their destiny.

In *The Way to Paradise* (2003) and in *The Dream of the Celt* (2010), newspapers are part of the environment. Flora, a female character in the story, meets journalists because they belong to the intelligentsia in which she moves, and Roger Casement looks for them to spread his anti-slavery and independence ideas.

In *The bad girl*, television appears recently arrived in Peru; In *The discreet hero* (2013), the entanglements of the rich businessman's wedding with his servant are spread through "social media and blogs" (VL, 2013: 190). The protagonist, after being threatened by a criminal group, becomes famous for his heroism by not giving in to blackmail. But he does not want the celebrity status: "You do not know how horrible it is to become known, to go out in the newspapers and on television, to be pointed out by people on the street" (VL, 2013: 390), he says in a pause of his trip to Europe, where he wants to forget the unwanted fame.

In these eight novels, the most recent in Vargas Llosa's production, the media continues to appear. The protagonists read newspapers to find out about the political situation or to find out what happened to their co-religionists; they listen to music or newscasts on the radio or on television, and even give themselves time to consult social networks. The world of imagination and creation of the Peruvian narrator in his novels would be incomplete without the presence of media and those characters so hated and loved as journalists.

9

In the 17 novels published by Mario Vargas Llosa there are media references, but in four of them, journalists, newspapers and radio programs are essential. In *Conversation in the Cathedral*, the narrative architecture is traced from the eyes of Zavalita, a character trapped in the mediocrity of journalism; in *Aunt Julia and the Scripwriter*, Vargas Llosa pays homage to radio soap operas, not only with the theme but also with the stories interspersed, full

of drama, typical of radio plays; in *Captain Pantoja and the Special Service* the radio, folkloric and corrupt journalist can be found, who with his threats provides a relevant information of the plot, while in *The War of the End of the World* the voice of the myopic journalist, the only one with Antonio Conselheiro who is present throughout the novel, allows us to understand the injustices committed in Canudos.

The journalists in Vargas Llosa's narrative are defeated or corrupted people. The first ones are there waiting to achieve a dream, to write a book or to finish a university career; the latter have found in the pages of newspapers or radio broadcasts a means to obtain resources through blackmail and threat.

In this literary universe, journalism is an uninspiring activity. One is with the mediocre or one is with the corrupt ones, since this profession imprisons and grants few liberties. In addition, the conditions in which it develops leave little to creativity.

The journalists in the fictional universe of Vargas Llosa wanted to be writers, poets, historians or lawyers and ended up as scriptwriters. Dreams and aspirations to transcend writing are lost in the newsrooms of newspapers, on radio stations and on television channels. In these places the hallucinated ones predominate, such as Camacho, the radio soap opera scriptwriter; Becerrita, the persecutor of bloody victims, or the Sinchi, blackmail of politicians, military and brothel regents.

In short, journalists appear again and again in the work of Vargas Llosa. Sometimes they are fundamental protagonists, in other marginal ones, but they are always there to accompany or tell the story, although it does not always correspond to reality, it always resembles it.

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