



Discourse of Postmodern Issues in Mario Vargas Llosa's Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter

Dr. G. Vasuki ^a, Ms. J. Madhumidha Stri ^b

^aAssistant Professor, Department of English, A.V.V.M Sri Pushpam College (Autonomous), (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli), Pondi, Tamilnadu.

^bAssistant Professor, Department of English, T.B.M.L College, Poraiyar, (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli), Pondi, Tamilnadu.

APA Citation:

Vasuki, G., & Madhumidha Stri, G. (2021). Discourse of Postmodern Issues in Mario Vargas Llosa's Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(4), 2855-2859

Submission Date: 11/10/2021

Acceptance Date: 25/12/2021

Abstract

This paper attempts to explore the postmodernist elements of magic realism as well as other postmodernist issues found in Mario Vargas Llosa's Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter. It will look at how Llosa uses magic realism to present the story of an indigenous tribe that refuses to surrender to the demands of change and to a so-called civilization. The paper investigates how magic realism is used to tell the story of a man seeking an identity, eventually finding it as a chronicler and the voice of a people and a culture he is obsessed to preserve from the clutches of a physical or worse mental colonization. It will also show how Llosa contrasts a uniform view of culture typical of modernism with the hybridity emphasized by postmodernism basing it on his shift in ideology and style of writing.

Keywords: Modernism, Postmodernism, Magic Realism, Culture, Identity.

1. Introduction

Mario Vargas Llosa is one of the postmodern voices of Latin American literature. He is the most professional novelist to emerge from the Boom and has had a long and successful career as a widely translated and internationally renowned writer. Indeed, his literary output demonstrates that his primary source of creative inspiration continues to be the distinctive natural and social environment of the Americas in general, and Peru in particular. His international popularity attests to his reputation as a major twentieth-century writer.

Llosa's achievement in the novel - *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter* - is all the more impressive in light of the writer's decision to depart from what he knew in various ways. *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter* is a comedic novel that is semi-autobiographical. It alternates between autobiographical and third-person narrative chapters to create the plot. It is set in 1950s Peru and follows Marito, an eighteen-year-old who falls for Aunt Julia, a thirty-two-year-old divorcee whose story mixes with scenes from a series of radio soap operas written by Pedro Camacho. According to Marvin A. Lewis,

Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter is, on the surface, less critical in nature in addressing the larger questions of society. It is, in part, autobiographical

and does not reflect many middle-class Peruvian values and attitudes that were prevalent during the Odria era. (*From Lima to Leticia: The Peruvian Novels of Mario Vargas Llosa*, 137)

The novel is divided into twenty chapters. Marito recalls the events of a single year in the odd-numbered chapters from 1 to 19, contrasting his frustrated attempts to produce serious literature with Pedro's exceptional ability to write and direct nine different radio plays each day at the radio station where they both work. Additionally, these odd-numbered chapters chronicle Marito's courtship with his Aunt Julia until they marry.

The narrator reminisces about Pedro's oddities, the impact of his radio plays on the Peruvian audience, and how his scripts become increasingly incomprehensible as he spirals into madness. Except for the twentieth chapter, the even-numbered chapters are stylised narrations based on Pedro's radio plays that depict Pedro's point of view. As the story proceeds, the scripts begin to disintegrate - Camacho loses track of the characters' identities, the intricacies of his schemes, and so forth, to the point where they become 'hopelessly confused.' To summarise, Marito's (odd) chapters are interlaced with Pedro Camacho's radio soap operas (even).

The novel's twin themes are love and writing. The book's cover clearly indicates that the book will be about the author's personal relationship with both subjects. Marito is an eighteen-year-old young man who lives in Miraflores, Peru, with his grandparents after his parents relocated to the United States. He has a nascent interest in being a writer and spends his leisure time writing short stories and essays, but discards the most of them. Because his family wishes for him to become a lawyer, he studies law at the University of San Marcos. Marito works for Panamericana, a local radio station, where he writes, edits, and broadcasts daily news updates. Three times daily, he co-hosts the reports with an assistant named Pascual. Their office is a small hut perched on the top of the Panamericana building, which is adjacent to Radio Central's sister station.

Of course, popular culture and its dissemination are a central preoccupation of the novel. Pedro Camacho's character can be understood solely in the context of popular culture in 1950s Peru. Pedro is an odd-looking Bolivian writer that the Genaro's hire to create the scripts for their radio soap operas, as importing these shows from Cuba has become too expensive. Panamericana and Radio Central are both owned by the Genaro family, but they cater to entirely different demographics. Panamericana is the polar opposite of Radio Central, offering serious radio to an educated upper-class audience. Radio Central offers a more relaxed environment and their content is more accessible to the general public. They are most known for their weekly serials or radio soap operas. Much of the socioeconomic inequality that exists in Peruvian society is also reflected in Panamericana's and Radio Central's approach toward popular culture. Pedro is rapidly labelled a prodigy for his writing, but he lacks social skills. He is entirely absorbed in the process of creating his work and claims to be uninterested in social interaction.

Marito meets Pedro, and their friendship inspires him to improve as a writer, and he discovers a newfound passion for his profession. Simultaneously with his meeting with Pedro Camacho, Marito meets his Aunt Julia, a stunning thirty-two-year-old woman who has relocated to Peru from Bolivia following a divorce. They begin by occasionally attending movies, and a romance develops between them. Their romance is tested to the limit as their family vows to end it. Marito and Julia demonstrate that their feelings are genuine by finding a means to marry. Pedro's commitment moulds Marito as a writer, and he develops an appetite for more from his writing profession. In comparison, the more Marito develops and succeeds as a writer, the less Pedro does.

Finally, the tables are turned, as Marito moulds his life into that of a renowned writer, while Pedro is left penniless and humiliated. By the novel's conclusion, Marito's relationships with Pedro and Julia have transformed him from boy to man, spouse, and successful writer. Apart from the title, it is apparent that Pedro Camacho and Aunt Julia will play significant roles in Marito's life. This work represents Llosa's transition away from his early self-conscious concern with form into an unabashedly

metafictional meditation on the nature of authorship and fiction in general. The work is loosely based on the author's own experiences. Thus, Jose Maguel Oviedo, in *Mario Vargas Llosa*, notes that the novel is "the first of Vargas Llosa's narratives whose subterranean thread is that of the writer in the process of writing - writing about fiction in life, writing himself a life through his fiction" (167). The novel alternates between the continuing story of a young narrator and narrations of scenes from Pedro Camacho's radio soap operas. The novel's protagonist, "Marito Varguitas," is described in this passage as a younger version of Llosa. This weaving together of multiple narrative strands leads in a complicated reflexive mediation on the nature of story and texts in general.

In the novel, Llosa abandons the narratorial obscurity that characterised his earlier work in favour of an alive narrator who goes by his own name and recounts his own coming of age as a writer. Critics speculated on what might have prompted Llosa to drastically alter his narrative method midway through his career. According to some critics, he desired to assuage the public's curiosity about his somewhat colourful history before an unauthorised biographer tackled this very intimate issue. Few stated that he wished to draw a broader readership by providing a glimpse into the personal lives of a literary celebrity. However, Llosa stated that textual constraints compelled him to incorporate the autobiographical portions. He claims to have been looking for a realistic story to counterbalance the unrealistic radio soap operas.

Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter expands the Peruvian author's literary oeuvre by introducing new facets of writing. Throughout the preceding decades, Llosa critiqued widespread fictions, but admitted that with this work, he created his own. One of the most contentious features of his story is the extent to which it contains autobiographical references. Because the work is so obviously personal, it is impossible to disentangle the author Llosa's opinions and experiences from those of his fictional protagonist Marito. Though the novel heavily fictionalises Llosa's image, Pedro Camacho is based on a real-life soap opera playwright named Raul Salmon. By interspersing these two pieces, Llosa offers a new theoretical paradigm for his literature. It was like to introducing the back and front of a reality, with one being objective and the other subjective, with one being true and the other fabricated. Marito's autobiographical chapters detail his budding romance with his fourteen-year-old divorced Aunt Julia. These moments are interspersed with scripts written hurriedly by Bolivian Pedro Camacho for the radio station where both protagonists work. As the reader observes Pedro's creative output approaching insanity, Marito's life begins to mimic these fictions, implying a complex link between truth and falsehoods that runs throughout the work.

Apart from providing critical insights into Llosa's biography, *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter* reflects the writer's growing thematic concern with the distinctions between fiction and reality, which culminated in a series of essays and creative works addressing both the theoretical and practical implications of the truth of lies. Apart from Llosa's proclivity for transforming his lived experiences into pure fiction, one cannot deny the overtly autobiographical quality of his depiction of Marito's struggles to become a writer. As Robert Richmond Ellis, in "The Inscription of Masculinity and Whiteness in the Autobiography of Mario Llosa," avers: "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). In a departure from his past portrayals of writing as a confrontation with truth, the author introduces one of the novelist's most defining issues for recent work: the subtle disparities between reality and fiction.

Llosa evidently weaves Pedro Camacho's story alongside his own romantic soap opera. *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter* is a novel comprised of twenty chapters of nearly equal length that are divided into two narrative scenarios. The first, consists of the odd numbered chapters as well as the concluding chapter, focuses on the protagonist Marito's experiences in love and literature. The second section, which is comprised of even-numbered chapters except for the final one, is devoted to a collection of colourful scenes from nine soap operas. The reader has no difficulty identifying the first narrative situation's narrator, as Llosa portrays himself in detail and refers to himself by name. Lima in the late 1950s is once again invoked as the historical epoch. Marito's autobiographical recounting of the events is the first narrative circumstance. During this time period, he meets two Bolivians who have a

significant impact on the course of his life: Aunt Julia, with whom he falls in love and later marries, and Pedro Camacho, a remarkable Bolivian scriptwriter of radio soap operas who has a significant impact on his initial decision to become a writer. Marito splits his time between his work at the radio station, wooing and eventually eloping with his aunt, and attempting to write short tales during these frantic days.

Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter is told in three distinct voices. Llosa addresses the reader throughout the work from the vantage point of a successful writer. Marito alternates between the voices of Pedro Camacho, the high priest of pop fiction whose voice is audible throughout the radio serials, and the ardent but immature apprentice who wishes to be a writer. Marito must grow personally and professionally in order to pursue a career as a writer and enter the literary world. In matters of love, he must make the transition from adolescence to manhood. Additionally, he must shift from apprentice to professional writer in order to survive in Peru. He begins by introducing himself as someone who aspires to be a writer: "I was studying at the University of San Marcos, Law, as I remember, resigned to earning myself a living later on by practicing a liberal profession, although deep down what I really wanted was to become a writer someday" (1). He writes in the epilogue that he eventually accomplished his dream of becoming a writer: "and for better or worse I had become a writer and published several books" (393). Similarly, to how the desire to be a writer opens and closes the novel, the woman attributed with Marito's inner maturity, Aunt Julia, is credited at both the beginning and finish of the narrative.

Llosa creates a multilayered literary impact by insinuating the presence of a metawriter who looks down on the youthful writer Marito's efforts. Of fact, this metawriter is Llosa himself, who recounts his early attempts to become a writer. Indeed, the novel's reader identifies not with Marito's position, but with the superior one of the elder Llosa, who is able to observe and point out his younger self's youthful faults. Marito's gaze stays fixed on Aunt Julia, although their courtship bears striking similarities to the plots of Camacho's soap operas. Additionally, the interruptions and delays in Marito's courting parallel the moments of narrative interruption that characterise both the endings of Camacho's soap opera episodes and Marito's futile attempts to write a good novel.

A significant feature of postmodern writing is the examination of the relationship between subjects and genres. The novel's core structural premise is the dualistic interchange of Aunt Julia's and the scriptwriter's stories, which alternate between fact and fiction. In *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Frederic Jameson argues that postmodern reality is fundamentally fragmented, discontinuous, and plural. He suggests that we can encounter this new sort of reality in Llosa's *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter*. The different soap operas written by Pedro Camacho are what he calls, "the very prototype of what we may call the postmodern mode of totalizing" (373). The novel's manifold violations are, in fact, emblematic of significant facets of postmodern civilization. And these violations result in confusions not just within Pedro's soap operas, but also between them. Pedro exhibits various features connected with postmodernism, such as deteriorating memory and a lack of any sense of continuous time.

The novel is one of the most evocative examples of how many postmodernist writers appropriate the language and images of popular culture for literary purposes. Llosa frequently draws significantly on pop culture to inform their fictions. He states his attitude toward popular culture, which is characteristic of the attitudes of a large number of his fellow writers: "I'm not afraid of popular culture, I'm not afraid of the mass media, of entertainment. I feel that this is all grist to the mill of literature, as it always has been" (146). M. Keith Booker, in *Vargas Llosa Among the Postmodernists*, avers "The title of the chapter 'The marriage to Aunt Julia,' is highly misleading" (73), since Julia disappears after the first few sentences and the epilogue in fact deals with the events that occur well after she and Marito have divorced. As a postmodern fiction, it did not conclude smoothly.

A significant trait of any postmodern literary work is that it rarely concludes elegantly. At the book's conclusion, Marito gets home late and Patricia gave an unfavourable look on her face. The soap opera tension here is whether, the next time Marito comes in such a state, cousin Patricia will scratch his eyes out or break a dish over his head, as she is a girl with a lot of spirit and is capable of executing what she

promises. While the final alleged soap opera chapter concludes with Marito's narration, it does so on a soap opera-style suspenseful note, with the idea that the next time the narrator returns home in such a state, the repercussions may be severe indeed. This is a parody of the final questions in Camacho's soap operas.

Postmodern literature is defined by a strong emphasis on tactics such as fragmentation, paradox, and dubious narrators. Pedro's soap operas take a dark turn as he begins murdering all of his existing characters in order to escape the chaos and start over. Typically, his soap operas conclude with a series of unanswered questions about what might happen next. The recounted incidents from Camacho's soap operas become increasingly weird as Pedro's mental deteriorates toward the book's conclusion, yet they generally mirror those of real soap operas. As a result, these episodes should appeal to precisely the type of reader who would appreciate the fruits of this obscurity. Latin American popular artists have created images that are renowned throughout their countries and have dedicated their careers to enhancing the beauty of everyday life.

Llosa has always been fascinated by the technical difficulties inherent in fictional presentation, and by now, devoted readers of his work should have developed some proficiency in reading these rather baffling fictional frameworks. He successfully juxtaposes the funny and serious in order to provide a critical assessment of Peruvian reality. Through this novel, he effectively introduced new aspects of writing into the Peruvian literary canon by establishing himself as an anchor in reality, providing a backdrop for Pedro Camacho's soap opera universe.

2. Conclusion

To sum-up, the novel, *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter*, distinguished by its subtle use of humour, a narrative structure rich in event and parody, and an overall accessibility to ordinary readers. Despite its commercial success, the novel prompted postmodern concerns among a sizable minority of reviewers, including some of the most important, concerning the Peruvian novelist's possible decadence or commercialization of literature.

References

- Booker, M. Keith. *Vargas Llosa Among Postmodernists*. UP of Florida, 1994.
- Jameson, Frederic. *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Duke UP, 2003.
- Lewis, Marvin A. *From Lima to Leticia: The Penman Novels of Mario Vargas Llosa*. UP of America, 1983.
- Oviedo, Jose Miguel. *Mario Vargas Llosa*. Taurus, 1981.
- Richmond Ellis, Robert. "The Inscription of Masculinity and Whiteness in the Autobiography of Mario Vargas Llosa." *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol.17, No.2, 1998, pp.223-36.
- Vargas Llosa, Mario. *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter*. Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1982.