

## PODCAST – “LA BIBLIOTECA”

*An exploration of the Library’s collections that focus on the cultures of Spain, Portugal, Latin America, and the Hispanic community in the US.*

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SEASON 1/Episode 2

### Listening to Mario Vargas Llosa

**Talía Guzmán-González:** ¡Hola! and welcome to *La biblioteca* I am Talía Guzmán-González a reference librarian in the Hispanic Division at the Library of Congress, and I am here with my colleague...

**Catalina Gómez:** Catalina Gómez, also a reference librarian in the Hispanic Division. Hi Talía!

**TGG:** Hi Catalina! This is our second episode of the first season of our podcast *La biblioteca* where we will be exploring the *Archive of Hispanic Literature on Tape*.

**CG:** Yes, and today we will be listening to recording of Peruvian novelist, journalist, politician, intellectual and Nobel laureate Mario Vargas Llosa reading from his work.

**TGG:** I have to say, this is one of my favorite recordings in the Archive. It is so fun. He really chose a wonderful text to read for this recording. The recording is from 1977, so it turned 40 this year.

**CG:** Today we will be listening to a previously recorded interview with Professor Charlotte Rogers from the University of Virginia who will share with us some her insights about this recording. Dr. Rogers received her Ph.D. in Spanish from Yale University, and her book *Jungle Fever: Exploring Madness and Medicine in Twentieth-Century Tropical Narratives* was published by Vanderbilt University Press in 2012.

**TGG:** Great, let’s listen!

### *Interview with Charlotte Rogers*

**CG:** Thank you so much Charlotte for being with us.

**Charlotte Rogers:** Hi Catalina! I’m happy to be with you.

**CG:** To begin, can you tell us about Mario Vargas Llosa and his relevance?

**CR:** Absolutely. Mario Vargas Llosa is one of the few remaining living members of the Latin American Literary Boom which made literature in Spanish famous in the 1960s and ‘70s. He’s from Peru and he

won the Nobel Prize in 2010, particularly for being a true master of every literary genre. His work spans melodrama, very reminiscent of *telenovela* that's very popular in Latin America, as well as historical fiction; he's even written detective stories, and plays, and essays. He's a real... he's very talented in every single genre.

**CG:** Great. Thank you. What excerpt from his recording did you choose to discuss?

**CR:** So we're going to listen to an episode from his novel that's called *La tía Julia y el escribidor* or *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter*, which was published in 1977. In this episode we hear about a priest named Seferino Huanca Leyva, who is something of a renegade. He has a parish in a tiny town in Peru and he declares to church officials that every single couple in his parish has been sanctified in holy matrimony. Now the church officials don't believe this because one of the common places in Peru is the frequency of extra-marital affairs and Seferino, the priest, explains to the church officials in the fragment that we're going to hear that he simply married every couple who had extra-marital sex. Now, this results in many people being married multiple times which is of course against church doctrine, so he solves this problem by hearing their confession and granting them absolution right away. So we can hear the farcical nature of this episode in the clip here now...

- **Excerpt #1: Chapter 14 of *La tía Julia y el escribidor* (1977) by Mario Vargas Llosa, read by the author. (Archive of Hispanic Literature on Tape, Library of Congress, 1977)**

**CR:** This particular episode really features a lot of elements that are common to Vargas Llosa's works. He offers a very lively critique of Peru's institution namely the military, the church, and the government. He is very well known for poking fun at the foibles of everyday citizens, but as well as people in power. He does this very successfully here in this *telenovela* melodrama style. But he also does it in very serious ways in historical fiction.

**CG:** What about the way he's reading it and his voice? What can you say about the way he's reading this particular novel?

**CR:** The way that Vargas Llosa reads this particular excerpt is beautiful in the sense that it captures precisely the sense of fun that he carries through in this novel, of every pause and every high and low point of his voice really emphasize the ridiculousness of believing that people will never have sex outside of marriage, for example. So Vargas Llosa is really good at critiquing the society that he lives in.

**CG:** Do you get a sense that Vargas Llosa and other prose writers practice reading aloud some of prose when they're writing it.

**CR:** I know for sure that Gustave Flaubert was known to read aloud as he wrote often with great shouts of joy or misery. I'm not sure about the case of Vargas Llosa, but I think that you can hear the conversational tone of his writing when he reads it out loud.

**CG:** Great. So I know he has written extensively, so which of his list of works would you recommend to our readers?

**CR:** Well I would like to recommend to the readers a novel that offers a very strong contrast to *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter*, which we just heard. While *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter* is very light I would recommend one of his more serious works in historical fiction which is also more recent. The name of the novel is *The Feast of the Goat* or *La fiesta del Chivo* which was published in 2000, and that novel takes a very extensive and deep look at the dictatorship of the Dominican nation -- the dictator was named Rafael Leónidas Trujillo. In that novel Vargas Llosa really explores power, like he does in *Tía Julia*, but in *The Feast of the Goat* it's a much more serious and brutal and shocking novel. Definitely worth the read, I highly recommend it.

**CG:** Great. Well thank you so much Charlotte for joining us!

**CR:** Thank you very much, Catalina.

*(End of interview with Dr. Rogers.)*

**TGG:** That was a great commentary by Charlotte! And I would also like to mention that one of the reasons why I love this recording is because in the beginning Mario Vargas Llosa introduces this novel as a work in progress with the title "Vida y Milagros de Pedro Camacho," which eventually became *La tía Julia y el escribidor*. So basically we captured Vargas Llosa's voice as he was writing, as he was in the process of writing this novel.

**CG:** I love that about the recording too, that the title was changing and that it was in progress.

**TGG:** We both were fortunate to meet Vargas Llosa here in the Library in 2016 when he received the *Living Legend Award* for his significant contributions to America's diverse cultural and social heritage. That day in an interview with author and journalist Marie Arana, he talked – among other things – about how as a young child he discovered his passion for reading.

**Mario Vargas Llosa:** "I am deeply attached. And in a way I think that this is also a consequence of my love of books and of literature and fiction. I think that books gave me since my first readings when I was very young this idea of the adventure, life as an adventure... life as an adventure to change life for the better. I read Alexander Dumas, the history of the musketeers, for example, and I remember the way in which I enjoy and I identified myself, you know, with the musketeers, with d'Artagnan, with Porthos, with Aramis; and afterwards when I started to read more important books, you know, Malraux, Faulkner, the kind of heroes that were in a kind of war with the world were heroes with which I identified myself immediately. *(From the Living Legend Award Ceremony with Mario Vargas Llosa – April 11, 2016 at the Library of Congress)*

**CG:** That's wonderful. It really is very special when authors speak about their personal experiences. I also love when he talked about his craft of writing and about his audience. Let's listen to that part.

**MVLL:** I don't think I am thinking in a reader -- in a particular kind of reader when I am writing a novel. No, for me, to write a novel is something, I repeat, very solitary, I seclude myself in a world which came from memories, images from the memory which produce inventions, which produce other images, which are invented. But the point of departure is something -- it's always memory, images that are preserved in the memory, images that were produced by experiences, by living experiences, and then are always the point of departure for the imagination, for invention. But I don't think I have a particular kind of reader in which I am thinking when I am writing, no. What I try to do, of course -- and I think this is something that many writers try to do when they are writing -- I try to divide myself in the reader that is reading what I am writing to see if the techniques are effective and can really persuade the reader of what they say. But I think this is a very personal kind of reader, and I don't think I have a particular audience in mind when I am writing.

*(From the Living Legend Award Ceremony with Mario Vargas Llosa – April 11, 2016 at the Library of Congress)*

**TGG:** I think that having the opportunity to learn about the creative process of writers like Mario Vargas Llosa is one of the great things about this archive, and also about all the great events hosted at the Library of Congress.

**CG:** Indeed! And we would like to take this opportunity to invite our listeners to visit the Hispanic Reading Room website and sign up to find out more about our events hosted by this, your national library!

**TGG:** We leave you with the voice of Mario Vargas Llosa reading from *La tía Julia y el escribidor*. We hope you join us next week for another episode of our podcast *La biblioteca*. ¡Hasta luego!

- **Excerpt #2: Chapter 14 of *La tía Julia y el escribidor* (1977) by Mario Vargas Llosa, read by the author. (Archive of Hispanic Literature on Tape, Library of Congress, 1977)**

**CG:** Thank you for tuning in! To listen to some of the recordings from *the Archive of Hispanic Literature on Tape* go to [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov). You can find the project clicking on our "Digital Collections" link on our homepage and selecting the "Audio Recording" collections category. You can also find it by going to the Library's Hispanic Division's website, which is [www.loc.gov/rr/hispanic](http://www.loc.gov/rr/hispanic). ¡Hasta pronto!