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Review Of "Lituma En Los Andes" By M. V. Llosa

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Japanese ancestry, was elected on June 10, 1990 with more than a twenty point advantage over Vargas Llosa.

While some might look upon Fujimori's victory as a political fluke, most serious analysts now view the Fujimori phenomenon in terms of the average Peruvian's long desired break with a political tradition dominated by white, well-to-do leaders of European ancestry. In the four years following his election Fujimori has brought inflation down to less than 100%; he has closed Congress, created his own hand-picked national Assembly and, like Chile's Pinochet in the seventies and eighties, he has turned the bashing of politicians into a national pastime. Ironically, the new government's success lies in its application of economic policies that are not very different from those espoused by Vargas Llosa and the Frente Democrático.

After his electoral loss Vargas Llosa returned immediately to Europe where he has since become a Spanish national. His assumption of Spanish citizenship provides only a partial explanation of why today an increasing number of Peruvians view him in such a negative light. The real culprit has been the publication of this book of memoirs, *El pez en el agua*, in which he sought to exorcise his disillusionment with the country's political process, the corruption of its leaders and what appears to him to be the facile manipulation of its people. Very few Peruvians escape the writer's wrath in these pages, including former supporters of his own political party. This autobiographical exercise, rather than providing the writer with greater insight into his own political naiveté and the forces at work among the less fortunate of his country, may have left him even more perplexed and with an even greater sense of betrayal. Such conclusions may indeed be warranted if we consider Vargas Llosa's recent demands that the U.S. impose an embargo on Peru similar to that imposed on Haiti because of Fujimori's decision to shut down Congress. It is an understatement to say that most Peruvians were outraged by such remarks since the great majority of them saw their president's

action as perfectly justified, given the chaos engulfing their society. And while Vargas Llosa puts thousand and thousands of miles between him and the land he so bitterly attacks, many tend to see this physical distance as one more indication of the author's aloofness, not to mention his estrangement from a society that perhaps he understands only superficially.

El pez en el agua, although not the great political novel everyone was expecting Vargas Llosa to write as a result of his brief affair with national politics, is, nevertheless, fascinating. Surely it will be read very differently by Peruvians than by the majority of its readers world-wide. But for both reading publics this book will be hard to put down, either because of the level at which it infuriates or because of the insights it offers regarding the personal and political psychology of one of Latin America's most controversial figures.

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Mario Vargas Llosa. *Lituma en los Andes*. Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1993. 313p.

This is Vargas Llosa's first book of fiction since his unsuccessful campaign for the presidency of Peru (1987-1990). Readers, I think, will tend to find that as a novel *Lituma en los Andes* is somewhat uneven and disappointing, notwithstanding its being awarded the Premio Planeta for 1993. Similar to its predecessors, it is undeniably vargasllosian in its attempt to explore and understand the enigma that is today's Peru and the violence that has besieged it in recent years. But it is precisely this exploration and the conclusions suggested that render the novel unconvincing and lacking in the depth that we have come to expect, perhaps unfairly, from the author of such masterpieces as *La casa verde*, *Conversacion en la Catedral*, and *La guerra del fin del mundo*.

Readers of Vargas Llosa's fiction will immediately recognize in this novel's protagonist, Lituma, an old literary acquaintance who appeared in several of

the author's earlier texts, including *La casa verde*, *La tía Julia y el escribidor*, and *¿Quién mató a Polmino Molero?*. In this latest novel Corporal Lituma, a member of the country's National Guard, has been assigned to Naccos, an isolated and sparsely populated outpost high in the Andes that he shares with his subordinate Tomás Carreño. There are so many allusions to Piura, the Casa Verde, Los Inconquistables, La Chunga and Lituma's nostalgia for his hometown that it is impossible for the reader not to become immersed simultaneously in the fictional world of *La casa verde*, a novel written more than twenty years before the publication of *Lituma en los Andes*. The more recent novel's events, however, are prior to those of *La casa verde*, since Lituma is not yet a sergeant and it is only in the final pages that we learn of his promotion and reassignment to Santa María de Nieva.

Like his earlier novels, this one too reflects an almost unrelenting obsession with structural symmetry. Composed of two parts and an epilogue, the novel is narrated essentially on three different story levels: 1) the disappearance of three of Naccos' residents and Lituma's attempt to investigate what happened to them; 2) the operations of Sendero Luminoso in the first part followed in the second by a series of legends regarding the insatiable appetites of the gods and the Andes who demand sacrifice from their human subjects and 3) a love story with a "happy ending" that involves Carreño and a woman from Lituma's hometown of Piura. At this third level Vargas Llosa makes extensive use of his "vasos comunicantes" technique, which formed an integral part of *La casa verde*'s narrative structure. All three story lines fuse in the epilogue as we learn that the disappeared of Naccos were not only sacrificed to the Andean gods, but cannibalized as well.

The episodes in the novel that deal with Sendero Luminoso, its youthful followers, their almost naive interpretation of national and international events and their brutal behavior in meting out justice to their perceived enemies, constitute

some of the most poignant and spell-binding pages of the text. Together with the frequent references to the equally repressive behavior of the nation's military, one cannot help but be sensitive to Vargas Llosa's depiction of a country caught in the grips of two contending forces, both of whom believe to possess truth, while an entire people struggles to survive in the midst of their unrelenting violence. It is this dilemma, so ably portrayed in the book's early stages, that makes for compelling reading and forms what appears to be the principal axis of the text. For this reason, one of the most disturbing aspects of this novel is the almost total disappearance of Sendero Luminoso and its antagonist after the first part comes to a close. Suddenly, a very important story line on the cycle of violence is discontinued only to be replaced in the second part by a far less convincing insistence on people's superstitions and the power of Andean spirits who demand human sacrifice in return for natural harmony and freedom from their anger.

Are we to believe, as is suggested in chapter six, that Peru's recent violence is not an historical aberration but rather a continuation of the sacrificial rituals carried out by its pre-Colombian peoples to gods who, to this day, inhabit those same mountains? In trying to raise the theme of national violence to mythical proportions, Vargas Llosa, I am afraid, has undermined the importance of a very specific historical context, to the detriment of this novel.

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Marvin Lewis. *Ethnicity and Identity in Contemporary Afro-Venezuelan Literature*. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press 1992. 120p.

La literatura afro-venezolana ha sido muy poco estudiada en los Estados Unidos. Entre las investigaciones que se han hecho se destacan las tesis doctorales de María Elena Angulo y Michael Anthony Brookshaw. También existen varios libros que tratan el tema en términos generales. Sin embargo, un