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***Hispania* Guest Editorial:
Celebrating Vargas Llosa**

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Hispania Guest Editorial: Celebrating Vargas Llosa

On October 7, 2010, I was concluding an 8:00am session of Spanish 201, when one of my colleagues at Lewis-Clark State College, Professor Martin Gibbs, entered the classroom with a message. When he asked “Did you hear about Mario Vargas Llosa?”, I thought he was referring to the recent press release for his upcoming novel and promptly replied that I had already preordered a copy. The real news was that Vargas Llosa had received notice from the Swedish Academy earlier that morning that he had been selected as the most recent recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature. My audible shout of excitement was the first signal to my students that something special had occurred. Since that instance, I have reflected upon the significance of the award and believe there is even more to celebrate.

Before stepping to the podium at Stockholm to deliver his Nobel Prize lecture, Vargas Llosa was the young novelist of 1967 who took the stage in Caracas, Venezuela to receive the inaugural *Premio Nacional de Literatura Rómulo Gallegos* for his second novel *La casa verde* (1966). Months earlier, Gabriel García Márquez had published *Cien años de soledad* (1967) to the acclaim of readers and critics, and Spanish American literature rested at the apex of the period of unprecedented critical attention known as its Boom. García Márquez did not speak at the conference; nevertheless, his presence contributed to the excitement and anticipation of Vargas Llosa’s words. As Vargas Llosa biographer and critic José Miguel Oviedo observed firsthand: “[Todo] Caracas pendía de un hilo esperando las palabras del autor tras la ceremonia, porque se suponía, con fundada razón, que no serían un convencional agradecimiento de ganador sino—otra vez, como siempre—un documento polémico, contradictorio, irritante” (42). Certainly, the thirty-one-year-old literary prodigy did not disappoint. Since the initial delivery of “La literatura es fuego”, the speech has been adopted as one of Vargas Llosa’s classic statements on the role of literature in society. For the next several decades, his comments defined the *raison d’être* of his literary vocation. “La literatura es una forma de insurrección permanente,” the writer declared, “y ella no admite las camisas de fuerza” (135). Forty-three years later, Vargas Llosa’s Nobel lecture reverberates with these same sentiments. Similar to Pierre Menard’s *Quijote*, however, his familiar concept of writing and reading as “[una protesta] contra las insuficiencias de la vida” (“Lecture”) is made “infinitamente más rico” (Borges 30) through a retrospective gaze that has challenged readers for more than a half-century.

From *La huida del inca* (1952) to his latest novel *El sueño del celta* (2010), Vargas Llosa has depicted the most despicable faces of humanity and some of its most inspiring struggles to endure. Though he confesses that the shadow of the literary giants that inspired his own work “nos sumirían en la oscuridad,” his own legacy of influence is enormous. Vargas Llosa’s literary production has never been predictable, but what is certain is that he will expand the limits of his own canon as he continues to “resistir la adversidad, de protestar, de rebelarme, de escapar a lo intolerable, mi razón de vivir.” And, as the author explains, “[L]a nuestra será siempre, por fortuna, una historia inconclusa. Por eso tenemos que seguir soñando, leyendo y escribiendo, la más eficaz manera que hayamos encontrado de aliviar nuestra condición perecedera, de derrotar a la carcoma del tiempo y de convertir en posible lo imposible” (“Lecture”). As we celebrate the Nobel Prize with Vargas Llosa, therefore, let us also commemorate his impressive blend of raw talent and Flaubertian dedication to a vocation that for most does not afford rewards such as the one received in Stockholm. Let us consider the countless stories that are never brought to press. Let us celebrate the many faces of fiction as we also remember that within these creative mirrors—whether bright or disparaging—we often view reflections of ourselves. Regardless of country of origin, native tongue, religious affiliation, political persuasion, or ideological bent,

let us recognize Mario Vargas Llosa “for his cartography of the structures of power and his trenchant images of the individual’s resistance, revolt and defeat” (“Nobel”) as we collectively celebrate the reading and writing of literature.

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