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"INHABITANTS, VISITORS, AND WASHERWOMEN: Prostitutes and Prostitution in the Novels of Mario Vargas Llosa"

Amy Katz Kaminsky

Mario Vargas Llosa, an innovative writer whose masters are the creators of the Iberian novels of chivalry, is a paradox. In his efforts to provide his readers with a total novel, which includes all possible human perspectives, he inevitably encounters contradiction. Vargas Llosa's attitude toward women and their roles, and especially toward prostitutes and prostitution, epitomizes the confrontation between modernity and tradition which marks his novels. He alternately adopts, questions, satirizes, and contradicts society's beliefs about prostitution.

Vargas Llosa's own statements indicate the nature of his unresolved conflicts relating to the interaction among women, society, and literature. When asked why his women characters are so passive, the novelist replied that his works merely reflect the reality of the lives of women in Peru.[1] Yet he has also said that the novelist's mission is to create reality, not to copy it.[2] It is not unjustified to infer, then, that the women in Vargas Llosa's fictional universe reflect not only the reality of Peruvian women, but also the writer's own imagined reality for women.

Of all the female characters appearing in the novels under discussion, it is the prostitutes who hold most interest for their creator. As victims of a vicious society, prostitutes qualify for a politically committed Vargas Llosa's compassion. But the writer is also a Latin American male who has confessed his childhood and adolescent fascination with those women whose sole purpose in life seems to be to provide men with pleasure.[3] So prostitutes are doubly attractive as characters to Vargas Llosa, and for conflicting reasons. The new novelist and the traditional story-teller, the Marxist and the moralist, the man both attracted to and appalled by the sexual exploitation of women, confront each other in Vargas Llosa.

It is the distinction between the individual and the institution that enables Vargas Llosa to reconcile the contradictory uses to which he puts them in his novels. By accepting the conventional view which holds that prostitution is wrong, the novelist is free to use the evils of prostitution as a theme on which to compose variations. In its simplest manifestations,

prostitution is one of the primary institutions of Peruvian society. Its connection to other, more respectable, institutions —government, the military, organized religion— informs the reader of Vargas Llosa's view of the latter. The exploitation, degradation, and seaminess associated with prostitution are ascribed to those other elements of society, and in conjunction they become the reality of Peru as seen in *La casa verde, Conversación en la Catedral,* and *Pantaleón y las visitadoras.*[4] The prostitute herself, however, is never presented as an incarnation of evil, nor is there ever any overt moral judgment of her.

Those who exploit the whore are often evil, however. Brothel owners are all-powerful and often vindictive. Women who leave Mosquitos' establishment to join Pantaleón's Visitors Service are blacklisted. In keeping with the comic tone of *Pantaleón y las visitadoras,* the trio of professionals Pantoja hires to help organize and run the service, Chucupe, Chupito, and el Chino Porfirio, are less malevolent than ridiculous.[5] Ivonne, the madame of an exclusive brothel in *Conversación en la Catedral,* is a greedy, corrupt old woman who uses her bartender/lover to humiliate the prostitutes. Also reprehensible are those responsible for recruiting prostitutes. In *La casa verde,* the military kidnaps Indian girls who are then trained by Spanish nuns to be servants of God and man. A certain number of these children are later channelled into houses of prostitution. Unfair economic systems force other women to sell their bodies. Maclovia *(Pantaleón)* explains that there is simply no other way for a poor woman to support herself. Racism —the attempt to Christianize the "savages"— and capitalism are, then, two primary causes of prostitution in these novels.

By selecting different aspects of prostitution, Vargas Llosa varies the means by which he relates it to the societal elements to be criticized. The sordid realism with which he presents the house of prostitution in *Conversación en la Catedral* reflects the same qualities present in the houses of government. The structures of these two institutions are parallel as well: the relationship between prostitutes and brothel owners is analagous to the one between the people and the men in power. Even the language used to describe the country's situation is that of the prostitute's experience. "En qué momento se había jodido el Perú?" wonders Santiago.[6] To complete the identification, the politicans veritably create brothels for their own use, assuming the role of procurer as well as client.[7] Far from being simply the sexual activity of whores, prostitution in *Conversación en la Catedral* is a social and political phenomenon in which the women are victims.

When Vargas Llosa focuses on the oppression of the prostitutes, he inverts the original assumption — prostitution is bad — and portrays a callous and often ridiculous bourgeoisie that unnecessarily harrases prostitutes. This is the approach he uses in *La casa verde.* Still, until the latter part of the

novel, Vargas Llosa individualizes neither the women of the Green House nor their adversaries, the good women of Piura. In fact, he dehumanizes both groups by labeling the former "habitantas" and the latter "gallinazas." By maintaining the anonymity of the prostitutes, Vargas Llosa adds to the mystery of the Green House.

Despite the physical description he gives it, the Green House is hardly a real place at all, unlike Ivonne's brothel or Pantaleón's Servicio de Visitadoras para Guarniciones, Puestos de Frontera y Afines. This latter is perceived as a place of sin by the people of Iquitos, but in reality it is run like an army barracks. One way in which Vargas Llosa contradicts the popular fantasy of Pantilandia, whose nickname is as deflating as its official title is pompous, is by depicting its reality down to the physical dimensions of the construction. In *La casa verde,* on the other hand, the idea of the house is more powerful than the actuality. Unlike individuals in the novel whose name and personality change with time and place, while the body stays the same, the name and essence of the Green House remain constant throughout the novel, though the body —the building itself— is destroyed and rebuilt in another location. The house thus achieves its mythic stature which gives it a significance far outweighing that of the people who inhabit, frequent, or despise the place.[8]

The Green House is not identified with any other agency of Peruvian society. It is above them all, pervading their consciousness and forming a part of the spiritual structure of the country. Again, the preexisting assumption that prostitution is itself evil allows the reader to conclude that the Peruvian reality it pervades is also polluted. This assumption remains even though the Green House is in many senses a positive symbol. Though it is not a place of love (sex and death, yes, but not love), the Green House is a place of truth. As such, it is equated with the jungle, another locus of essences, and as such it must be accepted. To attempt to destroy it as Father García did is only to enshrine it in the communal consciousness and to lose one's own credibility. Father Garcia is forgiven for burning the Green House only when he accepts the place symbolically, by administering the last rites to its creator, Anselmo.

In *Pantaleón* y *las visitadoras* Vargas Llosa again uses prostitution as comparator. The other term in the metaphorical equation is the military, and here too it is the shared assumptions about prostitution that enable the writer to ridicule the armed forces. The army is inherently at attention ; prostitution is at ease, and the incongruous fusion of military form and sexual content produces humor. Here, it is to the novelist's advantage to depict at least some of the women as individuals, since as such they are all the more resistant to the rigid language of the military communiqués to which Pantoja and his superiors attempt to confine them.

Although there are many sexually active women in Vargas Llosa's novels, bv no means are all of them whores.[9] The true prostitutes are those who so define themselves. They are fully conscious of their actions and unapologetically take responsibility for them. La Brasileña *(Pantaleón),* Queta *(Conversación),* and la Selvática *(La casa verde)* all belong to this category.

There is a noticeable difference in Vargas Llosa's treatment of these characters which reflects the internal needs of the works and, perhaps, an attitudinal change in the writer. He seems slowly to become less encumbered by cultural attitudes with respect to the prostitutes he creates, though he continues to use those norms as referents. In *La ciudad y los perros,* prostitution is part of the cadets' fantasy life, as is the whore, Pies Dorados. The reality of prostitution is absent from the novel and would be extraneous to it. The real world of the prostitute is again missing from *La casa verde,* as it should be. Here it is the idea of the Green House, its connections to the jungle and the city, its corruption as well as its preservation of primitive innocence which matter. The place is an object of fascination, and its inhabitants are unimportant as real people. They form part of the mythic structure of the novel, and thev are more awesome undifferentiated and unknown. Vargas Llosa does not exploit their sexuality; even the euphemism "Inhabitants" removes the sexual connotation from their identity, such as it is. When a woman enters the brothel she becomes just another member of the group and loses her individuality as she is renamed by la Chunga.

Of all the prostitutes in *La casa verde,* only Bonifacia/la Selvática is of any interest as an individual. Unlike the other inhabitants she is not a deliberately undifferentiated part of the mythic structure of the work, but rather its most complete and complicated character, the intermediary not only between jungle and town, but between the reader and the myth. The novel takes life, in great part, through Bonifacia. Nevertheless, the whore Selvática is of interest only because we know the nameless Indian child, the adolescent Bonifacia in the convent, Lalita's servant and friend, and the sergeant's bride. Vargas Llosa means to appall us with the transformation of the innocent Indian child into the professional prostitute, and in fact he urges us to doubt that Bonifacia and la Selvática are indeed the same person: the identification is not made clear until well into the novel. Nor does the process by which Bonifacia becomes a prostitute hold particular interest for Vargas Llosa, since a product of the careful fragmentation of time and space in the work is the refutation of progression and process, and the confirmation of simultaneity. Bonifacia is at once each of her identities and all of them.

While Bonifacia is seen primarily as an innocent forced by societal constraints to enter the brothel (and who therefore can be seen as victim and sympathetic character), Queta is seen as a prostitute only. In *Conversación en*

la Catedral, Vargas Llosa gives us a prostitute who, though not depicted primarily as a victim, is still a sympathetic character. Like Bonifacia, part of Queta's function is to connect diverse elements in the novel. Through her we learn of Fermín Zavala's homosexual relationship with his chauffeur/bodyguard, Ambrosio. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to assume that Queta's only function is that of an intermediary between men. Her relationships with both Ambrosio and Hortensia are important in themselves. In fact, the rich texture of the novel as a whole is due largely to the attention Vargas Llosa gives to non-central characters like Queta.

Unlike Bonifacia, Queta is of interest *because* she is a prostitute. In *La casa verde* it is important for the reader to remain at a distance from the brothel, which accounts in part for the emphasis on the pre-prostitute Bonifacia. The sordid atmosphere of the place avoided in *La casa verde* is deliberately evoked in *Conversación en la Catedral,* and Queta is our main access to it. The moral judgment implied in the explicit scenes of sex reflects not on the prostitute, from whose point of view the episodes are related, but on the client, specifically Cayo Bermúdez. Queta is disgusted by him, and that feeling is transmitted to the reader.

Queta is, perhaps, the only character in the novel who is not in awe of Cayo. Thanks to her profession, not only has she seen him at his most vulnerable, she is in certain ways similar to him. As Luis Díez has noted, Queta and Cayo are the only ones who use evil without becoming its slave.[10] Nevertheless, one must use caution when comparing the two characters. As I have indicated, though the prostitute may derive some benefit by working within the structure of prostitution, she is its victim, while politicians are among those who victimize her.

Cayo's ruthlessness is explained in part by his own suffering, established in an extensive series of flashbacks. Once in power, he avenges himself unrestrainedly on society. Queta, too, relishes the power she has, though we know nothing of the background that makes her choose to exercise it — nothing but the obvious: she is a prostitute and is therefore a member of an oppressed group. As a white woman in a fancy whorehouse, Queta can withhold her body from Ambrosio, who is Black and Indian. When he finally saves enough money to pay her twice the going rate, she continues to humiliate him for a time. Unlike Cayo, Queta's power is extremely limited, and she tempers her use of it.

Queta and her colleagues are class and caste conscious. They are keenly aware of the levels of status within their profession and of their relationship to society. More important, they know who their oppressors are. They ridicule management and feel anything from indifference to hatred for their customers. The prostitutes must be self reliant, and to that end they cultivate a façade of toughness, but they also have a sense of their need for mutual

support if they are to survive. When Queta is in the hospital, for example, the others send her gifts of food; and Queta is a loyal friend to Hortensia. This understanding of class and caste is something the servile Ambrosio lacks. Queta knows she must play-act, often supressing laughter or disgust, as part of her job. Ambrosio, on the other hand, identifies with Fermín Zavala, has sex with him because he likes, respects, and even pities him. Queta knows that such feelings are utterly self destructive. It is this surrender of self, this identification with the exploiter, which Queta finds sickening in the relationship between Ambrosio and Zavala, not the fact that they engage in homosexual activity. After all, Queta has sex with Hortensia and so would hardly condemn homosexuality. The critical distinction is that Queta and Hortensia are equals and friends. In fact, theirs is the only non-exploitative sexual relationship in the novel.[11] Even though it has its beginnings in the tittilation of Cayo, he is later excluded from it.

Queta's affection for Hortensia is often masked by scorn. As a professional prostitute, Queta is always wary of emotional attachments which might make her vulnerable, and so she wavers between self-protection and manifestations of friendship. Once Hortensia has been discarded by Cayo, she is no longer of use to Queta as a source of income; furthermore, Hor-tensia's attempts to blackmail Zavala and her need for money, food, and a place to live make her a dangerous burden to her friend. In the end, Queta risks her job, and perhaps her life, by accusing Zavala and Ambrosio of Hortensia's murder. It is an act of heroic lunacy, since she knows that the powerful Zavala will never be punished; but it is necessary to her integrity.[12]

A sense of bonding among the women can also be found in *La casa verde.* After la Selvática is beaten by her husband, the other prostitutes go to her aid. Vargas Llosa underscores the prostitutes' humanity in this scene by individualizing the women and giving them names. Such manifestations of comradeship are magnified into comedy in *Pantaleóny la visitadoras.* Here the women are banded together not because they are pariahs, but because they are treated as an army unit. In fact, the external pressure to be a unit, and even the good treatment they receive, seems to diminish their sense of solidarity. The great competition to join the Visitors Service retards the development of trust among those who are chosen, and la Brasileña's special privileges are a source of friction. In true adversity, however —la Brasileña's death, the dissolution of the Service— the bond is deeply felt.

The visitors accept the parody of army discipline Pantaleón imposes on them because it is accompanied by his respect. Pantoja infects the women with his sense of mission, and they become as blind as he in believing in their respectability. This innocence is a source of comedy, but it results in disaster as well. Because they lose contact with the social truth about themselves, the Service is disbanded and the visitors suffer. Maclovia nearly starves; others

are forced to become streetwalkers or beggars. Like Hortensia, whose belief that she is a fine lady and a great artist renders her powerless to cope after Cayo leaves her and leads to her degradation and death, the visitors suffer for their believing Pantaleón when he tells them they are not whores.

Self knowledge and an eye unclouded to social reality are necessary to a prostitute's survival, and characters as different as Queta and Bonifacia stay alive because they see and accept the truth about themselves and their world.[13] La Brasileña, a successful prostitute who aspires to nothing more, should not die but does. Her death shocks the reader, because, like Queta and la Selvática, her behavior is self protective and she is at ease with herself and her profession, finding the euphemisms Pantaleón devises to describe the activities of the Service both pretentious and funny.

Like la Selvática, la Brasileña is not meant to be representative, but rather is the outstanding individual in a group of prostitutes. She is more beautiful, more intelligent, and more privileged than the others. Unlike Bonifacia/la Selvática, she is introduced as a prostitute, and that remains her primary identity. We see la Brasileña, as we saw Queta, engaged in explicitly sexual behavior. In *Pantaleón y las visitadoras,* though, the sex is made to seem humorous and even ludicrous. Comic misunderstandings, the use of infantile behavior and language, and the absence of male domination and female victimization all contribute to the playful tone of the sex scenes.[14]

La Brasileña is portrayed exclusively as a prostitute until she dies, at which time Vargas Llosa provides her with an extraordinarily melodramatic background which merely confirms her primary identity as a prostitute. The use of lurid newspaper accounts to report her death places the event at a great distance from the reader.[15] The author deliberately lessens the impact of la Brasileña's death because it is less important than Pantoja's downfall. In fact, it merely precipitates the latter. Rarely does Vargas Llosa so visibly manipulate the direction his work takes, but in *Pantaleón y las visitadoras* the ironic mode he uses places him in a superior position vis a vis the characters; and he succumbs to the temptation, clearly present in such a situation, to determine arbitrarily the fates of his characters. La Brasileña's death is necessary to occasion Pantaloon's apparently deranged behavior, so she dies — ironically— shot by the soliders who have come to the rescue.

So inconsistent is la Brasileña's death with her life (though it is clearly possible in an absurd, chaotic world), that Vargas Llosa very nearly atones for it by divorcing the dead Brasileña from the live one. The news items, riddled with irrelevant facts, reporting her death and crucifixion, the parody of a whore's life, and the use of la Brasileña's real name, all contribute to the dis-junction of the character. In *La casa verde,* Bonifacia and la Selvática are resolved into one person; in *Pantaleón y las visitadoras,* la Brasileña and Olga are sundered. It is curious that while we must struggle to identify Bonifacia

with la Selvática, there is never any doubt that la Brasileña is "really" Olga, since even before she appears in the novel she is referred to by that name. Yet Olga, unlike Bonifacia, is nobody. She lives in the work only and la Brasileña, and the past life the newspapers invent for Olga Arellano Rosaura is too stereotypical to be credible.

Nevertheless, the division between the prostitute and the woman she is outside the profession exists; and it is articulated by Maclovia, another of the visitors:

> Maclovia va sólo con el trabajo, tampoco ése es mi nombre, y en cambio mi nombre de veras va con todo lo demás, por ejemplo mis amistades. [...] Es como si yo fuera dos mujeres, cada una haciendo una cosa y cada una con un nombre distinto.[16]

Many of Vargas Llosa's characters have dual names, often reflecting changes in personality or situation. The phenomenon is almost universal among prostitutes, and as Maclovia suggests elsewhere in the same speech, it occurs less to protect onesself and one's family than to signal a separate identity. Though Vargas Llosa insists on double names for prostitutes and those associated with them in *Pantaleón y las visitadores,* the "real" names of these characters are very nearly vestigial. With the exception of Pechuga/Luisa Cánepa, a servant who turned to prostitution after being raped, and la Brasileña/Olga, no facts are given about the whores', madames', and pimps' other lives. The mention of these characters' true names indicates the existence of a greater reality than that presented in the novel, which is supported by the nature of the bulk of the material out of which the rest of the work is formed: reports, incomplete conversations, distilled descriptions of action, letters, dreams, and radio shows —all of which are highly selective interpretations or presentations of the world.

On the other hand, the exhaustive *Conversación en la Catedral,* in which Vargas Llosa is conscious of presenting overwhelming amounts of data that the reader must sort and interpret, presents Queta exclusively as a prostitute. She mentions once that Queta is her working name, but no indication is given as to her real one. We are left to conclude that Queta as prostitute is complete as far as her creator is concerned. Hortensia, a more important character, is given a double name and the past identity to go with it: she is the Muse, a famous singer.

In the case of Bonifacia/la Selvática, the individual is created as two separate characters who are ultimately resolved into one. Throughout, certain characteristics mark both: her green eyes, compassion, and self knowledge. Bonifacia begins as a nameless Indian child and becomes la Selvática. The movement is circular, from jungle child to jungle woman,

from the green house of the Amazon Basin to the Green House of Piura. She is always the Indian/savage/Selvática, carrying the green that marks her dwelling in her eyes; and she is always the doer of good/Bonifacia. The two parts of her are always present within her; the double name enriches the character. In *Pantaleón y las visitadoras,* it diminishes the individual by implying possibilities that are never realized.

Still, the visitors are humanized to a great extent than the inhabitants of the Green House. At first their actions as a group perform this function, in opposition to the depersonalizing force of the military. Later individuals emerge, though with the exception of la Brasileña, each of the women tends to represent the mass. Many of the details of Maclovia's experience are unique, but her perceptions of the Service and of prostitution are certainly representative.

Also representative is Maclovia's involvement in the cult of Brother Francisco. His Brotherhood of the Ark, a parody of Christianity with its emphasis on crucifixion, interacts with both the military and the Visitors Service, and it mirrors the trajectory and form of the latter. The cult and the Service both conform to the pattern of sudden, enormous success and destruction. They are first seen as bothersome but harmless, become a serious threat to the status quo, and end on a note of horror. Vargas Llosa further identifies the cult with the Service by creating a network of coincidence that connects the two. The headquarters of the Service is a former temple of the Ark, many of the prostitutes are cult members, and la Brasileña is crucified in an attempt to blame her death on the Brotherhood. Finally, though the cult and the Service are officially disbanded, they continue, metamorphosed. Dead religious leaders are notoriously potent, and the *estampas* of Brother Francisco and other cult martyrs, including la Brasileña, are widely distributed. Most of the visitors once again become prostitutes, many just changing their clientele from enlisted men to officers. The merging of military, cult, and prostitution is made manifest when an officer and a former visitor act out a sexual fantasy based on a cult crucifixion:

> — Los brazos amarraditos así, las patitas así, la cabeza caída sobre esta tetita—jadea, va viene, decora, anuda, mide el teniente Santana—. Ahora ciérrame los ojos y hazte la muerta, Pichuza. Así mismo. Pobrecita mi visitadora, ay qué pena mi crucificada, mi 'hermanita' del Arca tan rica.[17]

The inevitability of prostitution in a society that sees women only as sexual beings has provided Vargas Llosa with a rich source of material. The writer's ambivalence toward prostitution, and his ability to use that ambivalence, can be understood by looking at the way he uses euphemisms to

name the prostitute. In his efforts to soften the reality he is dealing with and make it acceptable, Vargas Llosa implies that it is really dirty and improper. In addition, he himself comments on their use, telling us that the word "inhabitant" *(habitanta)* was coined by him and his friends when they were children, to refer to the prostitutes in the real-life prototype of the Green House.[18] The prostitutes were magical creatures, and the prosaic name the boys gave them no doubt served to demystify the women somewhat. The euphemisms "visitors" and "washerwomen" *(visitadoras* and *lavanderas)* of *Pantaleón y las visitadoras* are commented on within the work, the first by a chaplain who disapproves of the Service and the second, indirectly, in a comic scene during which Pantoja's wife goes to get the laundry while the washerwoman is worrying about having to deal with a *ménage a trois.* Vargas Llosa uses euphemisms in both these novels to veil the prostitutes, in one to keep them abstract and undifferentiated —to perpetuate the myth, and in the other for comic effect —to undermine the myth. The realism of *Conversación en la Catedral* would be weakened by the use of euphemisms, and so there are none. Likewise, la Selvática, who is an individual, rejects all evasions of truth. "Soy una puta y una recogida," she proclaims.[19]

The need to reject euphemism is as urgent as the need to employ it. The need to accept the prostitute equals the need to deplore prostitution. Vargas Llosa's ability to embrace diese contradictions and discover ways of using them allows him to create novels alive with the vital tension that marks his works.

FOOTNOTES

[1]José Miguel Oviedo, "Mario Vargas Llosa: la alternativa del humor," *Palabras del escándalo,* Julio Ortega, ed. (Barcelona: 1974), pp. 315-335.
[2]This point is aplty made by Joseph Sommers, "Literatura e ideología: el militarismo en las novelas de Mario Vargas Llosa," *Revista de crítica literaria latinoamericana,* I:2 (1975), pp. 87-112.

[2]This point is aptly made by Joseph Sommers, "Literatura e ideología: el militarismo en las novelas de Mario Vargas Llosa," *Revista de critica literaria latinoamericana,* I:2 (1975), pp. 87-112.

[3]Mario Vargas Llosa, *Historia secreta de una novela* (Barcelona: 1971).

[4]The novels I deal with in this essay are *La casa verde,* 4a edición (Barcelona: 1967), *Conversación en la Catedral,* 3a edición (Barcelona: 1970), and *Pantaleón y las visitadoras,* 7a edición (Barcelona: 1976). All quotations are from these editions. Prostitutes are insignificant as characters in *La ciudad y los perros* and almost entirely absent in *La tía Julia y el escribidor.* The only prostitute in the last novel is Pedro Camacho's Argentine wife, whose existence is conjured up at the last minute to explain Camacho's obsessive hatred of her countrymen.

[5]Their names contribute to their characterization. Chuchupe, the name of the deadliest snake in the region, and Chupito recall the verb, *chupar.* These two names, and Chino Porfirio's, repeat the "ch" and "p" sounds, creating a silly, infantile effect congruent with Chino's pidgen Spanish, undermining their more sinister characteristics. Furthermore, Vargas Llosa uses the same sounds in the names of Pantaleón *P*antoja and his wife, *Poch*ita; and he identifies Pantoja's mother with Chuchupe by giving them the same first name, Leonor.

[6]Mario Vargas Llosa, *Conversación en la Catedral,* p. 13.

[7]I refer to the situation Cayo Bermúdez creates. His mistress's home is the meeting place of politicans and prostitutes. Cayo is also reputed to be part owner of Ivonne's brothel.

[8]Anselmo, the founder of the original Green House, however, is mythicized just as the house is. Unlike other Vargas Llosa brothel owners, Anselmo is not corrupt or evil and in fact has few dealings with the prostitutes. Even his relationship with Antonia is portrayed as a miraculous and tender love, though from her point of view it must have been terrifying. After her death, Anselmo assumes Antonia's infirmities, becoming the near-blind harpist, dumb insofar as he refuses to acknowledge the existence and destruction of the brothel he built. La Chunga, like her father, is vaguely superhuman. An

androgynous, fear-inspiring figure, she reenacts Anselmo's ritual departure and return to open the Green House.

[9]Lalita *(La casa verde)* and Amalia *(Conversación)* each have several lovers, but both women form long term relationships with their men and do not use sex as a commodity. Above all, they have an innocence that remains untouched. Hortensia, Cayo Bermúdez's self deluded mistress *(Conversación),* is not a professional prostitute either. After Cayo abandons her, she has a series of lovers, but before she can become established as a prostitute she is murdered.

[10]Luis A. Díez, *"Conversación en la Catedral,* saga de corrupción y mediocridad," *Homenaje a Mario Vargas Llosa,* Helmy F. Giacoman and José Miguel Oviedo, eds. (New York: 1971), pp. 203-222.

[n]Amalia's love affair with Trinidad may be an exception, but it is not depicted, only recalled by Amalia, who sees no ill in anyone.

[12]Ironically, Queta is doubly mistaken. Zavala did not order Hortensia's death, and he is punished: His son witnesses the accusation and so Zavala's secret is revealed to his family.

[13]The implicit message here for oppressed women is, "resign yourself —hardly what one would expect from a writer dedicated to the revolution.

[14]La Brasileña is more knowledgeable sexually than Pantaleón, and she uses her experience to reduce their difference in status. This reversal of the typical male dominant situation adds to the humor.

[15]Similar devices, such as exposition by means of military communiqués and transcriptions of radio shows, also create emotional distance, but these are mitigated by the use of dialogues, dreams, and letters, all of which are more immediate expressions or interpretations of reality.

[16]Mario Vargas Llosa, *Pantaleón y las visitadoras,* p. 194.

[17]Mario Vargas Llosa, *Pantaleón y las visitadoras,* pp. 308-309. This scene also combines horror with humor and is an implicit statement on the "success" of die military in eradicating the two scourges of Iquitos. In short, these lines contain the essence of the novel.

[18]Mario Vargas Llosa, *Historia secreta de una novela,* op. cit.

[19]Mario Vargas Llosa, *La casaverde,* p. 428.