



Making Waves

Mario Vargas Llosa , John King (Editor)

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Mario Vargas Llosa, renowned as a novelist, is one of our most brilliant and provocative public intellectuals as well. In "Making Waves," the first collection of his essays, he explores, with characteristic brio and elegance, his long-standing preoccupations - literature and politics, Europe and the Americas, and the relations among them all. We follow Vargas Llosa from his native Peru to Madrid and then to Paris, the setting of essays on his great precursors Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Albert Camus, as well as a comic account of his visit to the tomb of Rin Tin Tin and an affecting memoir of his time in the city as an aspiring writer in the 1960s. In passionately critical essays on the Cuban revolution and its aftermath, Vargas Llosa takes up vital questions of Latin American independence, while in essays on Faulkner, Garcia Marquez, and Julio Cortazar - and in an exchange with Gunter Grass - he ponders magic realism. In more recent articles, he considers the terrorism of Peru's Shining Path and the presidency of Alberto Fujimori - and the failures of the English public-school system, which made his son into a Rastafarian. The essays in "Making Waves" are full of Mario Vargas Llosa's unflagging literary intensity and moral and political integrity. They are an important addition to the body of work of this major international writer.

Making Waves Details

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Tony says

MAKING WAVES. (1996). Mario Vargas Llosa. ****.

This collection of Vargas Llosa's essays was edited and translated by John King. Many of them dealt with the politics of various Latin American countries, and, I admit, I was not up enough on my history enough to follow many of them – other than the ones everyone knows about. The author certainly had a lot to say about the vagaries of leadership in most of those countries. The essays that I particularly enjoyed were those that dealt with his opinions of other writers and their ultimate contributions to the world of literature. It is relatively easy to spot that one of his favorite writers – one that he admired above all others – was William Faulkner. He makes the point that Faulkner's world was similar to the world that existed in the perimeters of the larger Latin American cities. The people inhabiting those worlds are kissing cousins in terms of their economic status and quality of life. As it turns out – what I didn't realize – Faulkner is one of the most highly respected of all American writers by Central and South American readers and critics. Aside from Faulkner, Vargas Llosa provides complimentary essays on John Dos Passos and several other American authors. Other essays that hit home included one on the Entartete Kunst Exhibit that was held in Berlin during the Nazi Era and was later repeated after the war featuring those works that still survived; one on the assassination and significance of Che, and, for a relief, one entitled, "The Penis or Life: The Bobbitt Affair." It's hard to believe that Lorena's attack on her husband, John Wayne Bobbitt, happened back in June of 1993. Has it been that long ago? I'll stick my neck out and say that there is likely to be several essays in this collection that will appeal to every reader – all of which were thoughtfully written by this great Peruvian novelist.

Jeff says

Admittedly, I have read none of Llosa's fiction. I have a novel of his sitting on my shelf, but I haven't gotten to it yet. But nonetheless I found this collection of essays tremendously interesting. The essay span the late '60s to the early '90s, and while not arranged strictly chronologically, the beginning of the collection has more from the '60s and the end of the book is predominantly from the '80s and '90s. In arranging the book in this way, the editor allows the reader to see Llosa's ideas transform and evolve over time, particularly his thoughts about the state and direction of Latin American governments, and more specifically his views on socialism. His affinity for socialism is obvious in the first few essays. But the reader quickly sees this change, especially in regards to Cuba and Fidel Castro. By the last few essays, Llosa villifies Castro. In his essay written on the 25th anniversary of Che Guevara's death in 1992, I thoroughly expected that he would have portrayed Che as the true representative of the Cuban Revolution, cast aside by the machinations of Castro's totalitarianism, a hero of the people, particularly of the poor. But Llosa surprised me. His acrimony extends to Che, calling him the "destroyer of democracies." In addition to all of this, there is a heavy dose of literary commentary. Llose explains his love of Faulker, his lessening admiration of Sartre, and his reconsideration of Camus...all writers that I greatly admire. And the final essay on the nature of fiction, the importance of fiction in a free society is sublime. I may have every student that I teach from now on read that essay. I'm very glad I read this book.

Titus Hjelm says

Interestingly, I thought the essays got better the further from my political views Vargas Llosa became. The highlights were the pieces on the Shining Path and the Sandinistas, although they are more reportage than essays, perhaps. Llosa is probably correct in thinking South American revolutionaries' proneness to violence is a 'Latin' thing, and of course some of his observations on socialism are correct. However, like so many other converts from socialism, his view that the world works best when ran with 'common sense' is hopelessly naive. He never asks _whose_ common sense he is talking about and his apparent neutrality is betrayed by the fact that the brutalities of capitalism are never submitted to the same merciless scrutiny as socialist regimes and movements. Pity, as the essays get otherwise better with the years.

Armando says

great essay by vargas llosa, we learn a lot about him, this is a great book for any fans of Vargas Llosa. highly recommended. if you have read any of his books and now you read making waves you will have a different perspective of his books

Ali says

When ever I come to names such as “Llosa”, “Borges”, “Cortazar”, “Fuentes”... I wish I knew Spanish language, as I’m sure works by these authors would have a different aroma and melody in their own tongues. Llosa is, for me, one of the greatest story tellers, whose works give me deliciousness in Persian as well, (if it’s translated by Abdollah Kowsari, for example). Mario Vargas Llosa uses a highly sophisticated techniques with a very delicate language in multiple viewpoint, as if I’m listening to “Sare”, my childhood story tellers whom supposed to drown me in sleep, but was keeping me awake instead. Llosa takes you to a place, and while you get used to the situation, become a bit relax, he leaves you for another situation, another character in another place, force you to follow him as a sleepwalker, burning of curiosity, apprehension and restlessness, while he continue to make new situations with new chracters out of nothing, absolutely relax with a smile on his lips. He doesn’t explain the characters, but procreates them and leave them on your lap, and disappears...

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Atoosa says

Brilliant, that is all I can say

Benjamin Zapata says

First time I read Vargas Llosa in English, and he sounds just as good as in Spanish; John King as made an amazing translation of some of the best essays by one the most accomplished and most provocative literary and philosophical figures in the world. Winner of the National Book Critics Circle, a New York Times Notable Book, and consider "One of the Best Books of the Year" by Publishers Weekly, "Making Waves" span thirty years of writing, from social criticism to contemporary literature, with each and every work reminds us that "literature is fire...a form of permanent insurrection." This book also includes one his best essays ever, "The Story of a Massacre", about the terrorism of Peru's Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso). An elegant, thoughtful, and wide-ranging book that shows the breadth of Vargas Llosa's interest and passions.

Hadrian says

Third book I won on Goodreads through FirstReads.

After being completely starstruck by The War of the End of the World, I was pleasantly surprised by winning this, and hoped to learn more about the author.

The range of the essays is wide, from Hemingway, Faulkner and Joyce, to meeting Buñuel and discussing the decline of Che's legacy, to having a son convert to Rastafarianism. Likewise, the mood of these varies, from introspection to mirth. All of these are written wonderfully, and the author has a charming and witty voice.

Some of the essays are a bit out of reach for the lay person, but the majority are still tasty treats. Worth picking up if you are already a fan of the author, and want to learn more about him.

David says

What an excellent and astute collection of essays from such topics as the "Bobbitt affair" to Camus. The man is brilliant and a joy to read in the translation by John King. Originally published in 1996, it was released again after his win of the 2010 Nobel prize in literature.

The pinnacle of this book is "The Story of the Massacre" based on his work in a commission set up by the Peruvian government to understand what happened when seven journalists were killed in the Andes in 1983. Vargas Llosa gives a very well-rounded background leading up to the massacre when Sendero Luminoso (The Shining Path) army began its war against the Peruvian government. I don't even remember this event but it was a central issue in Peru at the time. His journalistic background unravels a good story and I was surprised by the ending.

Opposite to this is his story called "My Son the Rastafarian". This is a personal recollection of a visit by his son Gonzalo Gabriel while he sat on the jury of the Berlin Film Festival. The title sums up his 16-year old son. His observations, anxiety and grief of a teen boy reminded me of my own (to a much lesser degree). It was a good laugh and I'm sure Vargas Llosa didn't laugh at the time but does now.

Throughout these 46 essays, Vargas Llosa gives his view from a Latin American about literature (James Joyce, Hemmingway, Doris Lessing, Faulkner to name a view), politics, art, existentialism and soccer. If you enjoy his books, don't miss this collection of essays.
