

**Questions of Conquest  
and Culture**

*Mario Vargas Llosa*



The John Bonython Lectures

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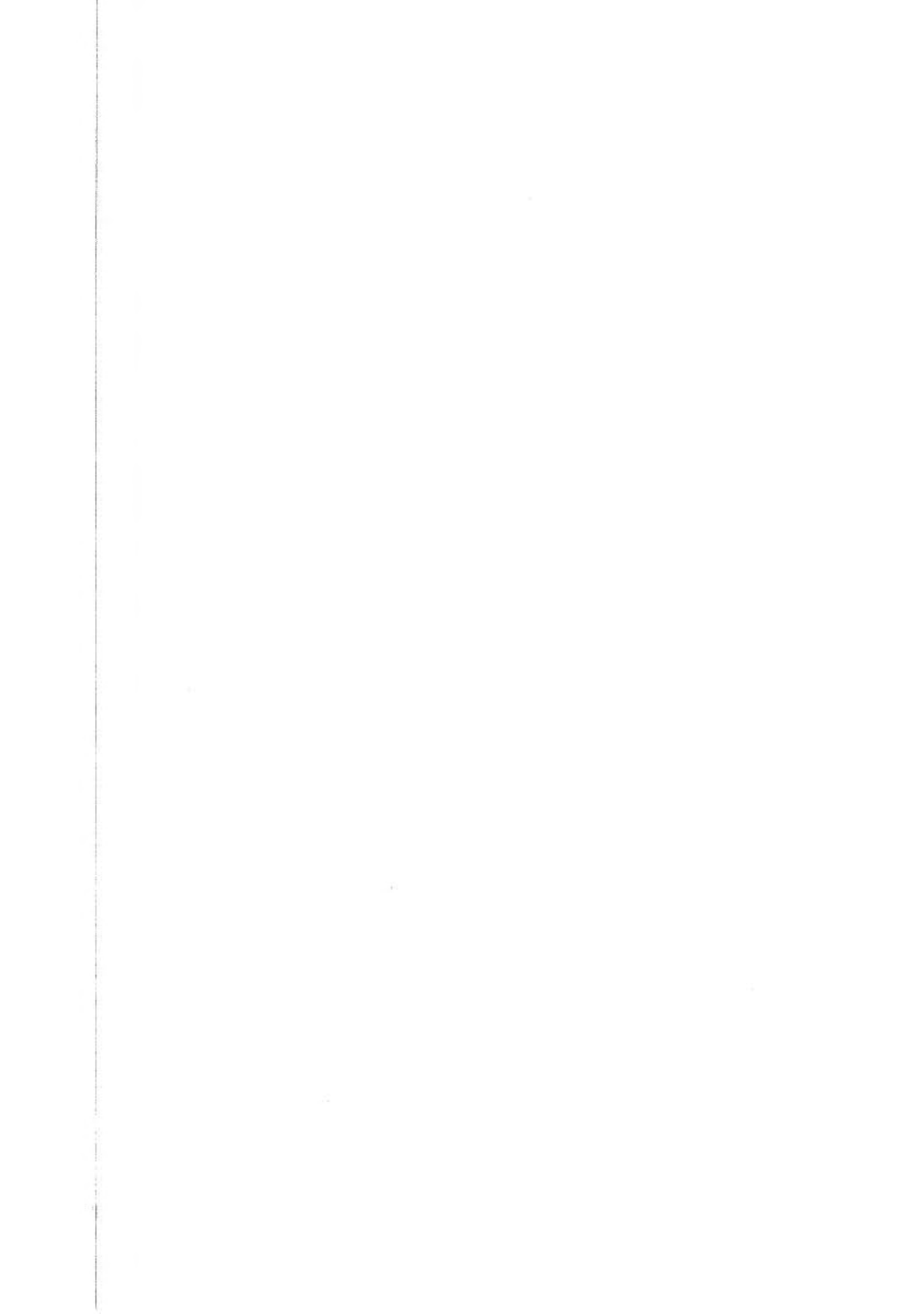
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# **Questions of Conquest and Culture**

**CIS Occasional Papers 47**



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*Mario Vargas Llosa*

THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY  
JOHN BONYTHON LECTURE

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# Opening Remarks

*Maurice Newman*  
*Chairman, CIS Executive Board*

May I welcome you to this, the tenth Anniversary John Bonython Lecture. As you may know, the Lecture has been named after the late John Bonython, the first Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Centre for Independent Studies. We are especially grateful on this occasion for the support of Santos, the company founded by John, and Qantas, in assisting the Centre to make this night the obvious success it is going to be. It will be a fairly late evening, but you can be assured of both an intellectual and a gastronomic feast right through to the vote of thanks. I might also comment on the enormous amount of work undertaken by the CIS staff in getting things to where they are tonight. It would be inappropriate of me to single out any individuals because they are such a great team of imaginative and hard-working men and women, and, speaking as Chairman, I can only express my admiration for their work tonight.

Before I conclude these remarks, let me remind you of the reason for which this Lecture has been established, and I quote, 'to examine the relationship between individuals and the economic, social and political factors that make up a free society'. Over the years, the Lecture has been given by a person, not necessarily a scholar, selected because of the valuable insights he or she may have developed in support of the fundamental objectives for which the Centre for Independent Studies has been established. The Lecture was first presented in Adelaide in 1984 by Professor Israel Kirzner of New York University. In following years, the Lecture was delivered by Professor Max Hartwell, Lord Harris of High Cross, Mrs Shirley Robin Letwin (who sadly passed away earlier this year), Dr Thomas Sowell, Lord Bauer, Nobel Laureate James M. Buchanan, Czech Prime Minister Václav Klaus, and last year by Professor Kenneth Minogue.

I now invite Mr Alan McGregor, Chairman of the CIS Board of Trustees, to introduce our guest, Mario Vargas Llosa.

# Introduction

*Alan McGregor AO*  
*Chairman, CIS Board of Trustees*

The John Bonython Lecture is the annual major public event of the Centre for Independent Studies. Over the years Greg Lindsay has assembled a marvellous array of people of world renown to come to Australia for this event. This year, the tenth, he has excelled, inviting Mario Vargas Llosa, who is an exceptional example of the powerful forces which can be generated by one man and his ideas and philosophy.

In the early years of its existence, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Centre's main research and publications were directed towards the promotion of rational economic policies. Some say this battle has been won. Nothing could be further from the truth. Statements of that nature are dangerously complacent.

Look around the world: you will see the re-emergence of the superficially seductive policies of protection and government interference in trade and economic activity. Europe and Japan, together the greatest beneficiaries of increasingly free world-trade policies since World War II, are both resisting further reform in the GATT Uruguay round which is essential as the next step in fostering conditions for growing prosperity.

In the USA, the rhetoric of the Clinton administration encourages that country's citizens to believe they will gain by 'managed trade'. For such notions read 'protection'. As we see graphically portrayed in this country, protection leads to inefficiency and insulation from the forces which should influence the allocation of resources. Perhaps there is a period of short-term artificial benefit, but this inevitably leads to more painful adjustment being required in the longer term. In many senses Australia's timid start at adjustment is made more difficult by earlier periods when governments believed they could protect the country from world economic forces. New Zealand deserves admiration for tackling these issues, and the benefits are now becoming apparent.

Not only is there much to do in the area of economics. We should also be concerned about the increasing difficulties governments have in the fields of health, welfare and education. The standards and the generosity (as governments see it) to which we have become accustomed will be difficult to maintain. The CIS has done a considerable



amount of work on these subjects. There is a need for basic structural reform. Generally speaking, there are not many in our community contemplating how welfare can be improved. Changes must occur in the way it is delivered. There must be changes in philosophy, aimed at reducing perpetual dependence.

I will refrain from joining the debate about the quality of government in Australia. No doubt the conversation at most tables would have commented on our current state of affairs. However, the lack of any apparent philosophy underpinning the government's policies, and the way important issues are either trivialised or ignored, must, I suggest, bring home to everyone the importance of independent organisations such as the CIS in providing the foundations, by way of independent research and cogent argument, for the development of ideas and policy changes.

We hear much comment about the need for research and development in our industries, the importance of technological advancement, and the need for reform and restructuring. So it is in the field of ideas: what we want to achieve for society, how we should do it, what will work and what *will* not work. This is the work the CIS does with independence of thought and action that is widely acknowledged and respected. I hope you individually feel it is important and that it will contribute to your, and your family's, well being and prosperity.

In Australia, democracy flourishes and by any objective assessment we enjoy considerable freedom and personal liberty. And yet we believe there is much to reform and much to improve; and continued vigilance is vital. Mario Vargas Llosa stands for the same principles of freedom and liberty that the CIS espouses, but he comes from a vastly different background, where Australia's concerns about itself must seem slight by comparison with the fundamental disadvantages of the citizens of Peru. He stands as a beacon of freedom in a country where repression and thuggery are realities of everyday life.

He is a writer and author of international renown. He has been described by that journalistic icon, Paddy McGuinness, as 'one of the most important novelists writing today on the Latin American stage and on the world stage'. He is not as well known in Australia as in many other parts of the world, but he will be much better known after tonight and as a result of this visit. Moreover, if you read some of his books you will gain an insight into this colourful character, as there is much in them that is inspired by his own life and thoughts.

He is a writer of fiction, much of which is humorous, and also an author of serious essays on a wide range of political, economic and

social subjects. He is also a courageous commentator and a political candidate of considerable stature. He ran for President of Peru in 1990 against the forces of dictatorship, totalitarianism, repression and the like. Some time before the elections in Peru in 1990, the government of the day nationalised the banks, an act of grand larceny of the people's savings. He wrote an article exposing this for what it was, and severely criticising the action. From that day onward there were many in Peru who saw him as a potential leader.

By a stroke of good fortune I discovered we have a mutual friend who originates from Chile. I telephoned him in search of intelligence. When I asked, 'do you know Mario Vargas Llosa?', the response was full of Latin excitement. Our friend Claudio Veliz created a picture of this marvellous character, a colourful personality and a courageous and honourable citizen of the world. He recounted how he had dined with Mario and Patricia Vargas Llosa on the night that the article about the banks had been published. The restaurant was the Rosa Nautica, on a pier on the coast. It was chosen because it was considered safe; from the roof all approaches by guerrillas could be discovered and repulsed. There was nothing to obstruct the line of sight. Such were the considerations for dining out in Lima. He described how people came up throughout the evening congratulating Sr. Vargas Llosa on the article and exhorting him to become their leader. 'You know what to do', and 'You can say it for us', they said. As Claudio described it to me, these simple pleas did in fact portray the nature of the man. What he said came from the heart, and from a heart that understood the essential ingredients of human dignity and the conditions that must be created for people to use their imagination and energy to create their own lives. Then they will naturally combine to produce vibrant economic activity, leading to the capacity for a greater enjoyment of life, and a fertile field for artists and scholars to thrive and be agents for inspiration.

This man, with great sense of honour, and responsibility, responded to his fellow countrymen. Two weeks later his immediate future was sealed when he addressed a rally of some half a million cheering supporters in Lima. (What must it be like to experience such adulation? Both thrilling and sobering, I suspect.)

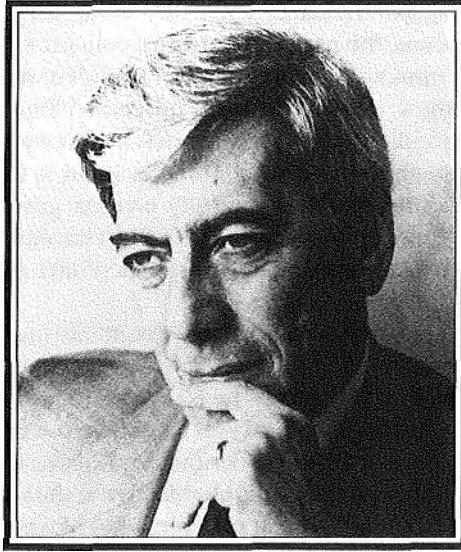
In the election he won in the first round and was defeated in the second after a scurrilous campaign was run against him personally. During this campaign there were many attempts on his life; most if not all the municipal candidates who ran with him were grievously threatened, and some were attacked and killed.

In the end he lost the immediate purpose. However, this may well

be a case of having lost the battle while on a wider stage great progress was made in winning the greater contest to convert South America to democratic government. His candidacy for President was a major event in what now seems to be an irreversible process. While the communist world has largely collapsed and governments in many countries strive for democratic institutions, South America is on a roll from almost universal dictatorship to democratically elected governments. The achievements of these new governments will, in the end, surely provide their own force towards those like Peru, which have yet to go the full distance.

Meanwhile, Mario Vargas Llosa is a constant rallying point, a spokesman and an inspiration for those still fighting for progress towards freedom and democracy. Perhaps he is destined for this greater world role rather than the life of a politician. Certainly the rest of the world will continue to benefit from his writing and his example. He is an advocate for the fundamental principles that we at the CIS stand for. We salute him. Here is a man of great courage, who like a great forest tree seeks the light while anchoring his roots in the arts and the world of letters and philosophy, combining this with forceful action from time to time in support of his beliefs. He is a rare combination: a thinker, a writer, a doer and tonight a speaker.

It is with great pleasure that I welcome Mario and Patricia Vargas Llosa to Australia, to the Centre for Independent Studies, and to the John Bonython Lecture for 1993. And now, sir, I invite you to deliver the Lecture.



## About the Author

Mario Vargas Llosa, born in 1936, undertook his schooling and studies in Bolivia, Peru and Spain, and obtained a doctorate from the University of Madrid. While working as a journalist, he became known to a wider audience with his book *The City and the Dogs* (1963), which won him several literary prizes and was translated into 21 languages. Other books and plays followed, and he is now one of the most acclaimed writers in Latin America. His works include *The City and the Dogs* (1963), *The Green House* (1966), *Conversation in The Cathedral* (1969), *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter* (1977), *The Storyteller* (1987), and *In Praise of the Stepmother* (1988). His autobiography will be published in English translation in 1994, under the title *Like a Fish in Water: A Memoir*.

In 1987, he joined friends in starting a citizens' campaign in defence of private banking and economic and political liberty generally. In 1990, as head of a liberal-conservative coalition, he stood for election to the Presidency of Peru. He won a plurality of the votes in the first round, but was defeated in the second round by Alberto Fujimori, who subsequently staged a coup against himself to claim dictatorial powers.

Mario Vargas Llosa recently acquired dual Spanish-Peruvian citizenship and now lives in Europe, devoting his energies to lecturing and writing.

## Questions of Conquest and Culture

*Mario Vargas Llosa*

The historian who mastered the subject of the discovery and conquest of Peru by the Spaniards better than anyone else had a tragic history himself. He died without having written the book for which he had prepared himself his whole life and whose theme he knew so well that he almost gave the impression of being omniscient.

His name was Raul Porras Barrenechea. He was a small, pot-bellied man with a large forehead and a pair of blue eyes that glistened with irony every time he said something in jest. He was the most brilliant teacher I have ever had. Marcel Bataillon, another historian whom I had a chance to listen to at the College de France in a course he gave on a Peruvian chronicle, seemed to match Porras Barrenechea's eloquence and evocative power as well as his academic integrity. But not even the learned and elegant Bataillon could captivate an audience with the enchantment that Porras Barrenechea did. In the big old house of San Marcos, the first university founded by the Spaniards in the New World, a place that had already begun to fall into an irreparable process of decay when I passed through it in the 1950s, the lectures on historical sources attracted such a vast number of listeners that it was necessary to arrive well before they started so as not to be left outside the classroom, listening together with dozens of students literally hanging from doors and windows.

Whenever Porras Barrenechea spoke, history became anecdote, gesture, adventure, colour, psychology. He depicted history in a series of murals which had the magnificence of a Renaissance painting, and in which the determining factor of events was never impersonal forces, the geographical imperative, economic relations, or divine providence — but rather the cast of certain outstanding individuals whose audacity, genius, charisma or contagious insanity had imposed on each era and society a certain orientation and shape.

To this concept of history, which the 'scientific' historians had already named 'romantic' in an effort to disqualify it, Porras Barrenechea added a quest for knowledge and documentary precision that none of his colleagues and critics at San Marcos have so far been able to equal. Those historians who dismissed Porras Barrenechea because he was more interested in simple 'narrated' history instead of giving it a social or economic interpretation, have been less effective than he was in explaining to us that crucial event in the destiny of Europe and

America: the destruction of the Inca Empire and the linking of its vast territories and peoples to the Western world. Because for Porras Barrenechea, although History had to have a dramatic quality, architectonic beauty, suspense and richness, as well as a wide range of human types and the excellence in style of a great work of fiction, everything in it also had to be scrupulously true, proven time after time.

In order to be able to narrate the discovery and conquest of Peru in this way, Porras Barrenechea, before anything else, had to evaluate his sources very carefully. It was necessary to examine thoroughly all the witnesses and documents of the event so as to establish the degree of credibility of each one of them. And in the numerous cases of deceitful testimonies, Porras Barrenechea had to find out the reasons that lead the author to conceal, misrepresent or overpaint the facts so that, knowing their peculiar limitations, those sources had a double meaning: what they revealed and what they distorted. For 40 years Porras Barrenechea dedicated all his powerful intellectual energy to this heroic hermeneutic. **All** the works he published while he was alive constituted the preliminary work for what should have been his *magnum opus*. Once he was perfectly equipped to embark upon it, pressing on with assurance through the labyrinthine jungle of chronicles, letters, testaments, rhymes and ballads of the discovery and conquest which he had read, cleansed, confronted and just about memorised, a sudden death put an end to his encyclopaedic information. As a result, all those interested in that era and in the men who lived it have had to keep on reading the old but so far unsurpassed *History of the Conquest* written by an American who never set foot in the country and who sketched it with extraordinary skill: William Prescott.

Dazzled by Porras Barrenechea's lectures, at one time I seriously considered the possibility of leaving aside literature so as to dedicate myself to history. Porras Barrenechea had asked me to work with him as an assistant in an ambitious project on the general history of Peru, under the auspices of the bookseller and publisher Juan Mejía Baca. It was Porras Barrenechea's task to write the volumes devoted to the conquest and emancipation. For four years, I spent three hours a day, five times a week, in that dusty house situated on Colina Street, where the books, the card indexes and the notebooks had slowly invaded and devoured everything, except Porras Barrenechea's bed and the dining table. My job was to read and take notes on the chroniclers' various themes, but principally on the myths and legends that preceded and followed the discovery and conquest of Peru. That experience has become an unforgettable memory for me. Whoever is familiar with the chronicles of the conquest and discovery of America will understand why. They

represent for us Latin Americans what the novels of chivalry represent for Europe: the beginning of literary fiction as we understand it today. I would ask you to permit me, here, a long parenthesis.

### **The Subversive Novel**

As you probably know, the novel was forbidden in the Spanish colonies by the Inquisition. The Inquisitors considered this literary genre — the novel — as dangerous for the spiritual fate of the Indians as for the moral and political behaviour of society, and in this, of course, they were absolutely right. We novelists must be grateful to the Spanish Inquisition for having discovered, before any critic did, the inevitably subversive nature of fiction. The prohibition included reading and publishing novels in the colonies. Naturally, there was no way to prevent a great number of novels from being smuggled into our countries and we know, for example, that the first copies of *Don Quixote* entered America hidden in barrels of wine. We can only dream with envy about the kind of experience it was, in those times, in Spanish America, to read a novel: a sinful adventure on account of which, by daring to abandon yourself to an imaginary world, you had to be prepared to face prison and humiliation.

Novels were not published in Spanish America until after the Wars of Independence. The first, *El Periquillo Samiento*, appeared in Mexico only in 1816. Although novels were abolished for three centuries, the goal of the Inquisitors — a society exonerated from the fictional disease — was not achieved.

They did not realise that the realm of fiction was larger and deeper than that of the novel. Nor could they imagine that the appetite for lies — that is, for escaping objective reality through illusions — was so powerful and rooted in the human spirit, that, once the novel as a medium for satisfying that appetite was gone, the thirst for fiction would infect, like a plague, all the other disciplines and genres in which the written word could freely flow. In repressing and censoring the literary genre specifically invented to give 'the necessity of lying' a place in the world, the Inquisitors achieved exactly the opposite of what they wanted: a world without novels, yes, put a world into which fiction had spread and contaminated practically everything: history, religion, poetry, science, art, speeches, journalism, and the daily habits of people.

We still are victims, in Latin America, of what we could call 'the revenge of the novel'. We still have great difficulty in our countries in differentiating between fiction and reality. We are traditionally accustomed to mix them in such a way that this is, probably, one of the

reasons why we are so impractical and inept in political matters, for instance. But some good came also from this novelisation of our whole life. Books like *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Cortázar's short stories and Roa Bastos' novels would not have been possible otherwise.

The tradition from which this kind of literature sprang, one in which we are exposed to a world totally subverted by fantasy, began, without doubt, with those chroniclers of the conquest and discovery that I read and glossed under the direction of Porras Barrenechea.

I have been thinking a lot about him lately, particularly since last year, 1992, which was, as you might remember, a commemorative year, the Quincentenary, which recalls a turning point in world history. Some would rather forget, but I think we ought to remember that just about 500 years ago Christopher Columbus's caravels first set sail and arrived on what would be called America, initiating waves of European and African immigrations. It is appropriate to reflect upon Columbus's voyage and its aftermath because just about everything good, and some of the bad, that has happened ever since has its roots in this episode. It shook up geography, economy, religion, morality, and the imagination of humanity; and it changed the course of history like probably nothing before it except, perhaps, the biblical flood.

Jorge Luis Borges once wrote regarding patriotism that 'only affirmations are tolerated'. Regarding the Quincentenary, it seems only contradictions were tolerated. A heated discussion preceded the Quincentenary, during which some rejected the idea of a commemoration wholesale, while others were willing to agree to it provided it served primarily to publicise the pillage committed by discoverers, conquistadors, and colonisers. The Quincentenary produced a curious controversy, with prosecutors of all shapes and sizes but few defenders. Some of the harshest detractors have been Spaniards and Portuguese who have raised their angry voices to claim there is nothing to celebrate in the arrival of Columbus to America because it was an imperialistic enterprise. Catholic priests and theologians are the leading critics of what my school text-books in the 1950s had called 'the propagation of faith and the extirpation of idolatry by missionaries'; a statement not even the most absent-minded conservative would dare to say in public today. All celebrations of the Quincentenary appear to have been burdened with hidden feelings of guilt and bad conscience.

This should not surprise us. Our age may be one of tremendous events, but it is also one of intellectual confusion. It is an age that has witnessed the collapse of the bloodiest regimes in history, and the eruption of liberty in societies where it never existed before, or where it was but a pale, elusive fire. But it has also witnessed the perversion



of common sense and the assailing of values and reason by ideology. Ideology has become the lay religion of our time, and its dogmas, stereotypes, commonplaces and excommunications continue to contaminate the intelligentsia of the Western world. The condemnations, the discomfort, and the silence of so many intellectuals on both sides of the Atlantic concerning the Quincentenary can be explained by the fear of praising the moral or material achievements of our democracies, and thereby losing the 'politically correct' credentials so necessary for success in the cultural establishment of the first and third worlds. The second world, the Soviet Union and its satellites, failed and collapsed precisely because ideology had moved beyond the musings of individuals to become the reason of state. Prominent intellectuals continue to cast a shadow of doubt and scepticism on liberty and democracy, but this is an aberration. Liberty is nothing to be ashamed of: it ought to be cherished with the fervour of those who have lost it, or have just regained it. Like the young people of the former East Germany who in 1989 tore down the wall in Berlin, one of the tasks for men and women of the new generation is to tear down the ideological walls of the prison houses of thought and culture still prevalent in so many free nations.

The arrival of Europeans in those lands — let us say it without an inferiority or superiority complex, and without bringing in historical exorcisms — is the greatest event in the history of America, Europe, and I would dare say, the world. Modernity began with the Odyssey of Columbus's three fragile and legendary boats and with the handful of adventurers who sailed through uncharted waters in search of a new route to India. They defied the long-held assumption that the world was flat, and boggled the European mind by stumbling into a fourth continent with highly developed civilisations. After 1492 the histories of many peoples scattered and isolated from each other in all corners of the world became one single, interconnected and inseparable history; and the slow and daunting, and also grandiose and irreversible, march of humanity towards universal civilisation was set in motion.

There are many ways to broach a subject of such massive import. One can start at the beginning, like José de la Rada y Gamio, the fearless historian who began his biography of the poet Mariano Melgar with the Almighty's creation of the universe. He summarised the first seven days and continued chronologically with Adam and Eve, the earthly paradise, the apple, the serpent, and so on. By the time he got to the birth of his hero, towards the end of the 18th century, he was mentally and physically exhausted. I will not rehearse this method now, but will choose instead a less comprehensive and more personal one. I would like to look back on the events of 500 years ago from the perspective of

my own experience, from my family history, or rather, from the history of my last name.

### **Some Personal Genealogy**

The name Vargas — my father's — arrived in South America with the first wave of Spaniards, those intrepid men led by the conquistador Francisco Pizarro who scaled the mountain range of the Andes and encountered the Inca civilisation. The Vargases came from Extremadura, one of the poorest regions of Spain, and took their name, as was then customary, from the feudal lord of the region, in whose lands they worked as farm-hands.

Humble and ignorant, many of them illiterate, but fierce like the times they were braving, they became protagonists in all the breath-taking events that characterised this adventurous and violent encounter of worlds and cultures. A Vargas was among the handful of conquistadors who set eyes on Atahualpa, the last emperor of the Incas, as he was drinking *chicha*, a corn-based liquor, from a skull. Rumour had it that it was the skull of his half-brother Huascar, whom he had executed in a bloody civil war. The next day, on the Plaza of Cajamarca, the conquistadors ambushed the Inca, and dealt the fatal blow to the empire.

No sooner had the empire fallen, than the conquistadors became involved in bitter and bloody conflicts. Many were killed in civil wars, others in uprisings; but many survived and spread throughout Peru and beyond. Centuries later the name Vargas would become quite common. My paternal family is a stream from this vast network of rivers.

I was never interested in the genealogy of my family, a large and sometimes unruly tribe. I was, however, quite interested in individuals and in none more than in Don Marcelino, my grandfather, for whom I felt uncontrollable affection. At home his name was taboo, and therefore a myth. He had been a faithful supporter of the liberal leader Augusto Duran, whom he accompanied in countless uprisings, guerrilla wars, imprisonments and exiles. My grandmother had to work wonders to feed her five children. In his old age, the impulsive Marcelino crowned a life of irresponsibility when he fled his home with a native woman who wore traditional Indian dress. He finished his days with her, far away from us, as the master of a railway station in a remote post in the Andes.

Llosa, my mother's last name, made its way to America in the 17th century, about 100 years after my father's. Llosa was a military bureaucrat. He came from Santillana del Mar in Spain, a spotless little town in the mountains of the Bay of Biscay, and settled in a city in the south of

Peru where I was born. He left many descendants who stuck stubbornly to the native soil: priests, nuns, judges, professors, poets, a few madmen, and a couple of military officers.

My grandparents knew every detail of the trials and tribulations of the Llosa family. It was a sheer delight to hear them tell so many tales and anecdotes during my childhood. I remember one story about a young officer, a hero of the war with Chile; and another about an inventor whose experiments caused floods, unintended demolitions of buildings, and the bankruptcy of a company that took his inventions seriously. There was also one about a young woman who was going to enter a cloister when she met and fell in love with Dúnquer Lavalle, a composer with whom she led a bohemian life which ended in tragedy. But the anecdote that fired my imagination and kept me up at night is one I made my grandparents repeat over and over again: the story of a relative who told his wife and children he was stepping out for a moment before lunch to buy a newspaper in the arcades of the Plaza de Armas, the town centre. They did not hear from him again for 25 years, when they received a letter from France announcing his death. 'Why did he go to Paris?' I used to ask my grandmother. 'Why else? To become corrupt!' That was, I believe, the origin of my fascination with French culture.

### *Mestizaje*

My story, I am sure, is not unusual. South Americans tend to have Spanish, Portuguese, or British ancestors. Many have ancestors stemming from more recent European migrations from Italy, France, Ireland, Germany, Central Europe, and elsewhere. For 500 years the Indians, the Europeans, and the Africans (who arrived in America with Spanish conquistadors) have mixed to such an extent that most individuals have ancestors of different origins. I hope that this process, mestizaje, as we call it in Spanish, continues. Mestizaje has been faster in countries like Paraguay or Mexico and slower in countries like Peru and Bolivia. It has been extremely slow in countries like the United States and Canada. But it has been taking place throughout the continent. In South America it has been so systematic that all European families who have settled in America have some Indian or African background by the second or third generation. Mestizaje works both ways. It would probably be impossible to find 'pure Indians', if it makes sense to use the expression at all, because one would need to search for them like a needle in a haystack in the roughest and most remote areas of the Andes, or in the jungles of Central and South America. They exist, but they are a very small minority.

One must understand *mestizaje* in a literal sense, of course, but it is also a psychological and a cultural fact. Let me illustrate the point with an example. There is a way of being Spanish, open and direct, which any Peruvian or Mexican would find disturbing, even offensive. Where a Spaniard may say 'no' we are likely to say 'yes . . . but'. We speak in diminutives to dilute conviction. When we express ourselves we take for granted that the best way to get from point A to point B is not a direct line, but a curve, or better yet a spiral. We believe we are being thoughtless or impolite when we do not colour our statements with doubts, when we do not express ourselves with a measure of restraint. Whether we are Indian, white, black, mulatto, or mestizo, when we Peruvians or Mexicans speak, we are enacting the rituals, the scrupulous and indirect forms of interaction of Incas, Aztecs, and other pre-Columbian cultures.

But the Indians have also adopted many customs and beliefs that the Europeans brought to America. From social organisation to music and dances, from festivals to religions, most practices and even the native languages have been profoundly affected by institutions and behaviours brought to America from Europe. Obviously, our population is not a homogeneous one, but *mestizaje* is irreversible, and any attempt to slow it down is as useless as it is senseless because it represents the essence of modern culture.

Racists often attempt to cover up this reality. And racism is a human stupidity from which, I am sad to say, neither Anglo- nor Latin-America — nor any other part of the world — can be exonerated. Prejudice against the Indian, the black and the Asian, is expressed in a thousand ways, some blatant, some subtle, some crafty. One of its expressions is the quiet contempt for the mestizo condition which is ours. Since economic powers tend to be concentrated in the white minorities, and there are proportionally far too many Indians and African Americans in the most exploited and discriminated sectors of society, it has been commonplace to perceive racism strictly in terms of the rich discriminating against the poor, but this perception is inaccurate because racism can work both ways.

### **Indianists vs Europeanists**

And it has worked both ways in Latin-America, especially among intellectuals. In the 1920s there was, in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution, a polemic throughout Spanish-America between 'Indianists' and 'Europeanists'. It was a sorry example of reciprocal racism. In the heat of the polemic, a distinguished Peruvian historian called for the destruction of all churches and paintings of the Spanish-Colonial period

because he claimed they were foreign to the American reality. With this logic he would have also called for the banning of the Spanish language with which he made his proposal; or, for that matter, the English and Portuguese languages as well; and why not other objects and customs that were not around before the arrival of the European, like the wheel, writing, the horse, Christianity and so on and so forth? To be consistent he would have also called for the re-establishment of human sacrifice and of the Aztec rite, whereby an emperor was buried with all of his advisers, his many wives and concubines (although I can think of instances where this may not have been so bad).

Those who express dismay about the crimes and cruelties of the conquistadors against the Incas and Aztecs have good reason to feel solidarity with peoples who suffered in the past. They should, however, be equally outraged about the crimes and cruelties of Incas and Aztecs against the thousands of peoples they subjugated. But they are not. Academics have been itemising every single crime committed by Europeans with remarkable meticulousness, but they have not shed a single tear for the thousands, for the hundreds of thousands, and perhaps millions of Indian men and women who were sacrificed in wars of conquest and in Inca, Maya, Aztec, Chicha or Tolteca ceremonies resembling human barbecues. And yet I am sure that, at least in theory, they would agree that one cannot be selective about moral outrage. Cruelty must be condemned wherever we find it, and it is not fair to elicit sympathy for the victims of a subjugated culture while forgetting the cruelty for which it was also responsible.

I am not arguing against those who wish to remember the arrival of the Spaniards as a bloody period of history in which countless and inexcusable brutalities were committed. I do object, however, to the jump many have made from moral outrage about historical events to the utopian assumption, which sometimes becomes an explicit claim, that we must somehow re-establish pre-Columbian civilisations as the Europeans found them; as though it were possible to defy the course of history. It is a proposal that leads invariably to actions that make us recoil with horror, like the atrocities of the Shining Path movement in Peru. I also find it unrealistic to forget that all Americans in the north and in the south, regardless of their colour and origins, are products of this saga and its aftermath, for better or for worse.

However, I believe mostly for the better: because those hard, greedy and sometimes fanatical men brought along to America not only a hunger for wealth, and the unforgiving cross, but also a culture that has been ours ever since. A culture that makes us heirs of Cervantes and of Shakespeare and Adam Smith no more and no less than an inhabitant

of Madrid or London. A culture that introduced to human civilisation those codes of politics and morality that allow us to condemn powerful nations that abuse the weak, to reject imperialism and colonialism, to stand up for human rights wherever they are violated. The first culture in human history to recognise the rights of our contemporaries and even the rights of our remote ancestors.

The ancient Americans would not have understood how someone could question the right of conquest, and would have found it difficult to figure out why men and women criticise their own nation and express solidarity with its victims in the manner of the great Bartolomé de las Casas, the priest who denounced Spanish brutalities against the Indians in the name of a universal morality superior to the interests of any individual, government, state or nation.

Liberty, I believe, is the greatest contribution of the culture that created the sovereign individual, the owner of rights that other individuals and the state must respect at all times. The culture that gives liberty an unprecedented and primary role in all realms of life has attained its leading role in science and technology, and has produced an abundance of wealth. Liberty, as Fernand Braudel has shown, is the driving force of economic and technological progress. The political expression of this culture is liberal democracy, the system which has prevailed over totalitarianism in a decisive way, and which is slowly spreading its benefits throughout the world. With the pathetic exceptions of Cuba, Haiti, and Peru, democracy is today the system that Latin American nations have made their own.

To revive the absurd polemic between 'Indianists' and 'Europeanists', as happened last year, during the Quincentenary commemoration, is to set up a smoke-screen of pseudo-problems in front of problems that are truly pressing. I am not referring to the cruelties the native populations suffered 500 years ago, but to the misery they continue to suffer today, when America is made up of independent republics. It is incumbent upon us to assume responsibility for the discrimination that exists today against cultural and ethnic minorities. This is not an historical debate, but a highly topical issue which will shape our future.

It is always a useful exercise to review the past with the eyes of the present in order to learn from error, but it is disingenuous to express horror and dismay for the crimes of conquest while forgetting that violence and exploitation continued. It worsened in countries like Argentina, Chile or the United States, where genocides of native populations occurred in the 19th century, and violence continues to occur under our very eyes in nations like Guatemala, Brazil or Peru, where struggles between terrorists and soldiers or between gold

diggers and settlers for the possessions of the land in the Amazon region have resulted in the mass murder of Indians. These are current and burning issues. The speculation about what would have happened in America if the Europeans had remained in Europe will not allay the misery and suffering of our day.

### **Can Indigenous Cultures Survive?**

Why are the indigenous cultures marginal after so many years? Why is their integration so slow? How can we promote their development and modernisation? The key question, which one needs to respond to with technical and scientific arguments, and not just emotional or ethical ones, is the following: Can these cultures become modern and overcome oppression while conserving what are essential or at least fundamental elements of their language, beliefs and traditions?

I believe this is possible for cultures like the Quechuas of the Andean region who number in the millions and have a long history. Their culture achieved a great deal of development and it still serves to create cohesion among its people. I am more sceptical about the small and archaic communities, like those in the Amazons, for which modernisation inevitably means Westernisation. But even in the case of the Quechua Indians, I sometimes have the impression that mestizaje has shaped a culture that is as Indian as it is Western because cultural integration has taken place not only with respect to religion, clothing, family and work, but also with respect to the backbone of any culture: its language. Should this process be supported or resisted? Is Westernisation of indigenous peoples a crime or is it the fastest way to overcome the backwardness and exploitation they are suffering today?

I have explored the dilemma of modernisation versus cultural survival in one of my novels, *The Storyteller*, where I draw on the extraordinary saga of the Machiguenga Indians of the Peruvian jungle who have struggled to preserve their culture over the centuries. Today they number some 2000 or 3000 men, women and children, and their future is uncertain. I must confess I have a hard time finding good answers to my own questions about archaic cultures in the modern world. I only know that it is not possible to resolve the issue with the impassioned statements or with the ideological stereotypes that invariably lead to counterproductive policies.

I do not rule out bilingualism or plurilingualism for countries where the minorities do not necessarily speak the language of the majority, be it Spanish, English or Portuguese. In South America there is a considerable number of minorities who have preserved their ancient languages. I am only sure this issue should not be decided in the abstract, without

taking into account both the needs and aspirations of individuals, and the actual possibilities of nations. The answers to my questions should not depend on abstract ideas, but on the participation of the citizens involved. They need to make important choices and set priorities about issues that affect them, like the role of investment in development. Should resources be channelled to create the infrastructure necessary to establish bilingualism or plurilingualism at all levels of social life while sacrificing other priorities? Or would such trade-offs deepen the backwardness of the native populations? Isn't there a risk that good and honourable intentions may condemn these cultures to eternal marginalisation, shutting them out of modernity, making it impossible for them to enjoy the same opportunities others enjoy?

These are some of the problems I think should be considered instead of empty polemics that pretend 500 years of history can be forgotten, and the people of America would be happier if the pre-Columbian world were re-established as it once existed. In fiction, which is my field, it is always possible to pretend that certain historical events did not take place, to project our fantasies into the past, to imagine utopias. But it is not possible or desirable when coping with social and economic problems that are all too real.

Karl Popper notices that people have an easier time identifying human misery than in agreeing on the nature of ideal societies that would make everyone happy. He argued convincingly in his 1947 address 'Utopia and Violence' (published in *Conjectures and Refutations*) that the pursuit of happiness should be a private affair while the struggle against misery should be the moral responsibility of everyone:

Our fellow men have a claim to our help; no generation must be sacrificed for the sake of future generations, for the sake of an ideal of happiness that may never be realised . . . For the evils are with us here and now. They can be experienced, and are being experienced every day, by many people who have been and are being made miserable by poverty, unemployment, national oppression, war and disease.



## Closing Remarks

*Kara Greiner*

When I was first asked to propose the vote of thanks to tonight's lecture, my first thought was: I'm not suitable for this; I cannot follow a man of such intellect at the same microphone. And I was struck by the thought that I'm too young to propose such an important vote of thanks. But while I was listening to the lecture tonight, I realised that it was important that I was proposing this vote of thanks; that it was important that there are people here who are the leaders of tomorrow.

The John Bonython Lecture is about communication to all, in the political, economic and social spheres. These are important topics that should be addressed not only to those at present in power, but to those waiting to acquire it. The Centre for Independent Studies provides the vital link between the power of ideas and the actions of people. The power that flows from the joining together of ideas and action is represented here tonight in the presence of Mario Vargas Llosa.

Indeed, in his speech tonight, he emphasised the importance of youth and taking the chance of joining ideas and actions. He said that 'one of the tasks for men and women of the new generation is to tear down the ideological walls of the prison houses of thought and culture still prevalent in so many free nations'. I am therefore indeed honoured to propose the vote of thanks.

The lecture *Questions of Conquest and Culture* was a timely look, in the year of indigenous peoples, at the relationship between the indigenous culture and the settler population. We were shown the importance of *mestizaje* through the diversity of Sr. Vargas Llosa's own family and the richness of his own history. By acknowledging the importance of this mixture of cultures, we can progress to a better society. And although Sr. Vargas Llosa has been asked many times during his visit to Australia about the *Mabo* issue, and although he has said that he cannot give an adequately informed opinion on it, one of the most important things he said tonight related to that issue. He said, with reference to all indigenous cultures and their relations with settler populations, that we should focus less on the cruelties of the past and more on the sufferings of the present. If those involved in the *Mabo* issue understand this, they are more likely to arrive at a solution of benefit to all involved.

Another important theme in Sr.Vargas Llosa's lecture was the importance of liberty and liberal democracy. It is so easy in this country to take these institutions for granted; we did not have to fight for them, they were handed to us on a platter. But we should be proud of the liberty we have and of the liberal democracy that our society is founded on. We should be proud of it, we should protect it; as Sr.Vargas Llosa said tonight, 'liberty is nothing to be ashamed of'.

Finally, I would like to refer to Sr.Vargas Llosa himself. Rarely nowadays does one find such intellectual talent combined with such literary talent that can communicate fluently with so many people, not just with us tonight but with people in many different countries. He does not speak for a group, or for a nation, but for a belief: a belief in justice, prosperity, peace and liberty. I'm certain everyone here will join with me in thanking you, not only for delivering an insightful and entertaining tenth John Bonython Lecture, but for your contribution to global literature, for your courage in fighting for liberal democracy around the world, and for your colourful and mosaic ability to convey, and, most importantly, to act on, the power of ideas. Thank you very much.

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# Questions of Conquest and Culture

Mario Vargas Llosa

In the tenth John Bonython Lecture, the Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa reflects on *mestizaje*, the mingling of the indigenous American Indian population with the European settlers and the Africans who arrived with the Spanish conquistadors. Discussing its significance for 1992, the Quincentenary of European discovery of the Americas, and for 1993, the Year of the World's Indigenous People, he rejects the utopian view that indigenous cultures can be re-established as they were before European settlement. Espousing the liberalism of Western civilisation, he calls for a shift of attention away from the cruelties of the past and towards the sufferings of the present. The key question is: 'Can these cultures become modern and overcome oppression while conserving . . . fundamental elements of their language, beliefs and traditions?'

**Mario Vargas Llosa**, born in 1936, is one of the most acclaimed writers in Latin America. His works include *The City and the Dogs* (1963) and *Conversation in The Cathedral* (1969). In 1990 he stood for election to the Presidency of Peru. He recently acquired dual Spanish-Peruvian citizenship and now lives in Europe.

The John Bonython Lecture Series was inaugurated by the Centre for Independent Studies in 1984 to honour the founding Chairman of its Board of Trustees. Each year the Centre sponsors a lecture to examine the relationship between individuals and the economic, social and political forces that make up a free society. The lectures are published in the CIS Occasional Papers series.



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