Face to Face with Soviet Socialism, Hospitality, and Censorship

MARIO VARGAS LLOSA IN MOSCOW, MAY 1968

CARLOS AGUIRRE AND KRISTINA BUYNOVA

PERUVIAN novelist Mario Vargas Llosa (b. 1936), one of the most important figures in contemporary Latin American and world literature, has also been, for more than six decades, a prominent public intellectual. He rose to fame in 1963 with his first novel, *The Time of the Hero*, and around the same time established close ties to the Cuban Revolution, as so many other Latin American writers did.[1] During the rest of the 1960s he was a visible face of the left-wing intelligentsia in the region, with a frequent presence in the media, at literary and political events, and in the publishing industry in various languages. In 1971, after the incarceration and public confession of poet Heberto Padilla—what came to be known as "the Padilla affair"—he distanced himself from the Cuban Revolution. Later, he abandoned his socialist ideas, embraced liberalism, and supported right-wing political projects and regimes in Latin America and beyond.

In numerous interviews, writings, and lectures, Vargas Llosa has attributed his disenchantment with socialism, to a large extent, to the visit he made to the Soviet Union—specifically, to Moscow—in 1968 (fig. 1). During the five days he was there, he has said, he was able to verify that the socialist society that he defended had not eliminated

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1. Unless they are not translated, we will use the English titles for books mentioned and quoted in this article.

1. Drawing by Peruvian artist Raúl Valencia depicting Mario Vargas Llosa in Moscow. The drawing illustrated Vargas Llosa's article "Moscú. Notas a vuelo de pájaro (II)," published in *Caretas* (Lima), No. 382, October 1968. Archivo David Sobrevilla, Centro de Documentación del Perú Contemporáneo, Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos. https://cedoc.sisbib.unmsm.edu.pe/public/pdf/archivos/davidSobrevilla/44.pdf

but reinforced social inequalities and, above all, had suppressed individual liberties. "That made me feel somewhat traumatized," he would say many years later about what he saw, heard, and experienced in Moscow.[2]

This article attempts to reconstruct Vargas Llosa's short visit to Moscow and contextualize both the impressions he wrote immediately after his visit and those he expressed many years later. Thanks to hitherto unused documents contained in the Mario Vargas Llosa Papers held at Princeton University Library's Special Collections, as well as materials from Russian archives, this essay will shed light on Vargas Llosa's trip, his exchanges with Soviet officials, and his problems with censorship and copyright. In addition, it addresses an event that took place shortly afterward, one that, we argue, marked an even more decisive milestone in his gradual disenchantment with socialism: the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 and the support it publicly received from Fidel Castro.

The case of Vargas Llosa will also allow us to illuminate the complexities surrounding the "cultural diplomacy" that the Soviet Union cultivated with great diligence. In doing so, we also seek to give visibility to the writers, officials, translators, and publishers who, under difficult conditions, helped promote relations with foreign writers, so important for the image that the Soviet Union sought to project on the international cultural scene during the Cold War.

VARGAS LLOSA: A SOCIALIST INTELLECTUAL

Mario Vargas Llosa began his literary and political trajectory at San Marcos University in Lima, which he attended between 1953 and 1958. When he first entered San Marcos, at age seventeen, Peru was ruled by a dictatorship led by General Manuel A. Odría that started in 1948 and lasted until 1956. During his time in San Marcos, Vargas Llosa participated in activities and clandestine circles of young Communists.[3] In 1958 he left for Madrid, where he spent a year doing postgraduate studies. He closely followed the struggles against Cuban

2. Mario Vargas Llosa, *The Call of the Tribe*, trans. John King (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2023), 7.

3. Vargas Llosa recreated his years at San Marcos University in his memoir *A Fish in the Water*, trans. Helen Lane (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994).

dictator Fulgencio Batista and celebrated with great enthusiasm the triumph of the Revolution on January 1, 1959. He would remain a supporter of it throughout the 1960s. In the summer of 1959 he moved to Paris. While writing *The Time of the Hero* (originally published in 1963 as *La ciudad y los perros*) and working precarious jobs to survive, he maintained close contact with groups of Latin American leftist expatriates and visitors in the French capital. In 1965 Vargas Llosa signed a manifesto in support of armed movements in Peru.[4]

His first novel brought him to literary prominence in Spain and Latin America, and he became the youngest of the core group of novelists of the Latin American Boom, which included Julio Cortázar, Carlos Fuentes, and Gabriel García Márquez, all admirers of the Cuban Revolution.[5] Vargas Llosa's sympathy for Cuba led to multiple visits to the island and different forms of collaboration with cultural institutions of the Revolution. He was there for the first time in October 1962 as a journalist covering the outcome of the Missile Crisis.[6] He returned in January 1965 as a jury member for the Casa de las Américas literary prize; attended as an observer the Tricontinental Conference in January 1966; and participated, in January 1967, in the first meeting of the journal *Casa de las Américas* international board, which he had joined in 1965.[7]

His articles on Cuba show, with differences in emphasis, his enthusiasm for the Revolution, which he saw as different from the Soviet model. "Cuban socialism is idiosyncratic, very different from the rest of the countries of the Soviet bloc, a fact that could have very important repercussions for the future of world socialism," he wrote in 1962.

4. "Toma de posición," in Mario Vargas Llosa, *Obras Completas*, vol. 9, *Piedra de Toque I* (*1962–1983*) (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg–Círculo de Lectores, 2012), 183–84.

5. For a short and useful summary of this period, see John King, "The Boom of the Latin American Novel," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Latin American Novel*, ed. Efraín Kristal (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 59–80.

6. After this visit, he wrote two articles, "En Cuba, país sitiado" and "Crónica de la Revolución," both in 1962, reprinted in *Obras Completas*, 9:14–16 and 16–21, respectively. The latter was translated as "Chronicle of the Cuban Revolution," in *Making Waves*, ed. and trans. John King (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996), 20–24.

7. After this visit, he wrote a two-part article, "Crónica de Cuba" (1967), reprinted in *Obras Completas*, 9:341–53.

One of those differences was that, although the Cuban regime was Marxist-Leninist and "there is an official insistence on indoctrinating the masses," he did not see "an exclusive ideological directive." In the realm of art and literature, he added, "there is no official aesthetic."[8] In the 1967 article, he once again praised the Revolution for not imposing an "aesthetic directive" and for fostering a cultural policy that "has not become distorted (as it happened in other socialist countries and, unfortunately, continues to be the case in many of them) by a sectarian spirit and by dogmatism." He did question the single-party model, since it "always entails a danger in the short or the long run," although he qualified his judgment by suggesting that the viability of the model depended on the leader: "I have no doubt whatsoever that if Fidel called elections today, an overwhelming majority of Cubans would vote for him. But, of course, Fidel is not eternal, just as Lenin was not, and nothing assures us that whoever succeeds him will be equally honest, patriotic, or lucid (remember Stalin)."[9]

Vargas Llosa pointed out other mistakes of the Revolution, such as "the deplorable executions of torturers and assassins in the early days" and "the abuses committed by sectarian elements in the time of Aníbal Escalante."[10] In the meeting that Vargas Llosa and a group of intellectuals had with Fidel Castro in January 1967, criticism of the Revolution was aired, including the thorny issue of the persecution of homosexuals and the creation of the UMAPs (Military Units of Support for Production), which served as detention centers for homosexuals and criminals. These were mistakes, however, that for Vargas Llosa were, if not minor, certainly correctable, and which in no way could be compared to "the purges or exterminations of the Stalinist period" in the USSR.[11] On the delicate issues of freedom of expression and political association, Vargas Llosa clearly chose to defend the Revolution despite its errors or shortcomings: "Why just say that with the Revolution freedom of the press disappeared in Cuba and not talk about the literacy campaign that has made culture available

8. Vargas Llosa, "Chronicle of the Cuban Revolution," 21, 22.

9. Vargas Llosa, "Crónica de Cuba," 344, 353.

10. Vargas Llosa, "Crónica de Cuba," 352. Escalante was a Communist leader who was purged, along with a group of collaborators, accused of "sectarianism" and abuse of power. The Revolution justified Escalante's removal as a necessary step to avoid the "Sovietization" of Cuba.

11. Vargas Llosa, "Crónica de Cuba," 352.

to all Cubans? Why lament the disappearance of opposition political parties and not talk about land reform, which has handed over land to peasants?" Vargas Llosa insisted that social justice should not sacrifice civil liberties but admitted that, if he were given a choice between an unjust system that tolerates criticism and another that "suppresses political freedom but administers justice," he would clearly choose the latter.[12]

The 1967 article did not mention other recent and uncomfortable episodes involving foreign writers, maybe because, publicly at least, Vargas Llosa considered them almost anecdotal blunders next to the achievements of the Revolution. The first featured Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes, who in 1966 published an article about a meeting of the PEN Club in New York during which he announced the end of the Cold War in literature.[13] That same year Fuentes gave an interview to the new journal *Mundo Nuevo*, perceived in Havana as an organ hostile to the Revolution and one that, it would later be confirmed, was financed by the CIA.[14] In *Casa de las Américas*, Cuban writer Ambrosio Fornet launched a scathing critique of Fuentes.[15] In the meeting of the *Casa de las Américas* board, Vargas Llosa and Cortázar defended Fuentes and advocated a less aggressive and more fraternal attitude toward those who, beyond some discrepancies, were proven friends of the Revolution.

The other incident involved Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, not only one of the leading figures of Latin American and world poetry, but also a Communist militant and friend of the Cuban Revolution from day one. Neruda also participated in the PEN Club congress in New York, after which he offered poetry readings in different cities of the United States. He then traveled to Peru, where President Fernando Belaunde awarded him a medal of honor. A large group of Cuban intellectuals signed an open letter in which they questioned Neruda's judgment for having agreed to visit a country whose government was so hostile to Cuba and for accepting an award from a president who

12. Vargas Llosa, "Crónica de Cuba," 352–53.

13. Carlos Fuentes, "El PEN: Entierro de la guerra fría en la literatura," *Life en Español* (New York), August 1, 1966, 54–61.

14. Emir Rodríguez Monegal, "Situación del escritor en América Latina," *Mundo Nuevo* (Paris), no. 1 (July 1966): 5–21.

15. Ambrosio Fornet, "New World en español," *Casa de las Américas* (Havana), no. 40 (January–February 1967): 106–15.

had ordered the repression of guerrillas.[16] Vargas Llosa had also participated in the PEN Club meeting and accompanied Neruda at some of his readings in the United States. The letter by Cuban writers left him "somewhat alarmed," according to the Uruguayan critic Ángel Rama.[17]

In July 1967, Vargas Llosa won the Rómulo Gallegos Prize, sponsored by the Venezuelan government, for his novel *The Green House*.[18] In the speech he gave at the award ceremony, Vargas Llosa reiterated his unequivocal support for the Cuban Revolution while defending a model of socialism that admitted freedom and dissidence: the new society, he stated, would have to recognize "our right to dissent, showing in this living and magical way, as only literature can, that dogma, censorship and arbitrary acts are also mortal enemies of progress and human dignity."[19]

Was it realistic to aspire to this type of socialist model in Cuba, in the midst of the Cold War, the United States's blockade, and other forms of external aggression? Or, as Vargas Llosa had suggested in his 1967 article, was it imperative to close ranks in support of the Revolution, limit individual liberties if necessary, and move forward with the economic and social reforms that guarantee education, health care, work, and food for the population? Gradually, the Revolution

16. "Carta abierta a Pablo Neruda," July 25, 1966, *Casa de las Américas* (Havana), no. 38 (September–October 1966): 131–35. Cuban and other Latin American intellectuals had pledged not to visit the United States as a form of protest for its aggressive policies toward the Revolution; but others, like Neruda and Fuentes, saw no contradiction between siding with Cuba, criticizing the United States, and visiting the country and speaking their mind. The incident with Neruda also reflects, in some way, the tensions between the Cubans and the Soviets. Neruda had been strongly committed to the USSR since the 1940s, and the Soviets never spared him praise, publications, royalties, or privileges, as was well known in Cuba. The translators of the Foreign Commission of the USSR Union of Writers testified that, in 1964, the Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén expressed his annoyance with the cult of Neruda in Moscow and with the "huge vanity" of the Chilean poet. Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (henceforth RGALI), 631, box 26, folder 4679, p. 2.

17. Letter from Ángel Rama to Mario Benedetti, undated, received on October 12, 1966, in Ángel Rama, *Una vida en cartas: Correspondencia 1944–1983*, ed. Amparo Rama (Montevideo: Estuario Editora, 2022), 223.

18. Originally published as *La casa verde* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1966), translated by Gregory Rabassa (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

19. Mario Vargas Llosa, "Literature is Fire" (1967), reprinted in *Making Waves*, 70–74 (quotations from 73).

had come to embrace the idea that liberties, as they were understood in the capitalist world, were "bourgeois" indulgences that it did not need in order to maintain its course, since it was creating its own genuinely democratic forms of representation and participation.

Vargas Llosa's views on Cuba often included a comparison with the USSR and other socialist regimes in Eastern Europe. His perception, at least through 1967, was that Cuba had avoided the dogmatism, authoritarianism, and repression of dissent that characterized those other regimes. Censorship was a very sensitive issue for Vargas Llosa. But even though there had been episodes of suppression of artistic and intellectual freedom in Cuba (the ban of the documentary *PM*, for instance, or the closure of the weekly *Lunes de Revolución*), he opted to minimize them in his assessment of the Cuban process. In the case of the USSR, on the contrary, he was very critical of the treatment of Andrei Siniavski and Yuli Daniel and of Alexandr Solzhenitsin, on which he commented in two articles.[20]

Regarding the first case, Vargas Llosa wrote that "either socialism decides to suppress forever that human faculty that is artistic creation and eliminate, once and for all, that social species that is the writer, or it admits literature, and, in that case, it has no choice but to accept a perpetual stream of irony, satire, and criticism."[21] The Solzhenitsin case, on the other hand, showed "the absurd extremes, the injustices, distortions, and abuses that inevitably resulted from the attempt by the State to direct and plan artistic creation." He concluded emphati-

20. At the beginning of 1966, Soviet writers Andrei Siniavski (1925–1997) and Yuli Daniel (1925–1988) were sentenced to seven and five years, respectively, in forced labor camps for supposedly publishing anti-Soviet books abroad under the pseudonyms Abram Tertz and Nikolai Arzhak. Such severe sentences were unprecedented in the post-Stalinist era, as was the scale of the protest by the international community. A dossier on the case was translated and edited by Max Hayward under the title *On Trial: The Soviet State versus "Abram Tertz" and "Nikolai Arzhak"* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967). Solzhenitsin had spent eight years of hard labor in various GULAG establishments during the final years of the Stalin era. In the early 1960s, with Nikita Khrushchev's approval, he published short novels that sparked a major controversy over the legacy and aftermath of Stalin's dictatorship and made him one of the most famous writers of the time. Very soon, however, on instructions from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, he was censored and suffered ostracism, slander, and harassment.

21. Mario Vargas Llosa, "Una insurrección permanente" (1966), reprinted in *Obras Completas*, 9:247–51 (quotations from 249).

cally: "censorship, even if minimal, is deadly poison for literature." Vargas Llosa, however, made it clear that his criticisms of Soviet censorship were offered from the perspective of those who "are convinced of the gigantic benefits that the Revolution brought to the Russian people" and not from that of the "enemies of socialism." [22]

It is almost certain that, at the time of writing his article on the Siniavski and Daniel trial, dated March 1966, Vargas Llosa had already received news that *The Time of the Hero* had been translated and published in the Soviet Union the previous year without his authorization and mutilated by censorship (figs. 2 and 3). His fiery defense of the Soviet writers might also be read as an affirmation of his own right not to be censored in a socialist country: "I will never accept that social justice is accompanied by the resurrection of the grills and tongs of the Inquisition." [23]

THE TRANSLATION AND CENSORSHIP OF *The Time of the Hero* IN THE SOVIET UNION

Vargas Llosa's first novel, *The Time of the Hero*, won the Biblioteca Breve Prize and the Critics' Prize in Spain; it was enthusiastically received by critics, readers, and fellow writers on both sides of the Atlantic. Set in the Leoncio Prado Military Academy, in a district adjacent to Lima, the novel narrates the adventures of a group of adolescent students from different social and ethnic backgrounds subjected to (and producers of) forms of violence, survival mechanisms, and patterns of socialization that reflected the authoritarian and machista nature of Peruvian society. The novel also offered a critique of the hypocrisy and false values of military institutions, which explains why it was the target of harsh attacks and denunciations.[24]

The Time of the Hero was the first Boom novel to be translated into Russian and published in book format in the Soviet Union. *The Death*

22. Mario Vargas Llosa, "La censura en la URSS y Alexandr Solzhenitsin" (1967), reprinted in *Obras Completas*, 9:383–87 (quotations from 386, 383–84).

23. Vargas Llosa, "Una insurrección permanente," 250.

24. A legend that circulated widely and helped publicize the novel and the author as victims of military retaliation stated that hundreds of copies of the novel were burned inside the Leoncio Prado academy. There is no evidence this ever happened. See Carlos Aguirre, *La ciudad y los perros: Biografía de una novela* (Sevilla: Renacimiento, 2017), 242–50.

Марио
Варгас
Льоса

ГОРОД И ПСЫ

Марио
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ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО ЦК ВЛКСМ
„МОЛОДАЯ ГВАРДИЯ"
1965

2 and 3. Cover and title page of the Russian translation of *The Time of the Hero* (1965), with linocuts by Anatoly Brusilovsky (b. 1932). Carlos Aguirre collection.

of Artemio Cruz, by Carlos Fuentes (1962), was also translated in 1965 and published, first in two parts and in abbreviated form in the magazine *Foreign Literature*, and then as a book in 1967.[25] The international projection and editorial activism of Vargas Llosa's Spanish publisher, Seix Barral in Barcelona, and particularly of its editor, Carlos Barral, as well as the aura of a progressive and persecuted novel that surrounded it, help explain why it was translated at a relatively early date in the Soviet Union.[26] No other novel of the four main Boom authors was translated into Russian in the 1960s, although novels by other major Latin American authors, like Alejo Carpentier, were translated during that period.[27]

The history of the publication of *The Time of the Hero* in the Soviet Union can be reconstructed thanks to the correspondence between Seix Barral and the Foreign Commission of the USSR's Union of Writers,[28] although there are some gaps that we have not been able to fill. In March 1964, the Commission received two packages of books sent by the Barcelona publisher "for examination," one of which contained a copy of *The Time of the Hero*. In his letter, Carlos Barral offered information about the other translations and awards

25. The translation, by Margarita Bylinkina, appeared in *Inostrannaia Literatura* (*Foreign Literature*), nos. 7 and 8 (1965), and later in book format with the title *Smert' Artemio Krusa*, with a prologue by Yuri Dashkevich (Moscow: Progress, 1967). On the relations between Fuentes and the USSR, see Michael A. Lavery, "Soviet Translations of Latin American Literature, 1956–1991" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2021), ch. 3.

26. The Russian translation was only the second of Vargas Llosa's novel, after a Dutch one published in 1964.

27. During the 1960s there was a major push for the translation of Latin American works into Russian and other Slavic languages. See Lavery, "Soviet Translations," 17. That impulse was due, in no small measure, to the reopening to the world of the Soviet literary field after Stalin's death.

28. The Union of Writers was founded in 1934. No author could be published, legally earn an income, or enjoy professional privileges unless he or she was a member of the Union. Getting in was not that difficult, but it did require a strong commitment to the official ideology. Being kicked out was tantamount to ostracism in all walks of life. Foreign ties were regulated through the Foreign Commission, established also in the 1930s. It brought together translators and specialists in foreign literature and took care of the international correspondence of the Union of Writers, the organization of visits, book exchanges, and more. After Stalin's death, its work was strengthened and contacts between Soviet and foreign writers very visibly expanded.

for each of them. At the end, he added: "allow me to recommend, for strictly literary reasons, two extraordinary books, *Time of Silence*, by Luis Martín-Santos, probably the most important novel written in Spain since 1939, and the novel by the young Peruvian Mario Vargas Llosa, *The Time of the Hero*."[29]

George Breitburd, an official at the Union of Writers, informed Barral that the novels were being sent to "the boards of magazines and publishing houses."[30] Michael A. Lavery describes the rigorous process involved in the decision to translate a foreign novel:

> In order to be approved for translation and publication at a major journal or publishing house, it first had to be evaluated in a series of internal reviews. The translation could proceed only after it had been approved. The final translation would then have to be evaluated by another set of internal reviews and approved by the editorial board. A prologue would have to be written, reviewed, and approved by multiple editors as well.[31]

We can speculate that *The Time of the Hero* was sent to Molodaia Gvardia (Young Guard), received a positive review, and was then put in line for translation, although we have no evidence of the approval process that was followed.

The Russian translation of *The Time of the Hero* was done by Natalia Trauberg (fig. 4) and Dionisio García, and was based on the Spanish published version, not the original manuscript.[32] Trauberg (1928–2009) was a translator of various European languages; García (b. 1929, Asturias, Spain) arrived in the Soviet Union in 1937 as one of the thousands of "war children," the sons and daughters of

29. Carlos Barral to George Breitburd, February 14, 1964, RGALI, 631, box 26, folder 2061, pp. 2–3. *Time of Silence* was never translated into Russian.

30. Breitburd to Barral, March 16, 1964, RGALI, 631, box 26, folder 2061, p. 11.

31. Lavery, "Soviet Translations," 111–12. In the Soviet publishing industry, prologues to books constituted a true literary genre and had very specific purposes. If the editor understood that a certain work did not fully fit the requirements of the Soviet censorship body (Glavlit, to which we will refer later), he opted to "escort" it with a suitable prologue. In theory, a prologue served to "prepare" the reader to understand the content in a "correct" way, but in reality, it was a way to mislead Glavlit's censors. See Liudmila Sinianskaia, "Vo sne i nayavu sredi glyb" [In Dreams and in Reality Among Giants], *Znamia* (Moscow), no. 3 (2003): 142–73, esp. 144.

32. The published version had suffered a few minor changes as a result of the demands made by the Francoist censorship office and the ensuing negotiations with Barral and Vargas Llosa. See Aguirre, *La ciudad y los perros*, ch. 3.

4. Natalia Trauberg, co-translator of *The Time of the Hero*. Photo from 1958. http://trauberg.com/photos/1945-1958/#jp-carousel-2757.

republican families sent abroad to avoid the horrors of the Civil War. Besides doing translations, he was also a painter and worked on the restoration of religious icons.[33]

Vargas Llosa's novel was published by Young Guard in 1965 under the title *Gorod i psy* and had a circulation of 115,000 copies, a number unimaginable at that time in the Spanish-speaking market. In comparison, the first six printings of the Seix Barral edition, published between 1963 and 1966, had a total circulation of 25,000 copies, a true sales success in a country where the average print run for a book was 3,000 copies.[34] In the Soviet Union, however, that print run was not exceptional, given the usually high volumes of the publishing industry.[35]

Any satisfaction that Vargas Llosa might have felt upon learning that his novel had been translated into Russian was marred by the censorship to which it was subjected. Censorship in the Soviet Union had existed since the triumph of the Revolution. In 1918, a decree was issued to "temporarily" restrict freedom of the press, a measure that later became permanent. For almost seven decades, censorship was centralized in an organ founded in 1922 and known as Glavlit, an acronym that stood for Main Directorate for Literary and Publishing Affairs and that, despite various name changes, continued to be used.[36] Each periodical or publishing house had assigned censors (permanent or temporary) who reported to Glavlit. The editors submitted to them the materials being considered for publication; the

33. See Dionisio García Zapico, *Vospominaniya: Zhizn' ispantsa v Rossii* [Memories: The Life of a Spaniard in Russia] (Nizhny Novgorod: Vertical. XXI vek, 2012).

34. Aguirre, *La ciudad y los perros*, 207.

35. Natalia Iliyina, "Literatura i massovy tirazh" [Literature and Massive Print Runs], *Novy Mir* (Moscow), no. 1 (1969): 215. The large print runs in the USSR (much larger, in proportion, than those in any Western country) can be explained by a couple of reasons. First, in a planned economy, it was not the publishing house's profit that was the main consideration, but the fulfillment of the previously approved production plan, which often depended on ideological guidelines and, in the case of books, also on the need to supply all the libraries across the country. Second, given the limited offer of titles of literature in the USSR, especially by foreign authors, and the cheap prices for books, there was a high demand that publishers needed to satisfy.

36. Arlen Blium, *Za kulisami "Ministerstva pravdy": Tainaia istoriia sovetskoi tsenzury, 1917–1929* [The Backstage of the "Ministry of Truth": The Secret History of Soviet Censorship, 1917–1929] (Saint Petersburg: Gumanit. agentstvo "Akad.proekt," 1994), 82.

censors reviewed them and made a decision. A verdict could be reversed by Glavlit's central committee if "mistakes" were identified. It is worth highlighting that there was a golden rule in Soviet censorship, according to which authors had no contact with censors and the terms "Glavlit" and "censorship" could not be used in communications with them.[37] In official terms, the process was justified as follows: there was a punitive form of censorship in the bourgeois world that banned progressive works, but in the Soviet Union "State control" was established to protect citizens from reactionary ideas.[38]

In the case of foreign books, translators had to adjust their work to the norms established by Glavlit and so introduced cuts and changes they thought censors would expect from them.[39] They were motivated not just by fear but also by pragmatism: it was "better to publish something than nothing."[40] The translators' version underwent another review, at which point further cuts or changes could be introduced. In the end, therefore, the cuts were the result of a team effort: translators, editors, and censors took part in the task of eliminating or modifying sections, pages, paragraphs, or phrases considered politically and ideologically dangerous or morally repulsive.[41]

37. Arlen Blium, a prominent scholar of Soviet censorship, has reconstructed this process in great detail in several books. See, for instance, *Ot neolita do Glavlita* [From Neolithic to Glavlit] (Saint Petersburg: Izd-vo imeni N. I. Novikova; Iskusstvo Rossii, 2009), 123.

38. See, for instance, Anonymous, "Tsenzura" [Censorship], in *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia* [The Great Soviet Encyclopedia], vol. 46 ([Moscow]: Sovetskaia entsiklopediia, 1957), 519.

39. According to Tatiana Goriaeva's exhaustive study of political censorship in the USSR, "under the Soviet regime, self-censorship reached a colossal scale, affecting not only the people's consciousness, but also the majority of the intellectual elite, who always evaluated the content of their works in terms of the possibility of publishing them. One would have to be a prig to deny the compromises that many people, otherwise quite decent, had to make in order to survive." Tatiana Goriaeva, *Politicheskaia tsenzura v SSSR, 1917–1991* [Political Censorship in the USSR, 1917–1991] (Moscow: Rosspen, 2009), 134. The same could be said about Soviet translators: they had to make compromises so that the book in question could survive.

40. Samantha Sherry, "Better Something Than Nothing: The Editors and Translators of *Inostrannaia Literatura* as Censorial Agents," *Slavonic and East European Review* 91:4 (2013): 731–58.

41. This summary does not fully capture the complexity of the censorship process and the changes that it went through over time. See Leonid Vladimirov, "Glavlit:

The status of foreign books translated in the Soviet Union was somewhat vague, given that the country did not subscribe to the Universal Copyright Convention (Geneva Convention) until 1973. That left foreign novels at the mercy of Soviet censorship, just like those published by local authors, but with an important difference: the foreign author's opinion was not taken into consideration at all. Protests by censored foreign writers were irrelevant: in a country where "omnicensorship" prevailed,[42] officials refused to accept the notion of the integrity of a work of fiction.

How severe was the Soviet censorship of *The Time of the Hero*? In 1967, Vargas Llosa mentioned that the novel suffered mutilations over fifty pages.[43] Thanks to Daria Sinitcyna's careful study,[44] we estimate that all the sections eliminated from the novel add up to about twelve or thirteen pages, including full episodes such as the rape of a chicken, or sentences and segments considered too lewd, since they referred to sexual acts, descriptions of genitalia, masturbation, or homosexuality. In many other cases, instead of cutting phrases or paragraphs, translators (or censors; it is impossible to know who did what) used euphemisms to disguise expressions considered obscene. For instance, instead of "maricones, degenerados, pajeros" ("fairies, degenerates, jack-offs," in the English translation), they used "scumbags, idiots"; and where the author said "la calle de las putas" ("the street of the whores"), they chose "a tenderloin." In several cases, the term "huevos" (colloquial for testicles) was translated as "crotch" and even "head." And instead of "te podemos violar" ("we might rape you"), they used "we might hurt you."

In the Soviet Union, it is worth recalling, homosexuality was criminalized. The subject itself was taboo, and individuals suspected of sexually "deviant" behavior were stigmatized. On his 1965 trip to Moscow, Spanish writer Juan Goytisolo noted the "puritanical restraint that dominated press, television, books, and films." After

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How the Soviet Censor Works," *Index on Censorship* 1:3/4 (September 1972): 31–43; Goriaeva, *Politicheskaia tsenzura*; and Sherry, "Better Something Than Nothing."

42. Sherry, "Better Something Than Nothing," 734.

43. "Vargas Llosa proclama solidaridad con Rusia pero admite que le mutilaron su libro sin consultarlo," *Últimas noticias* (Caracas), August 14, 1967.

44. Daria Sinitcyna, "La censura en la traducción soviética de *La ciudad y los perros*," in Carlos Aguirre and Kristina Buynova, *Cinco días en Moscú. Mario Vargas Llosa y el socialismo soviético (1968)* (Trujillo: Reino de Almagro, 2024), 105–12.

stating that "censorship excised any reference or allusion to the sexual act," he noted: "As to homosexuality … their response could not have been more disappointing; they had all heard about it as something way-out and extravagant, but declared that they personally knew no 'perverts.'" [45]

There are two aspects in which the Soviet censorship of *The Time of the Hero* differed from the Spanish one. First, in the USSR there was little concern with episodes and expressions perceived as antimilitaristic or antireligious, which in Franco's Spain were unacceptable. Many passages and expressions deemed "disrespectful" to the Catholic Church or the military (the novel, let's remind the reader, takes place in a military academy) were marked by Spanish censors to be expunged or modified, although in the end the director of the censorship office, Carlos Robles Piquer, authorized that most be kept. What both the Soviet and the Spanish censorship had in common was their rejection of anything related to sex that could be considered sinful or immoral. And here is where the second difference arises: while in the Spanish case the changes were minimal (eight words or phrases were modified), in the case of the Soviet translation the mutilations were much more numerous. The explanation lies in the fact that, as mentioned above, Vargas Llosa and Barral negotiated with the Spanish censors and deployed a strategy that allowed them to block the suppression of dozens of paragraphs, phrases, and words, an option that in the USSR just did not exist.

The cuts inflicted to *The Time of the Hero* in the USSR were neither exceptional nor surprising. Soviet censorship affected virtually all foreign writers translated into Russian and other Slavic languages. To mention just the main authors of the Latin American Boom, novels such as *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *Hopscotch*, and *The Death of Artemio Cruz* were also mutilated.[46] Since the fall of the Soviet Union,

45. Juan Goytisolo, *Forbidden Territory and Realms of Strife*, trans. Peter Bush (New York: Verso, 2003), 378.

46. On *Hopscotch*, see the exhaustive study by Ekaterina Eremina, "Traducciones al ruso de *Rayuela* de Julio Cortázar en la época soviética y postsoviética" (Ph.D. diss., Universidad Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, 2017). *One Hundred Years of Solitude* also suffered the mutilation of erotic passages (Eremina, "Traducciones al ruso," 234). On the censorship of *The Death of Artemio Cruz*, see Lavery, "Soviet Translations," ch. 3. Samantha Sherry, who analyzed the shared responsibility of various agents of Soviet censorship, comes to a very fair conclusion: the mutilations were a neces-

several of these novels have been translated again and, supposedly, published in their entirety.[47]

The Russian translation of *The Time of the Hero* was printed in an attractive hardcover edition illustrated with a few linocuts by artist Anatoly Brusilovsky representing the world of youth and the military (figs. 5–7). It included, as was customary, a prologue by the critic and, later, writer and human rights activist Felix Svetov (1927–2002), who describes it as "a book that deals with serious and profound issues of life."[48] The Leoncio Prado academy, he states, "is a sort of State within a State," with "its own cruel norms," where the cadets "are doomed to remain … all their lives." The final lines summarize Svetov's overall assessment of Vargas Llosa's novel:

> The closed world of the Leoncio Prado, in which the writer focuses as if concentrating the vices of his society, that world remains unchanged. But Llosa is not only dispassionate, although he brilliantly portrays this terrible world; the reader is attracted by his rigorous and accurate analysis and not only by the surprise of what he sees and discovers. The writer leads the reader to understand what is happening and the reasons for it, awakens his conscience, and explodes from within the world of self-righteous virtue, authorized morality, lies, and compromises.
>
> The reader will find Llosa's novel *The Time of the Hero* interesting, and will not remain indifferent.

Svetov's interpretation echoes what critics in Spanish-speaking countries had said—the novel is an indictment of militarism and the rigidity and hypocrisy of closed and oppressive institutions such as the Leoncio Prado—but in the Soviet Union those comments could also be read as a veiled reference to the Communist regime. Svetov, in

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sary compromise to publish the work. See Sherry, "Better Something Than Nothing," 744.

47. A new translation of *The Time of the Hero* was published in 2023 in a single volume with *The Green House* (Mario Vargas Llosa, *Gorod i psy. Zelenyj Dom*, trans. Daria Sinitcyna, Naum Naumov (Moscow: AST, 2023). The new Russian law against "LGBT propaganda," which does not define the concept of propaganda very clearly, forces publishers to reinsure themselves by labeling the cover "18+" and wrapping the book in a protective film. This is how the new edition of *The Time of the Hero* is being sold.

48. Svetov, "Mario Vargas Llosa i ego roman" [Mario Vargas Llosa and His Novel].



5–7. Linocuts by Anatoly Brusilovsky for the Russian edition of *The Time of the Hero*.

fact, like Vargas Llosa, raised his voice to protest against the treatment of Siniavski, Daniel, and Solzhenitsin, and was later persecuted, imprisoned, sentenced, and exiled for his "anti-Soviet" activities.[49]

The well-known magazine *Novy Mir* published a short review of Vargas Llosa's novel by Yuri Pevtsov, an interpreter from Spanish and author of book reviews.[50] Pevtsov echoed the legend about the burning of copies and presented the novel as a denunciation of violence within the military academy, where cadets were "educated" in "slave obedience," which, in turn, makes them "future zealous activists for military dictators and the Pentagon." Pevtsov offers a fatalistic perspective on the world created by the novel: the cadets, subjected to humiliating practices, did not feel enraged or prompted to rebel, and those brutal practices were reproduced "from generation to generation." The author depicts Peru as a country ruled by a military dictatorship, which was not the case in 1966. Did Pevtsov deliberately lie, or was he simply misinformed? It is impossible to know, but the false information was convenient for the purpose of presenting the novel to the Soviet public as a work of "denunciation."

Vargas Llosa first heard about the Russian translation and mutilations of his novel in January 1965, in Havana, through a Russian

49. Felix Svetov y Zoya Svetova, *Opyt biografii: Nevinovnye* [A Tentative Biography: Innocents] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Ivana Limbakha, 2023).

50. *Novy Mir* 42:12 (1966): 277.

visitor.[51] The book was released in December of that year. In February 1966, Carlos Barral wrote to him and confirmed that the book had been published. Vargas Llosa would later say that he found out that his novel had been censored in the USSR through "a Spaniard in Barcelona."[52] He could be referring to Barral, who had promised to gather more information, or Juan Goytisolo, who visited Moscow in 1965 and met a group of Spanish exiles, including Dionisio García, one of the translators of *The Time of the Hero*, who surely told him about the book and the story behind its publication.[53] Shortly afterwards, Vargas Llosa shared the news with Cortázar. In a letter to his publisher in Buenos Aires, Cortázar wrote: "Did you know that several chapters of Vargas Llosa's *The Time of the Hero* were suppressed in Moscow, and they even sent him a letter to tell him that the book got much better and more interesting?"[54] The story of the letter supposedly received by Vargas Llosa is clearly apocryphal: we cannot imagine a Soviet official or editor admitting in writing to a foreign author that he had been censored. The anecdote is juicy enough to conceive that Vargas Llosa forgot it completely, since he has never mentioned it when talking about the publication of his novel in the USSR.

For months Vargas Llosa tried to get a copy of the Russian edition as well as contact information in Moscow. Sometime around October 1966, he asked the Italian translator of *The Time of the Hero*, Enrico Cicogna, who had recently visited Moscow, to try to get a copy of the novel through his acquaintances in the Soviet capital.[55] On November 9, 1966, Cicogna informed Vargas Llosa that he had asked "some Russianliberalreactionary friends" to get two copies; once he received them, he would forward them.[56] Although unauthorized and mutilated, the publication of the novel offered Vargas Llosa the

51. Elena Poniatowska, "Al fin un escritor al que le apasiona escribir, no lo que se diga de sus libros," *La Cultura en México,* supplement to *Siempre!*, (Mexico City), no. 117 (July 7, 1965): vi.

52. See "Report of the translator on the stay of Mario Vargas Llosa in the USSR from May 25 to 30, 1968," RGALI, 631, box 27, folder 559.

53. Goytisolo, *Forbidden Territory*, 368.

54. Julio Cortázar to Francisco Porrúa, April 25, 1966, in Julio Cortázar, *Cartas 3: 1965–1968* (Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 2012), 271.

55. *La città e i cani*, trans. Enrico Cicogna (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1967).

56. Cicogna's letters are in the Mario Vargas Llosa Papers (C0641), box 78, folder 4, Manuscripts Division, Department of Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

possibility of receiving some compensation for royalties at a time when his financial situation was not particularly buoyant. Vargas Llosa wrote to the Union of Writers asking about the novel and his royalties.[57] After some delay, Nina Bulgakova, head of the Latin American section of the Foreign Commission, informed him that his royalties amounted to 1,500 rubles and that a copy of the novel had been sent to him. She also extended an invitation to the novelist to visit the Soviet Union with his wife.[58]

This letter must have taken a while to reach Vargas Llosa in London, where he had moved with his family in the summer of 1966. It is possible that, in the absence of news, Vargas Llosa wrote a second letter protesting "in the strongest terms" against the censorship and requesting the withdrawal of the novel from circulation.[59] If he did write that letter, perhaps it has not survived, as we have not found it in the archives. There are no traces of it either in Bulgakova's second letter, in which she sent him "concrete news": the check in foreign currency for a portion of his royalties had already been sent to London. She also attached an official letter of invitation to visit the USSR, signed by Alexandr Kosorukov, president of the Foreign Commission. Bulgakova suggested Vargas Llosa come to Moscow in November 1967, "to witness the fiftieth anniversary [of the Bolshevik Revolution] celebrations."[60] These letters arrived, once again, quite late, so the visit had to be postponed to 1968. In a New Year's postcard, Bulgakova wrote: "We expect to have you with us in the spring."[61] The delay in communications made it very difficult to set a date;

57. This letter has not been recovered, but its content can be inferred from Bulgakova's response mentioned in the next footnote.

58. Bulgakova to Vargas Llosa, undated, Vargas Llosa Papers, box 77, folder 23. The Union of Writers invited Vargas Llosa and his wife for two weeks and offered to pay for their stay and airfare for him, but not for his wife. This type of invitation rarely included the plane ticket, which had to be covered by royalties or paid by the visitors. Vargas Llosa, in this sense, received quite generous treatment from the beginning. On the other hand, at that time the Foreign Commission must have had slightly higher than usual funds, since many Western writers canceled their trips to the USSR in protest against the trial of Siniavski and Daniel.

59. "Vargas Llosa responde a Recavarren" (1967), in *Obras Completas*, 9:401.

60. Bulgakova to Vargas Llosa, undated (*c.* 1967), Vargas Llosa Papers, box 77, folder 23.

61. Postcard from Bulgakova to Vargas Llosa, undated (*c.* December 1967), Vargas Llosa Papers, box 77, folder 23.

meanwhile, the check did not arrive in London. On April 24, Vargas Llosa suggested the second half of May as the probable date of his trip (fig. 8), and after a few more letters and telegrams, his arrival date was set for May 25 (fig. 9). The trip would last only five days.[62]

VARGAS LLOSA IN MOSCOW

During the 1960s, numerous foreign writers, including Latin Americans, were invited to visit the Soviet Union. This form of cultural diplomacy was practiced by the USSR from the beginning, but the triumph of the Cuban Revolution and the growing visibility of Latin American literature generated a renewed interest in strengthening ties with writers from the region. For visitors, it was an opportunity to know Moscow and other cities, meet literary personalities, get acquainted with the Soviet cultural and publishing scenes, and promote translations of their books (or ask for explanations when they had been made without their permission). We should also consider the great admiration that existed for the great Russian writers of the nineteenth century among Latin American writers (and readers in general). Fuentes, for example, read and admired Gogol, about whom he wrote an essay in which he discussed common elements between Russian and Spanish-American literature.[63] García Márquez read Dostoievski's *The Double* in his youth and would later say that Tolstoi's *War and Peace* was the best novel of all time.[64] Cortázar left several traces of his admiration for Dostoievski,[65] and Vargas Llosa read *War and Peace* in French in the early 1960s, when he lived in Paris, and has praised Tolstoi ever since as one of history's greatest novelists.[66]

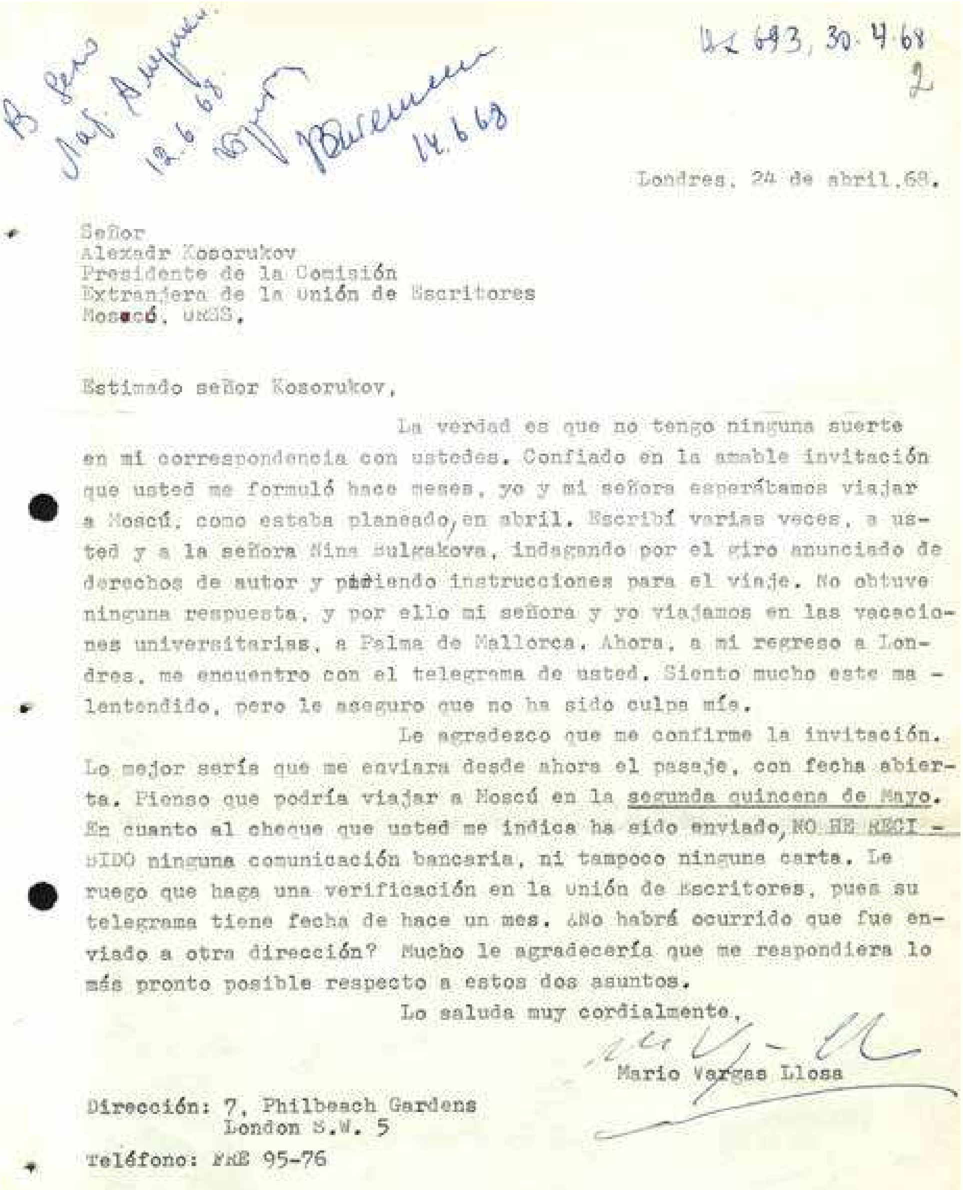
62. The final preparations for Vargas Llosa's trip coincided with the May 1968 uprising in Paris and other cities. Carlos Fuentes, who was also living in London, made plans to go to France with Vargas Llosa to witness the unfolding events. While Fuentes did go to Paris, Vargas Llosa did not alter his plans to visit Moscow.

63. Carlos Fuentes, "Gogol," in *Myself with Others: Selected Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988), 89–124.

64. Gabriel García Márquez, *The Fragrance of Guava*, trans. Ann Wright (New York: Verso, 1982), 46.

65. In a letter to Manuel Antín, dated August 1, 1962, for instance, Cortázar declares his "love" for Dostoiveski. *Cartas 2: 1955–1964* (Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 2012), 298.

66. Mario Vargas Llosa, "Lecciones de Tolstoi," *El País* (Madrid), August 24, 2015.



Londres, 24 de abril.68.

Señor
Alexadr Kosorukov
Presidente de la Comisión
Extranjera de la unión de Escritores
Moscú, URSS.

Estimado señor Kosorukov,

La verdad es que no tengo ninguna suerte en mi correspondencia con ustedes. Confiado en la amable invitación que usted me formuló hace meses, yo y mi señora esperábamos viajar a Moscú, como estaba planeado, en abril. Escribí varias veces, a usted y a la señora Nina Bulgakova, indagando por el giro anunciado de derechos de autor y pidiendo instrucciones para el viaje. No obtuve ninguna respuesta, y por ello mi señora y yo viajamos en las vacaciones universitarias, a Palma de Mallorca. Ahora, a mi regreso a Londres, me encuentro con el telegrama de usted. Siento mucho este malentendido, pero le aseguro que no ha sido culpa mía.

Le agradezco que me confirme la invitación. Lo mejor sería que me enviara desde ahora el pasaje, con fecha abierta. Pienso que podría viajar a Moscú en la segunda quincena de Mayo. En cuanto al cheque que usted me indica ha sido enviado, NO HE RECIBIDO ninguna comunicación bancaria, ni tampoco ninguna carta. Le ruego que haga una verificación en la Unión de Escritores, pues su telegrama tiene fecha de hace un mes. ¿No habrá ocurrido que fue enviado a otra dirección? Mucho le agradecería que me respondiera lo más pronto posible respecto a estos dos asuntos.

Lo saluda muy cordialmente,

Mario Vargas Llosa

Dirección: 7, Philbeach Gardens
London S.W. 5
Teléfono: FRE 95-76

8. Letter from Mario Vargas Llosa to Alexandr Kosorukov, April 24, 1968. RGALI, 631, box 27, folder 560, p. 2.


Charges to pay
s. d.
RECEIVED
POST OFFICE
TELEGRAM
Prefix. Time handed in. Office of Origin and Service Instructions. Words.
No.
OFFICE STAMP
At m
From
By
At m
N264 YH 246 MOSCOU 26 15 1321 NORTHERN =
ELT MARIO VARGAS LLOSA 7 PHILBEACH
GARDENS LONDONSW5 =
FAVOR TELEGRAFEE SI PUEDE VENIR 26 MAYO
PARA PARTICIPAR DIA NACIONAL POESIA EN
NOMBRE PUSHKIN = SALUDOS ALEJANDRO
ROSORUKOV +
at office COL 7 LONDON SW5 26 + 1 TS 784
envelope.
B or C

9. Telegram from the Union of Writers to Mario Vargas Llosa, May 15, 1968. Mario Vargas Llosa Papers (c0641), box 94, folder 1, Manuscripts Division, Department of Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

Among those who visited the USSR in the 1960s were the Mexicans Carlos Fuentes and Fernando Benítez, the Colombian Jorge Zalamea, the Uruguayan Eduardo Galeano, the Chileans Pablo Neruda, Gonzalo Rojas, and Volodia Teitelboim, the Venezuelan Miguel Otero Silva, the Cubans Alejo Carpentier, Nicolás Guillén, and Lisandro Otero, the Peruvian Gustavo Valcárcel, and many others.[67] Some were members of the Communist Parties of their countries and had a very close identification with the USSR; others were leftist sympathizers without the tradition of loyalty of the former and tended to have a less reverential and more critical attitude.[68] García Márquez

67. See Rafael Pedemonte, *Guerra por las ideas en América Latina, 1959–1973: Presencia soviética en Cuba y Chile* (Santiago de Chile: Universidad Alberto Hurtado, 2020).

68. On the "classification" of guests of the Union of Writers, see Kristina Buynova, "Typical Bourgeois Intellectuals and Great Friends of the Soviet Union: Latin American Writers in the USSR during the Khrushchev Thaw," *Concept: Philosophy, Religion, Culture* 5:3 (2021): 162–76.

was invited in 1968 for the centenary of Gorki, but declined because the program was "pretty boring," as he told Vargas Llosa, and because "Moscow bores me and the plane terrifies me," as he confided to Fuentes.[69]

Visitors were generally taken care of with generosity and courtesy, as the hosts naturally wanted them to get the best impression of the USSR. As Goytisolo wrote, "the comrades of the Union of Writers and other cultural entities multiplied their friendly overtures." Some of them "came to our hotel, went shopping with us [and] tried to make life easy."[70]

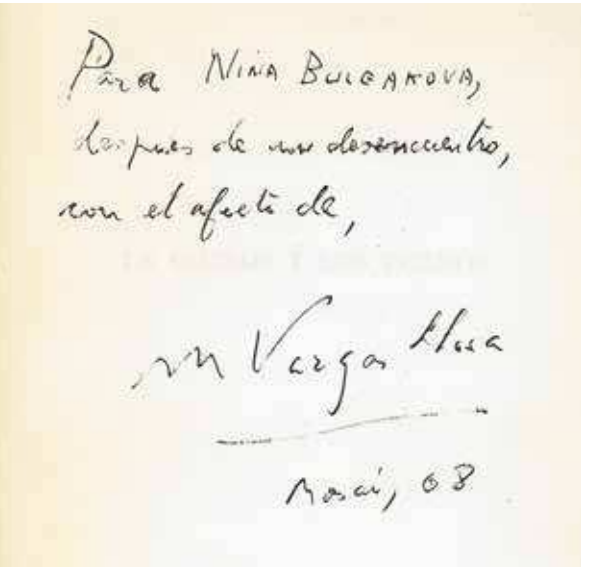
When Vargas Llosa arrived in Moscow in May 1968, he was known in the Soviet Union primarily as the author of *The Time of the Hero*, which gave him the reputation of a "progressive" writer for daring to criticize the military. The legend about the burning of his book made him a sort of martyr of the cruel imperialist world in the eyes of Soviet literary officials. The echoes of the Rómulo Gallegos Prize, which undoubtedly reached Moscow, increased his prestige, at least among the members of the Union of Writers. His sympathies for Cuba were also known, and although Soviet-Cuban relations were at their lowest, the Union of Writers, out of jealousy, tried to convert to their faith the writers "confused" by the charms of the young Cuban Revolution.

These same reasons perhaps explain why Soviet officials turned a blind eye to Vargas Llosa's articles denouncing censorship in the Soviet Union. If they had considered them, it would not matter if they were written from the position of someone who claimed to be a "friend of the USSR": the Soviet regime did not tolerate criticism. From the early years of Soviet propaganda, only "lavish praise" earned someone the high honor of being considered "a friend of the Soviet Union,"[71] an honor that possibly mattered little to the young Peruvian writer.

69. Gabriel García Márquez to Vargas Llosa, June 1, 1968, Vargas Llosa Papers, box 83, folder 7; García Márquez to Carlos Fuentes, June 1, 1968, Carlos Fuentes Papers (c0790), box 381, folder 9, Manuscripts Division, Department of Special Collections, Princeton University Library. García Márquez visited the USSR in 1957; he would not return until 1979.

70. Goytisolo, *Forbidden Territory*, 390.

71. Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921–1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 106.



10. Mario Vargas Llosa's inscription to Nina Bulgakova. Carlos Aguirre collection.

Vargas Llosa must have traveled to Moscow with more curiosity than enthusiasm given his reservations about the Soviet model, his critique of Soviet censorship (against himself and others), and the difficulties with communication and the payment of royalties. These problems perhaps explain the inscription that Vargas Llosa wrote on a Spanish-language copy of *The Time of the Hero*: "Para Nina Bulgakova, después de un desencuentro" ("For Nina Bulgakova, after a disagreement") (fig. 10).[72] Bulgakova was not only Vargas Llosa's main Soviet correspondent but also the person in charge of organizing his visit. She was an exceptional character who deserves some attention.

Bulgakova played a crucial role in fostering relations between the Soviet Union and Latin American writers. Like most Foreign Commission officials, she devoted all her time to the institution and its contacts. She spent at least a decade corresponding with dozens and even hundreds of people, arranging for visits by foreign writers, writing summaries of Latin American literature for the Commission's internal use, and drafting the many reports that Soviet bureaucracy demanded from its functionaries. Bulgakova possessed an important virtue for the job: her personal charm. The testimonies of visitors and correspondents coincide in describing her as a sweet, cordial,

72. "Desencuentro" could be translated as either a "mix-up" or a "disagreement."

and honest woman, as well as an accomplished translator.[73] For the Cuban writer Renée Méndez Capote, Bulgakova personified "the Soviet people: cordial, affectionate, sincere, kind, and good."[74] Writers such as the Cubans Eliseo Diego, Raúl Luis, and Ángel Augier, or the Colombian Luis Enrique Sendoya, among others, dedicated poems to her. She had lived in Cuba for two years in the early 1960s and traveled multiple times in several Latin American countries as an interpreter (fig. 11).[75] She coedited an important anthology of Russian and Soviet poetry and a bilingual anthology, in Spanish and Russian, of Soviet and Cuban poets.[76]

Bulgakova handled Latin American affairs on her own; she could rarely count on any support, unless she found a trustworthy interpreter to accompany a guest. She often had to travel with visitors to other regions of the country, which meant that she was absent from her office for weeks. Upon her return, she had to attend to accumulated commitments.

Vargas Llosa also had a busy travel schedule, so he and Bulgakova, as he once put it, were "doomed to have our letters miss each other."[77] It is not surprising, therefore, that it took a while for them to set the date of the trip; it was also partly for the same reasons that the payment of royalties became so muddled and was the subject of uncomfortable exchanges between Vargas Llosa and the Union of Writers. The issue of royalty payments was a serious problem in the 1960s, and, judging from correspondence with other writers, it was never resolved while the Soviet Union existed. The officials of the Union of Writers were aware of it and felt bad but couldn't do much

73. References to Bulgakova's tireless work can be found in Andrés López Bermúdez, *Jorge Zalamea, enlace de mundos: Quehacer literario y cosmopolitismo (1905–1969)* (Bogotá: Universidad del Rosario, 2014).

74. Quoted in Pedemonte, *Guerra por las ideas*, 248.

75. See, for instance, "Report by N. A. Bulgakova, R. I. Rozhdestvensky, S. S. Smirnov about their trip to Uruguay, Peru, Ecuador, and Costa Rica, from January 30 to March 19, 1969," RGALI, 631, box 27, folder 732.

76. Nina Bulgakova and Samuel Feijóo, eds., *Poetas rusos y soviéticos: Selección* (Santa Clara: Universidad Central de las Villas, 1966); Ángel Augier, Nina Bulgakova, Eliseo Diego, and Alexei Smolnikov, *Moskva-Gavana, Gavana-Moskva: Stikhi sovetskikh i kubinskikh poetov* [Moscow-Havana, Havana-Moscow: Cuban and Soviet Poets] (Moscow: Progress, 1977).

77. Vargas Llosa to Bulgakova, London, August 29, 1968, RGALI, 631, box 27, folder 560, p. 10.

11. Nina Bulgakova with writer Sergei Smirnov during a trip to Colombia in 1967. RGALI, 2528, box 8, folder 258.

more than extend an invitation to visit the USSR to authors interested in collecting their royalties. There they would receive payment in Soviet rubles, which were hardly convertible outside the country, giving those who accepted those conditions no choice but to spend their earnings inside the Soviet Union.

Before embarking on the trip to Moscow, Vargas Llosa had to ask about his royalties more than once, which was not exceptional. Less common was that his royalties were paid in foreign currency, given the chronically low reserves available to the Union of Writers. Those

in charge of communication with foreign writers tried to persuade them to receive their money in hard currency. After all, it was they (and the translators) who surely felt uncomfortable facing the protests of foreigners and the (not always subtle) accusations of piracy, and explaining, embarrassed, that the copyright law in their country was very different from that in the West. On the other hand, if there were funds, it was important to use them: budget estimates for the following year were based on the previous balance. If any amount was not used, the next budget would be smaller.[78] As we have seen, by mid-1967 Bulgakova informed Vargas Llosa that the publishing house had sent him a check equivalent to "part" of his fees.[79] It was about half of the 1,500 rubles he would receive. Considering that the average salary of a Soviet worker or employee was about 100–130 rubles per month,[80] that sum may seem high; but in reality, it was much less than what a Soviet writer would be paid. In the 1960s, a writer earned an average of 300 rubles for 40,000 characters of text (which in Russia is equivalent to an "author's sheet"), plus an important premium that depended on the volume of the print run.[81] It is quite likely that the remuneration of the translators of *The Time of the Hero* was even higher than what the author was paid.[82] By the time he departed for Moscow, Vargas Llosa had not yet received the check announced by Bulgakova. It was not money, though, that prompted Vargas Llosa

78. It is very likely that after the international boycott over the Siniavski and Daniel case, for the first time in many years foreign currency expenses were lower than expected, which made it possible to make some copyright payments, including Vargas Llosa's.

79. Bulgakova to Vargas Llosa, Moscow, undated, Vargas Llosa Papers, box 77, folder 23.

80. Anonymous, *Strana Sovetov za 50 let* (*Sbornik statisticheskikh materialov*) [The Soviet Union in 50 years (Compilation of Statistical Data)] (Moscow: Statistika, 1967), 226.

81. See Ilya Kukulin, "Mladshiy podchinennyy otryad: pisateli kak odna iz kast vnutri sovetskoy iyerarkhii" [The Subaltern Unity: Writers as a Caste within the Soviet Hierarchy], conference transcript, undated, available at https://arzamas.academy/materials/2303.

82. The fate of the accounting documents of the Young Guard publishing house is unknown. Elena Ivanovna Gorelik, the kind head of the Information and Bibliography Center, informed us that a significant part of the institution's archive was lost due to negligence in the 1970s and that the rest was distributed among two public archives, the RGALI and the RGASPI (Russian State Archive of Social and Political History).

to make the trip to the Soviet Union, but curiosity and "an enthusiastic sympathy for almost all aspects of its political and social system, with the exception of the cultural one."[83]

The details of Vargas Llosa's visit to Moscow can be reconstructed from two sources: the report of the Soviet translator, Tamara Zlochevskaia, and an article by Vargas Llosa himself. Writing a report after sending off the guest was, since the 1920s, an obligation for translators who worked in all Soviet propaganda institutions. Researchers can only bless the bureaucratic tradition that left such a systematic and punctual source, but for translators it was an overwhelming task. This documentary genre did not change for decades: it was written in a very formal and factual style, listed the most important conversations and activities, and at the end, offered a "characterization" of the guest.[84]

The details presented to superiors did not always match reality. Depending on various factors, including the willingness (or lack thereof) of Foreign Commission employees, some facts could be omitted from the report. Despite the brevity of the report, Zlochevskaia shows a certain sympathy for Vargas Llosa: she tries to dispel the idea that the writer did not appreciate the generosity of the Union of Writers by limiting his visit to just five days; she defends him in his indignation at the "amputations" of his novel; and she does not record the impressions that the Peruvian writer might have expressed about the living conditions in the Soviet capital. On the other hand, Vargas Llosa's criticism of the "extremely poor selection of books" in other languages that was offered in bookstores and the (for him) unpleasant reception by the Chilean cultural attaché, which ended in "a vulgar drunkenness," stand out. Whether these two issues were indeed mentioned by Vargas Llosa, it is impossible to know, but the fact that they were included in the report reveals that they mattered for the employees of the Foreign Commission, such as Zlochevskaia, and that they wanted to make them known to their superiors by using the authority of their distinguished visitors.

The translator's report reveals how saturated the Peruvian writer's

83. Mario Vargas Llosa, "Moscú: Notas a vuelo de pájaro" (1968), reprinted in *Obras completas*, 9:453.

84. The same structure is described by David-Fox, although he deals with the decades between the 1920s and 1940s. David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 48–50.

agenda was in Moscow. One or two visits to museums a day (including those of Tolstoi and Gorki), a play almost every night, a visit to the Foreign Literature Library (fig. 12), and various meetings and conversations with writers and officials, including Ella Braguinskaia (1926–2010), who worked at the Library and would eventually translate into Russian Vargas Llosa's short novel *Los cachorros* (*The Cubs*, 1967), as well as works by Gabriela Mistral, Julio Cortázar, Gabriel García Márquez, and Carlos Fuentes (fig. 13). That pace was no exception, nor was it the result of the guest's will. A foreign visitor's day was deliberately overloaded to make it easier to control the movements and, according to bureaucratic logic, the perceptions of the visitor. However, since foreign writers were exempt from the control—at least visibly—of KGB agents, the reality could be very different from what the report states. For example, theater tickets, if not wanted by the exhausted guest, could be used by the translator's family, and instead of visiting another VDNJ pavilion,[85] the visitor could choose to make a pilgrimage to Boris Pasternak's grave in Peredelkino.[86] Therefore, we do not know with total certainty whether Vargas Llosa actually attended all the activities mentioned by Zlochevskaia. The translator's final assessment was very positive: "M. Vargas Llosa gives the impression of being a man with a solid personality, progressive thinking, bold in his judgments and statements . . . , who is humble, reserved, and has a sense of responsibility—responsibility for what he writes, says, and does."

"THE CZECHOSLOVAKIAN AFFAIRS"

As mentioned earlier, Vargas Llosa wrote some "notes from a bird's eye view" a few weeks after his visit to Moscow. He clarifies at the beginning that he had gone without any prejudice against the USSR and that, on the contrary, he sympathized with the political and social aspects of the socialist regime. He denies that there is "a resurrection of capitalism" and mentions approvingly that "nothing indicates that, even in a timid and oblique way, private ownership of the means of production is being restored." He confirms the existence of

85. VDNJ, "Exhibition of the Achievements of the National Economy," is a large exhibition space that still exists in the north of Moscow.

86. See the reminiscences of the person who succeeded Nina Bulgakova a few years after Vargas Llosa's visit: Sinianskaia, "Vo sne i nayavu," 151–52.

12. The Foreign Literature Library Building in Moscow, about to be completed (1967). Mario Vargas Llosa was one of the first foreign writers to visit it. http://inostranka100.tilda.ws/vgbiliana_photo.

13. Mario Vargas Llosa and Ella Braguinskaia at the Foreign Literature Library in Moscow, May 29, 1968. Foreign Literature Library Archive.

"an egalitarian and homogeneous spectacle," but acknowledges that salary differences "generate a social differentiation capable of crystallizing in the long run into two classes of citizens." But while there are "rich people" who live better, they cannot "exploit anyone. And this fact seems fundamental to me, to differentiate the economic systems that compete in the world." [87]

Although the USSR, after fifty years, "has reduced social injustices to an insignificant degree compared to a Western country," Vargas Llosa finds something similar in both systems: "The spectacle offered by Moscow is the routine, impersonal, and monotonous one of any large capitalist city." In other words, the objectionable aspects of the Soviet system are those features that most resemble capitalism. Vargas Llosa even criticizes the fact that "the usual individualistic appetites persist in the USSR—the long-awaited vacations, the desire to have a car, to travel abroad, to have a better apartment. ... Solidarity concerns, disinterested idealisms, seem, as in the rest of the world, the attributes of a minority." [88]

Is this the language of someone "disenchanted with socialism" after spending a few days in Moscow? Vargas Llosa is actually demanding more, not less socialism, and more solidarity and less individualism.

In the second part of the article, Vargas Llosa offers an overview of the Soviet cultural and literary world. Here, he tries to dismantle the idea that Stalinism made "all spontaneity and freedom" disappear and "ruined creation." He highlights, and celebrates, the fervor he observed toward the artistic and cultural heritage of the country: flowers on the statues of Pushkin and Maiakovski, massive poetry recitals in stadiums and squares, millions of copies of the works of Tolstoi, Gorki, and Pushkin, museums where schoolchildren received literature classes, libraries that lent books to take home. At the same time, he underlines the official mistrust toward living creators, reflected in censorship and the selective use of state patronage: "The condition of the writer in the USSR is privileged, as long as he does not fall into disgrace." Vargas Llosa seems to feel a certain envy when describing the benefits that writers enjoyed (for example, "settling with his family on a beach, in a certain region, to write a novel or essay"), but he immediately qualifies that supposedly enviable con-

87. Vargas Llosa, "Moscú: Notas a vuelo de pájaro," 455.
88. Vargas Llosa, "Moscú: Notas a vuelo de pájaro," 455.

dition by pointing out that all advantages would be lost the day the writer became uncomfortable for those in power. For someone who defended the writer's freedom in socialist regimes, the intellectual and moral cost that the privileged status of Soviet writers entailed was unacceptable.[89]

Vargas Llosa ends his article with a reference to the publication and censorship of *The Time of the Hero*. On his visit to the Young Guard publishing house he asked why his novel had been mutilated (fig. 14). The answer was predictable: "The deleted pages contained lurid episodes that would have offended Soviet readers."[90] Years later he would recall that same anecdote in somewhat different terms: "The director of Young Guard ... clarified to me that, if those scenes had not been suppressed, 'the young Russian spouses would feel so ashamed after reading them that they could not look each other in the face.' When I asked her how she could know that, she reassured me, with the pious look that fools inspire, that all the editorial advisers of Young Guard had doctoral degrees in literature."[91]

It is clear that, by May 1968, Vargas Llosa had objections and doubts about socialism in general and about the USSR in particular, but he still considered himself a defender of socialism; he still believed that, considering the pros and cons, socialism, with all its flaws, was vastly superior to capitalism. Just as he offered a favorable image of Cuba by minimizing criticism in his 1967 article, he did the same with the USSR in his July 1968 article. As he would tell a journalist in 2012, processing disappointment with socialism was "very difficult": it implied a "tearing apart." Yet, at the same time that deep-rooted ideas were being questioned, it was important not to "give weapons to the enemy."[92]

Three months after Vargas Llosa's visit to Moscow, on the night of August 20–21, Soviet and Warsaw Pact troops invaded Czechoslovakia, a traumatic event for many supporters of socialism around the world. The so-called Prague Spring, an effort to democratize the socialist regime in that country, was brought to an end. Vargas Llosa and other intellectuals sent a letter to the Union of Writers of the

89. Vargas Llosa, "Moscú: Notas a vuelo de pájaro," 456–59.

90. Vargas Llosa, "Moscú: Notas a vuelo de pájaro," 460.

91. Mario Vargas Llosa, "Nuevas inquisiciones," *El País* (Madrid), March 17, 2018.

92. Juan Cruz, *Encuentros con Mario Vargas Llosa* (Madrid: Deliberar, 2017), 156.

14. Bookstore of the Young Guard publishing house, Moscow, late 1950s. https://storage.gvardiya.ru/files/landingpictures/e7/75/9b/37177oo68713_l.png.

USSR protesting an action "contrary to the principles of international morality and the right of peoples to self-determination, insofar as it strengthens the U.S. position in Vietnam, dismisses the hopes of a genuinely democratic socialism, and sows division among progressive forces." [93] From Cuba, Fidel Castro expressed his support for the invasion, a position that surprised many observers given that relations between the USSR and Cuba were cooling off at the time.[94] If in

93. *Le Monde* (Paris), August 26, 1968. Nina Bulgakova confirmed to Vargas Llosa that the letter had been received, but we have not found it in the archives. Bulgakova to Vargas Llosa, undated (*c.* September–October 1968), Vargas Llosa Papers, box 77, folder 23. The invasion was criticized by numerous intellectuals and political leaders of the Latin American left, some in public and others in private, including the then president of the Chilean Senate and future president of the republic Salvador Allende and the Uruguayan writer Mario Benedetti. There were also, naturally, many who supported it.

94. "El planteamiento cubano frente a la crisis checoslovaca," *Punto Final* (San-

"Moscú: Notas a vuelo de pájaro" Vargas Llosa decided, for reasons already mentioned, not to mention some of his more negative experiences and impressions about life in the USSR, the events of August 1968 and Castro's subsequent declaration of support struck a very sensitive chord, or, to put it differently, gave him the excuse he was waiting for. Shortly afterward, he decided to make his protest public and to do something unthinkable for a left-wing intellectual: to publicly criticize Fidel Castro. He did so in "Socialism and the Tanks," a frontal critique of that "imperialist aggression," "a political blunder of dizzying proportions" that "has gravely damaged the forces of the left."[95] The tone was much harder than the one used in the article about his visit to Moscow. More surprising and relevant, however, were the lines he devoted to Fidel. It is worth quoting them in full:

> He is a leader who, until now, has shown himself to be very attentive to the problems of national autonomy and has exhaustively supported the rights of small nations to conduct their own policies without interference from great powers. How can he now support a military invasion aimed at stamping out the independence of a country which, like Cuba, was only asking to be allowed to organize its own society according to its own convictions? It is distressing to see Fidel reacting in the same conditioned and reflex way as the mediocre leaders of the Latin American Communist parties who rushed to justify the Soviet intervention. Doesn't the Cuban supreme commander understand that if he allows the USSR the right to decide the type of socialism suitable for other countries and to import its choice by force, then what has happened in Prague could happen tomorrow in Havana?
>
> To many sincere friends of the Cuban revolution, the words of Fidel have seemed to us as incomprehensible and as unjust as the noise of the tanks entering Prague.[96]

It is difficult to gauge today, more than half a century later, the impact that this article had on the Latin American intellectual and political field. The person who wrote it was one of the most important Latin American writers of the moment, and the target of his criticism was no less than the leader of a revolutionary process and the most

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tiago de Chile), no. 63 (September 10, 1968); Juan Sánchez Monroe, "Las relaciones cubano-soviéticas en 1968 vistas desde Cuba," *Temas* (Havana), nos. 95–96 (2018).

95. Mario Vargas Llosa, "Socialism and the Tanks" (1968), reprinted in *Making Waves*, 79–82 (quotations from 79, 81).

96. Vargas Llosa, "Socialism and the Tanks," 81–82.

admired left-wing politician on the continent. The harshness of the critique reveals the cathartic nature of that document: Vargas Llosa was questioning the invasion and Fidel's support, but the vehemence of the writing reveals a barely contained need to question real socialism and its leaders. He tells Fidel that he is offering a "distressful" image ("pitiful" might be closer to the original "lastimoso" in Spanish); he compares him with the "mediocre leaders" of other Communist parties; and he equates the injustice of his declaration of support with the force of the tanks occupying Prague. It goes without saying that the article generated outright rejection in Cuba and that several intellectuals, including friends of Vargas Llosa, reproached him in public or in private.[97] It is worth mentioning here that none of the other three foremost writers of the Boom, Cortázar, García Márquez, and Fuentes—who also signed the aforementioned letter of protest against the invasion of Czechoslovakia and then visited Prague in December 1968—publicly expressed any criticism of the leader of the Cuban Revolution. In that, Vargas Llosa was alone.

On August 29, 1968, a few days after signing the collective letter to the Union of Writers, Vargas Llosa wrote to Nina Bulgakova to thank her for the royalty check, which he had finally received. And then he added:

> I have thought a lot about you these days, and about all the affection I received in Moscow during my stay, due to the events in Czechoslovakia. I cannot hide from you that *they have affected me terribly*, precisely because *I admire and consider myself a friend of the Soviet Revolution*, I still do not understand how *an act as unjust* as that military intervention could have been committed. I think it is something that *must have broken their hearts and saddened many like me*. I needed to tell you this, because, isn't it true that sincerity is the first condition of friendship?[98]

In her answer, Bulgakova was prudent. She expressed her "gratitude for being so honest with us" but avoided words like "invasion," "aggression," or "tanks," as well as the terms used by Soviet propa-

97. For some examples, see the letter from Roberto Fernández Retamar to Vargas Llosa, January 18, 1969, Vargas Llosa Papers, box 82, folder 8; Óscar Collazos, "Contrarrespuesta para armar," in Collazos et al., *Literatura en la revolución y revolución en la literatura* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1970), 102; Julio Cortázar to Vargas Llosa, January 31, 1969, Vargas Llosa Papers, box 79, folder 20.

98. Vargas Llosa to Bulgakova, London, August 29, 1968, RGALI, 631, box 27, folder 560, p. 10. Emphases added.

ganda ("fraternal help"). She spoke instead of "the Czechoslovakian affairs," "everything that has happened," "this harsh measure," and "the problem." Foreign Commission employees like Nina Bulgakova—who read foreign literature in its original language, knew the writers personally, and traveled abroad—could not help but perceive the drama of August 21 as a real catastrophe. And yet, Bulgakova could not afford to make explicit allusions to the events in Prague. In the end, she invited Vargas Llosa to Moscow again, and "then we will talk about everything." [99]

In a 1988 interview with Brazilian journalist Ricardo Setti, Vargas Llosa said that "to know the Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries, to discover that real socialism was so different from the dreamed and imagined one, was a great disappointment," and that his disenchantment with the USSR "was the reason why I distanced myself [from Cuba], but it was not an immediate process." [100] The evidence shows that the distancing from the USSR and Cuba was a parallel and simultaneous process and that both elements clearly converged in that month of August 1968: the critique of the USSR's invasion could not be complete without also criticizing Cuba and Fidel. And although the definitive rupture would take a few more years, the events in Prague marked a point of no return in that process. A letter to Chilean writer José Donoso summarizes the crossroads in which Vargas Llosa found himself after that episode:

> I still think that the Revolution is the most important thing that has happened in Latin America, but I no longer think about it with the same joy and faith than in the past. Now, with the things that are happening—Fidel's support for the invasion in Czechoslovakia, the atrocities that Lisandro Otero is saying, etc. —I think that we must continue to support the Revolution, but gritting our teeth, and because the rest is bullshit. Anyway, as you can see, I'm a bit pessimistic.[101]

99. Bulgakova to Vargas Llosa, undated (*c.* September–October 1968), Vargas Llosa Papers, box 77, folder 23.

100. Ricardo Setti, *Diálogo con Vargas Llosa* (Mexico City: Kosmos, 1988), 141.

101. Vargas Llosa to José Donoso, January 20, 1969, José Donoso Papers (c0099), box 62, folder 23, Manuscripts Division, Department of Special Collections, Princeton University Library. The Cuban writer Lisandro Otero attacked the "counter revolutionary" elements that, according to him, were creating in Cuba "problems" similar to those in Czechoslovakia. Otero, "En ustedes vemos una generación literaria que servirá de base al intelectual a que aspira la Revolución," *La Gaceta de Cuba* (Havana), no. 68 (November–December 1968).

Vargas Llosa's visit to Moscow was part of the pilgrimage that intellectuals from all over the world made to the Soviet Union throughout the twentieth century. The visitors' interest in learning about the reality of Soviet socialism was matched by the desire on the part of the USSR to strengthen ties with them and improve the image of Soviet socialism in the world. An intense and well-planned cultural diplomacy (invitations, hospitality, cultural events, interviews, translations, and what Paul Hollander called the "ego massage" of the visitors), became an essential instrument of Soviet international policy that mobilized cultural officials, translators, literary critics, and publishers.[102] The Cuban Revolution of 1959 and the acclaim reached by Latin American literature increased the exchanges between the region's intellectuals and the Soviet Union.

Vargas Llosa's trip to Moscow in May 1968 took place at a crucial moment in the history of socialism in Cuba and in Eastern Europe, but also in the political evolution of the Peruvian writer. By the time he landed in Moscow, his criticisms of both the Soviet Union and Cuba were restricted to the sphere of individual liberties and the censorship of writers, but they did not diminish, at least publicly, his enthusiasm for socialism and the Cuban and Soviet regimes. The "bird's-eye notes" he wrote after the visit generally reflect this spirit: Soviet society was far from paradise, but it could show achievements unimaginable in the capitalist world. Compared with the pages he wrote on Cuba in 1967, those on Moscow were arguably a little less enthusiastic, but in no way do they read like the testimony of a disenchanted dissident.

In August 1968, three months after his trip to Moscow and one month after he wrote that article, Warsaw Pact troops invaded Czechoslovakia, a decision that sparked criticism in left-wing circles around the world but was supported by Fidel Castro. Vargas Llosa, like other intellectuals, protested the invasion in public and in private, but he took his reaction to an unexpected and controversial level: he wrote an article criticizing both the invasion and the support it received from Castro. This stand marked the beginning of his

102. Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Western Intellectuals in Search of the Good Society*, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2017), 355.

break with socialism, both because of the seriousness of the events themselves and because of the opening of a division with the Cuban regime that was now almost impossible to mend. While many scholars associate Vargas Llosa's break from Cuba and socialism with the 1971 Padilla affair, and he has repeatedly associated it with what he saw in Moscow during those five days of May 1968, the events of August 1968 in Czechoslovakia and their reverberations were crucial in deepening Vargas Llosa's doubts about socialism and marked a point of no return in his disaffection with Cuba.