CHAPTER - IV
DIFFUSING POPULAR CULTURE
(Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter)

As critics have noted, in the early 1970s, Vargas Llosa was a man in transition from one set of political beliefs to another, but he was also a novelist in search of a new complexity. And he found it for a while in a genre that was not his first choice, i.e., comedy. His achievement in Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter (1977) is all the more remarkable because the writer was, in several respects, turning away from what he knew. At the same time he was anxious not to be disloyal to his past, and in comedy he discovered a means of expressing falsehood.

Over the decades, Vargas Llosa has written many literary manifestos that have shaped a whole generation of Latin American writers. But the positions that he states in these manifestos have changed dramatically. When asked in an interview as how does he perceive the dramatic changes in these manifestos over the decades, he states that, when he was young under the strong influence of Sartre (1905-1980), he believed in the idea that literature should be artistic and it should also be an instrument for producing changes in society and history, to open the minds of readers to the big problems. He was under the influence of Sartre and was against humour not in life but in literature. He says: "Then I changed completely. I
discovered that humour was a fantastic instrument, not only to produce good literature, but also to present certain aspects of the human experience that can only be described and understood that way" (216). That was an important change in his perception of dealing with humour in fiction. With this, he even incorporated other kinds of experiences in literature, not only humour but also eroticism.

Vargas Llosa shifts his narrative gears after nearly a decade of writing dark, lengthy, technically complex novels which culminates in his *Conversation in the Cathedral* (1969). In addition to his critical work, he published two novels, *Captain Pantoja and the Special Service* (1978) and *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter* (1977). Both novels are less complex and are infused with comic humor, a feature absent in his previous narrative. *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter*, which is dealt in-depth here, is a semi-autobiographic comic novel by Vargas Llosa published in 1977. The novel combines the two forms of discourse: the autobiographical and the third person narrative in alternating chapters of plot development. Set in Peru during the 1950s, it is the story of an 18-year-old Marito, who falls for a 32-year-old divorcee, Aunt Julia, whose story alternates with episodes from a series of radio soap operas written by Pedro Camacho. But the novel, According to Marvin A. Lewis, in *From Lima to Leticia: The Peruvian Novels of Mario Vargas Llosa* (1983):
Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter is, on the surface, less critical in nature in addressing the larger questions of society. It is, in part, autobiographical and does not reflect many middle class Peruvian values and attitudes that were prevalent during the Odria era (1948-1956). (137)

The novel consists of twenty chapters. In the odd-numbered chapters from 1 to 19, Marito remembers the events of a single year: his frustrated attempts to write serious literature, which he contrasts to the extraordinary ability of Pedro to write and direct nine different radio plays each day at the radio station where they both work. These odd-numbered chapters also narrate the romance between Marito and his Aunt Julia until they marry. The narrator recalls Pedro’s eccentricities, the impact of his radio plays on the Peruvian public, and how his scripts become increasingly incoherent as he goes mad. The even-numbered chapters, with the exception of the chapter 20, are stylized narrations based on Pedro’s radio plays and represent Pedro’s point of view. As the novel progresses, the scripts begin to fall apart - Camacho begins to lose track of the names of the characters, the details of his plots, etc., to the point where they become ‘hopelessly jumbled’. To put it in brief, Marito’s chapters (odd) are interwoven with Pedro Camacho’s radio soap operas (even).
Love and writing are the twin themes of the novel. The very cover of the book draws attention that the book will be about the author’s personal relationship to both matters. Marito is an eighteen-year old young man, living with his grandparents in Miraflores, Peru as his parents left Peru to live in the United States. He has a budding interest in becoming a writer and takes his free time to write short stories and articles but ends up throwing most of them in the garbage. His family has dreams of him becoming a lawyer; therefore, he studies law at the University of San Marcos. Marito works for a local radio station named Panamericana, where he writes, edits and airs daily news reports. The reports air three times daily and he shares the work with an assistant named Pascual. Their office is a small shack on the roof of the Panamericana building, which is right next door to its sister station, Radio Central.

Popular culture and its diffusion is of course one of the major concerns of the novel. The character Pedro Camacho can be understood only in the light of Popular culture, prevalent in the-then Peru of 1950s. Pedro is an odd looking writer from Bolivia, whom the Genaro’s bring-in to write the scripts for their radio soap operas because it is too expensive to continue importing these programs from Cuba. Panamericana and Radio Central are both owned by the Genaro family but are completely different genres. Panamericana offers serious radio with the educated upper-class in
mind as the audience and is the opposite of Radio Central. Radio Central has a more comfortable atmosphere and their programming targets the masses. Their most popular features are their weekly serials or radio soap operas. Much of the social stratification prevalent to Peruvian society is also evident in the attitude towards popular culture demonstrated by Panamericana and Radio Central. Pedro is quickly dubbed as a writing genius, but he has no social skills. He is completely absorbed in the art of composing his work and claims to have no interest in social exchange. Marito meets Pedro and his friendship drives him to be a better writer and he finds passion for his work. At the same time when Marito meets Pedro Camacho, he meets his Aunt Julia, a beautiful thirty-two-year-old woman who arrives in Peru from Bolivia after a divorce. They start out going to movies once in a while, and eventually a romance flourishes between them. Their relationship faces its biggest obstacle when their family vows to break their relationship apart. Marito and Julia prove that their feelings are real and find a way to get married. Pedro's dedication shapes Marito as a writer and he starts to desire more from his writing career. Contrastingly, the more that Marito grows and succeeds at his writing, the less Pedro does.

In the end, the tables turn, and Marito shapes his life into a successful writer, while Pedro ends up destitute and mocked. Marito's
relationships with both Pedro and Julia transform him from boy to man, husband and successful writer by the end of the novel. Apart from noting the title, it is already clear that both Pedro Camacho and Aunt Julia will be critical parts of Marito's life.

This novel marks Vargas Llosa's turn from his early self-conscious concern with form, to an overtly metafictional meditation on the nature of authorship and of fiction in general. The novel is based on the author's real life experience. Thus Jose Maguel Oviedo in his edited book *Mario Vargas Llosa* (1981) notes that the book is "the first of Vargas Llosa's narratives whose subterranean thread is that of the writer in the process of writing - writing about fiction in life, writing himself a life through his fiction" (167). The novel alternates the continuing story of a young narrator with narrations of episodes from radio soap operas written by the inimitable Pedro Camacho. Here, the novel's protagonist "Marito Varguitas" is identified as youthful version of Vargas Llosa himself. This interweaving of different narrative threads results in a complex reflexive mediation on the nature of narrative and of texts in general.

In the novel, Llosa breaks with the narratorial anonymity prevalent in his earlier work in order to animate a basic narrator, who bears his own name and narrates the story of his own coming of age as a writer. Critics wondered as what could have motivated Llosa to change his narrative
technique so dramatically midway through his career. Some critics have
observed that he wanted to satisfy the public’s curiosity about his rather
colourful past before some unauthorized biographer broached this
intensely personal subject. Few said, he wanted to entice a wider
readership by offering a glimpse of a literary celebrity’s personal life. But
Vargas Llosa himself said that textual pressures forced him to include the
autobiographical chapters. He claims that he was searching for a story of a
realist nature which would balance the unrealistic radio soap operas. In an
interview by Susannah Hunnewell, he discusses the root cause:

I thought, why not introduce myself in the novel as a
color character? Why not use my own name, my own face, my own
biography as the realistic counterpoint of this incredible and
unrealistic story of Pedro Camacho? Why not put myself as
an anchor in reality, an autobiographical document, something
that is obviously so realistic, my own life? It was this balance
that would give this incredible world of absurd fantasies,
which is the soap opera world of Pedro Camacho, a context
profoundly rooted in reality.

This novel introduces new aspects of writing into the Peruvian’s literary
oeuvre. Throughout earlier decades, Vargas Llosa criticized popularized
fictions, but confessed that he wrote his own with *Aunt Julia and the
Scriptwriter*. 
One of the most debated aspects of his novel is the degree and accuracy of its autographical referents. The novel is so overtly autobiographical that it is impossible to separate the views and experiences of the author Vargas Llosa from those of his literary protagonist Marito. Though Llosa’s personage is highly fictionalized in the novel, Pedro Camacho is also based upon a real soap opera scriptwriter named Raul Salmon. Llosa introduces a new theoretical concept for his literature, by interspersing these two stories. It was a bit like introducing the back and front of a reality, part objective and part subjective, a true face, and other invented. Marito’s autobiographical chapters describe a developing romance with his divorced Aunt Julia, fourteen years his elder. These scenes intermix with the scripts that the Bolivian Pedro Camacho writes feverishly for the radio station where both characters work. As the reader notices that Pedro’s creative output is approaching insanity, so too does Marito’s life resembles these fictions, suggesting a complex relationship between truth and lies that is evident at many levels throughout the novel. Besides providing important insights into Vargas Llosa’s biography, the novel also represents the writer’s increasing thematic concern with distinctions between fiction and reality, ultimately resulting in a series of essays and creative works that address both the theoretical and practical implications of the truth of lies.
Beyond Vargas Llosa’s tendency to transform his lived experiences into purely fictional creations, one cannot ignore the explicit autobiographical nature of his recounting of the struggles of Marito to become a writer. As Robert Richmond Ellis notes: “Vargas Llosa undermines his own project of rhetorical concealment by intertwining a series of fictional narratives with an autobiographical account of his first marriage to his aunt” (223). Departing from his earlier depictions of writing as a challenge to the real, the novelist introduces one of the most defining concerns for his recent writing, the subtle distinctions between reality and fiction.

Vargas Llosa obviously writes the story of Pedro Camacho while penning his own romantic soap opera. And thus Marvin A. Lewis, in *From Lima to Leticia: The Peruvian Novels of Mario Vargas Llosa* (1983) says that the reader gets “a double dose of this “opium of masses” through the techniques of parody” (140). The novel includes twenty chapters of roughly equal length which break down into two narrative situations. The first, composed of the odd numbered chapters as well as the final chapter (20), focuses on the Protagonist Marito’s experiences in love and literature. The second, made up of the even numbered chapters, excluding the last, relates to a series of colourful episodes from nine soap operas. The reader has no trouble identifying the narrator of the first narrative situation as
Llosa describes himself at length and identifies himself by name. The historical period evoked is once again Lima during the late 1950s. The first narrative situation is Marito’s autographical account of the events. During this time he meets two Bolivians who greatly influence the course of his life: Aunt Julia, with whom he promptly falls in love and marries later, and Pedro Camacho, a remarkable Bolivian scriptwriter of radio soap operas who greatly influences his initial decision to become a writer. In these hectic days, Marito divides his time between his work at the radio station, simultaneously courting and eventually eloping with his aunt, and attempting to write short stories.

The novel is composed of three major voices. Vargas Llosa speaks through the novel from the position of the successful writer. Marito speaks from the perspective of the eager but immature apprentice who wants to become a writer, and Pedro Camacho, the high priest of pop fiction whose voice is heard throughout the radio serials. Marito must develop both personally and professionally in order to become a writer and enter the world of literature. He must make the transition from adolescence to manhood in matters of love. He must also make transition from apprentice to a professional writer to earn a living in Peru. He introduces himself in the very beginning as one who would like to become a writer: “I was studying at the University of San Marcos, Law, as I remember, resigned to
earning myself a living later on by practicing a liberal profession, although deep down what I really wanted was to become a writer someday” (1). In the epilogue, he states that he eventually realized his desire to become a writer: “and for better or worse I had become a writer and published several books” (393). Just as the desire to become a writer opens and closes the novel, so the woman responsible for Marito’s personal maturity i.e., Aunt Julia, is credited both at the beginning and the end of the text. Vargas Llosa dedicates the novel to Julia Urquidi Illanes: “To Julia Urquidi Illanes to whom this novel and I owe so much” (v). In the epilogue Marito acknowledges: “In that time, thanks to my persistence and her help and enthusiasm, plus a fair amount of good luck, other predictions (dreams, desires) had come true” (393).

For Marito, artistic growth comes only in conjunction with personal growth, despite others’ suggestions that personal growth must be sacrificed for artistic growth. He persists in his reckless pursuit of Julia just as he persists in his literary aspirations. Aunt Julia’s presence seems to nurture his desire to become a writer. She is an excellent listener, in whom he finds a confidante for his literary ambitions. Their conversations tend to center on their own relationship and literature. So he moves on towards attaining the definitive step toward securing the first goal, by proposing to Julia. In a series of events that combine both comedy and thriller, Marito and Julia
elope. They rent a car and escape from Lima in search of a justice of the peace who would be willing to overlook Marito’s minority and marry them. Finally the fisherman-mayor of the coastal village Grocio Prado agrees to perform the service. When the couple returns to Lima, they learnt that Julia is to be banished from the country by Marito’s father. Marito did some necessary arrangements to support his new wife instead of surrendering his father. When he can finally convince his father of his financial independence as well as the seriousness of his commitment, his father consents to the union, and Julia is permitted to return. A triumphant Marito welcomes Julia back to Lima and into the life of the aspiring writer.

The novel focuses not on readers but on writers as it narrates the activities of the aspiring writer Marito and the tireless Camacho. Vargas Llosa uses counterpoint, paradox, and satire to explore the creative process of writing and its relation to the daily lives of writers. Marito learns about the art of writing; one of the themes of the novel is this art, and the relationships among the writers give the reader a prolonged experience of the act of writing itself. Philip Swanson in *The New Novel in Latin America: Politics and Popular Culture After the Boom* (1995) affirms: “but perhaps more than a novel about writing it is a novel about a writer” (67). Young Marito occupies an especially important role, since he is not only the central character but also the narrator of the continuing story.
Vargas Llosa employs a multilevel textual effect by implying a metawriter who looks down on the activities of the young writer Marito. This metawriter is, of course, Vargas Llosa himself, who tells the story of his initial attempts to become a writer. Indeed, the reader of the novel identifies not with the position of Marito, but with the superior position of the older Vargas Llosa, who is able to observe and point out the youthful foibles of his earlier self. Marito remains focused on Aunt Julia as the object of his desire but their courtship beats similarities to the plots of Camacho’s soap operas. Moreover the interruptions and delays in the completion of Marito’s courtship mirror the instances of narrative interruptions that epitomize both the endings of Camacho’s soap opera episodes and Marito’s abortive attempts to write a successful story.

At work, Marito feels his friendship with Pedro growing but wonders if Pedro even notices. He respects him but suspects whether the feeling was mutual or not: “Pedro Camacho didn't seem to me to be capable of wasting his time, his energy on friendships or on anything else that would distract him from ‘his art’” (137). Marito notices that Camacho lives to write and write: “For him, to live was to write. Whether or not his works would endure didn’t matter in the least to him” (141). Once his scripts had been broadcast, he forgot about them. Pedro assured Marito that he didn’t have a single copy of any of his serials. His writings are
engraved upon the memory of his radio listeners than on a printed page. His way of narrating the serial is unique. Indeed Marito and Aunt Julia were surprised to notice that there wasn’t a single book in his room. He once explained to Marito that he doesn’t read, because other writers might influence his style. Marito comes to idolize the idiosyncratic Pedro, as he works with utmost seriousness. Marito’s desire to be an established writer is quickly moving to the surface of the plot, the more that he interacts with both Pedro Camacho and Aunt Julia. Since he too had ‘literary inclinations’, he decided to follow Pedro: “I should follow the Bolivian’s example and learn his tricks for winning a mass audience” (182).

The hyper productive Pedro works doggedly day and night to produce an endless stream of scripts. In doing so, he functions quite literally as a writing machine, tossing events and preoccupations from his own personal life into a stock of typical soap opera elements like murder, madness, incest, rape, etc. He spices the mix with lines from his handy book of literary quotations, then cranking out the results according to his proven formulae. Marito observes: “The scripts came pouring out of that tenacious head of his and those indefatigable hands one after the other, each of them exactly the right length, like strings of sausages out of a machine” (129). Indeed, as Genaro Jr., Camacho’s employer says, “He’s not a man – he’s an industry!” (9). Vargas Llosa suggests that writers like
Camacho succeed because they supply a product for which there is a demand.

In his 1977 prologue to a new edition of the book, Vargas Llosa says that the novel is based on a writer of radio serials whom he knew, ‘whose melodramatic stories devoured his brain for a while’, adding to this material ‘an autobiographical collage’, a fictionalized version of his own first marriage. Eleven of the work’s twenty chapters relate, in the first person, the tale of one Mario Vargas, called Marito Varguitas by almost everyone. Marito is 18, therefore, in the Peru of the mid-1950s, not old enough to have a passport or to get married without his parents’ permission. He marries his Aunt Julia because he genuinely loves her, but also because he is told he cannot, and because he is still in the grip of her first words to him: “You’ve just gotten out of high school, haven’t you?” (6). Listening to these words, he hated her instantly:

My slight run-ins with the family in those days were all due to the fact that everybody insisted on treating me as though I were still a child rather than a full-frown man of eighteen. Nothing irritated me as much as being called ‘Marito’; I had the impression that this diminutive automatically put me back in short pants. (6)
It would be unkind and unjust to say that the fictional Marito is ‘a child of eighteen’ rather than the ‘full-grown man’ he says he is, because he shows himself capable of great resolve and courage as the plot thickens and the marriage approaches, meeting massive family resistance. He never stops calling Julia, ‘Aunt Julia’. Marito’s career as a writer deals directly with a complementary problem: the reader. He discovers that his first obstacle to attain literary success depends less on literary merit than on the reaction of his readers. He uses Aunt Julia as a reader and discovers for the first time the discrepancy between the author’s perception of his literary creation and that of the reader.

Critics have repeatedly noted that this novel is essentially a novel about writing. It begins with an epigraph from the Mexican Salvador Elizondo’s *The Graphographer* (1972) on writing about writing and ends with a kind of epilogue where the mature author is now in a position to start writing the story which the reader is about to finish:

I write. I write that I am writing. Mentally I see myself writing that I am writing and I can also see myself seeing that I am writing. I remember writing and also seeing myself writing. And I see myself remembering that I see myself writing and I remember seeing myself remembering that I was writing and I write seeing myself write that I remember
having seen myself write that I saw myself writing that I was writing and that I was writing that I was writing that I was writing. (VI)

This introductory epigraph is an indication of the metafictional intentions for his novel. Subsequent narratives indicate that the novel is a doorway to a new metafictional world. ‘Metafiction’ is the literary term describing fictional writing that self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status in posing questions about the relationship between fiction and reality.

An important characteristic of Postmodern literature is the questioning the combination of subjects and genres. Gerald Guinness in *The Covers of this Book are too Far Apart* (1999) says, “Chapters that are autobiographical and chapters that are widely fictive overlap, converge, and finally become indistinguishable” (310). The main structural principle of the novel is the dualistic alternation of the stories of Aunt Julia and the scriptwriter, which is of reality and fiction. Vargas Llosa’s relationship with Julia Urquidi is documented from reality while the stories of Pedro Camacho would appear to be fiction creations. At the same time, the real-life story of the relationship of the author and his first wife becomes here a fictional version (the story of Marito and Aunt Julia) while Camacho’s unreal stories are based on reality (the story of the real author of soap
The two levels parallel and interact with each other and the supposedly real story takes on the qualities of fiction, while the apparently fictional stories begin to look more like reality. Here, reality becomes fiction and fiction becomes reality.

The merging of so-called reality and the fiction in the novel can now be examined more closely. Plotting links constantly underline the connection between the odd chapters and the even chapters dealing respectively with the life of Marito and versions of the scripts of Pedro. For example, the first chapter ends with the arrival of Pedro at the radio station and the removal of Marito’s typewriter. The second (which the reader may not yet be aware is one of Pedro’s stories) tells the tale of the discovery by Dr. Alberto de Quinteros, following his niece’s fainting at her wedding, that she is pregnant by her brother. The third begins “I saw Pedro Camacho again after the typewriter episode” (41). Initially the reader probably thinks that the word ‘episode’ refers to what happened at the wedding before it becomes clear that it refers to what happened over the typewriter. Thus the two plot levels are locked together and continue in this way until the end.

Even within the odd-numbered chapters the structural connection between Marito’s relationships to Julia and Pedro (both Bolivian) is repeatedly stressed. “I remember very well the day he spoke to me of this
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genius of the airwaves, because that very day, at lunchtime, I saw Aunt Julia for the first time” (5). From now on, the two relationships are seen to develop in counterpoint to each other in the odd-numbered chapters. Moreover, many of the elements in the soap operas are clearly taken from things the reader learns about Pedro’s own life in the sections narrated by Marito. The two levels are so intimately connected that they are somehow the same as each other. The relationship of Marito and Julia, both romantic and scandalous, is itself like a soap opera. The story of their efforts to marry, with all its repetitions and suspenseful breaks, is written virtually as if it were a serial.

Philip Swanson in his book The New Novel in Latin America: Politics and Popular Culture After the Boom (1995) asserts: “But Pedro’s stories also echo their relationship, based as they are on convention-versus-desire, scandalous love affairs, the trials and tribulations of romance and the conflict between age and youth” (64). In particular, the stories focus repeatedly on the themes of family and incest. One should note the reversal of fortunes in the novel. The novel begins with Pedro taking Marito’s typewriter and ends with Marito taking over Pedro’s job. Even the voice in the final chapter which should have been Pedro’s, is surprisingly Marito’s.

Frederic Jameson in his book Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (1991) opines that postmodern reality is radically
fragmented, discontinuous and multiple. He suggests that this new kind of reality can be found in Vargas Llosa's *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter*. The different soap operas written by Pedro Camacho are what he calls, "the very prototype of what we may call the postmodern mode of totalizing" (373). The various transgressions occurred in the novel are indeed representative of important aspects of postmodern culture. And these transgressions involve confusions not only among Pedro's soap operas, but also between the soap operas. Pedro himself displays numerous characteristics that are associated with postmodernism, like failing memory and a lack of any continuous sense of time.

Two significant things occurred in the final soap opera. First, Pedro Camacho has exposed himself more than, in any other story. Second, the condition of his memory is much worse. The chapter has almost a biographical air about it and the character Crisanto is closely comparable to Pedro. Crisanto was born to Maria Portal and Valentin Maravillas, crippled in his legs. He remains dwarflike in appearance because his legs barely grow, but his parents love their only child. Crisanto soon learns that his talent is in music and his muses are his poetry. He meets Fatima, a young orphan at the convent and loves her instantly. As he is banned from visiting the convent, he composed the most beautiful music inspired by Fatima and is known all over the country. He has no interest in the fame
and focuses his attention on finding new ways to see her. As the years pass, she becomes a nun but still shared a quiet love for Crisanto. Crisanto's music becomes popular even in the church and they agree to have a concert of his music to raise money for their foreign efforts. Many people show up to hear the composer live but an earthquake strikes and kills everyone in attendance. Through this story, Pedro provides more information regarding the boy's birth, family accomplishments and short comings through which the reader can realise that the story is partially Pedro's own. In the past, Marito made many references to Pedro's strange dwarf-like and unappealing appearance. The same words are used to describe Crisanto. Like Pedro, Crisanto had so much passion for his work he didn't care about getting paid for it. He didn't care about recording it or protecting it from plagiarism.

The conclusion can therefore be made that like Crisanto, Pedro's art stemmed from and was dedicated to someone special. It appears as the chapter begins that, Pedro's mass death scene in the previous serial was successful in offering him the clean slate he needs. With the death of all his characters, Pedro has the chance to form new ones with new storylines. In the beginning he seems to take advantage of this opportunity, but by the middle of the story everything once again goes odd. It is clear that Pedro isn't simply mixing his stories. He is losing his sanity. He brings back old
characters once again, with wrong references and even loses track of the new characters he has created.

But what is perhaps most striking about the novel within the context of various debates over postmodernism is its overt treatment of the issue of popular culture and its relationship to art. When one talks about the 'Popular' in the Latin American context, the term is often used simply to refer to cultural products enjoyed or experienced by large number of people. Vivian Schelling in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Latin American Culture* edited by John King (2004) gives a broad definition of Latin American Popular Culture:

> Popular Culture is a term used to refer to a very broad and diverse array of forms and practices such as salsa, samba, religious ritual and magic, carnivals, telenovelas (television soaps), masks, pottery, weaving, alternative theatre, radio, video and oral narrative as well as the 'whole way of life', the language, dress and political culture of subordinate classes and ethnic groups. (171)

Popular culture has served throughout Latin America as a means to display identity, as an activity to produce momentary and playful pleasure, and as a way to sing and joke. The pleasure can be enjoyed by participants and spectators; and the music and the humor become common weapons of the
Radio serials are undoubtedly the best enjoyed and widely spread means of entertainment in the 1950s of Peru. Peruvian women are more interested to listen to soap operas than reading books. Even Marito’s two little old grandparents and the cook concentrate all their attention on the radio, which was played to full volume. When he asked them what do they offer that books don’t, she explained: “It’s more lifelike, hearing the characters talk, it’s more real” (97). When he made a similar survey among his other aunts, he was surprised to know that they liked radio serials because “they were diverting and set a person to dreaming, to living things that were impossible in real life, because there were truths to be learned from them” (98).

Vargas Llosa’s concept of ‘truth of lies’ can be better understood by this. Women in 1950s in Peru strongly believed that they can dream impossible things in real life while watching soap operas and thereby learn truths from them. Aunt Julia sometimes gave Marito certain soap operas that had impressed her and he in turn gave her a rundown of his conversations with Pedro and thus, little by little, Pedro became a constituent element in their romance too.

The ‘endless’ character of a serial is typical for a special genre of television fiction: the soap opera. The novel is considered, in part, a parody of the genre of the soap opera, which is considered the most important
vehicle of popular culture consumption in Peru. Soap opera is a long standing radio genre which was ‘invented’ and developed at the end of the 1920s by American, mainly female, radio programme makers. The soap opera, which rapidly developed into one of the most popular entertainment forms on radio, was characterized by an accent on human relations, domesticity and daily life; it is home, garden and kitchen problems which are discussed and solved by the characters.

The ‘soaps’, so called, because it was mainly soap manufacturers who sponsored the programmes, built up a faithful following, especially among housewives. The soap opera was alleged to be able to provide some company for housewives living in isolation. They listened to their favourite soaps while doing the ironing, cooking or other domestic work. In *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and Melodramatic Imagination* (1985), Len Ang argues that the primary source of involvement in a soap opera is not situated in the suspense of the narrative, as in many other popular genres, but in the creation and slow consolidation of a complex fictional world. There are other characteristics which are typical for the structure of the soap opera. The fact that not just one but many main characters are involved is also an important aspect of soap operas.

An important characteristic of the soap opera, concerns the theme of the story. A soap opera follows the individual lives of the characters of a
community, but it is not interested in their whole lives. It does not reveal all their doings and all their experiences. The soap opera is selective; it tells us a lot about the different characters but it also leaves large parts of their life histories untold.

A familiar complaint leveled at soap operas is that they lack social relevance: social problems and conflicts are not dealt with an adequate length. Len Ang’s counter-attack in *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and Melodramatic Imagination* (1985) is reasonable: “But anyone expressing such a criticism overlooks the fact that leaving out or cutting out questions which are seen as important in the social reality is functional for the soap opera as genre” (9).

Soap opera generally ignores too concrete social or cultural references because it concerns itself with a completely different aspect of life. To put it more strongly, soap opera would not be able to exist without murders, legal battles, extramarital affairs or serious illness. The genre acquires its very strength from such exaggerated occurrences. In the world of soap opera the characters go through all kinds of calamities as though it were the most normal thing in life. Len Ang further says that the significance of such a plot structure is that through it, human misery is exposed in a very emphatic manner. But leaving out such things is functional for the soap opera as genre.
Even Gabriel Garcia Marquez when asked why he continues to write screenplays for soap operas, replied that he could reach many more people through this genre than he could through his novels. It is pertinent to observe, a limited number of people in Latin America could afford to purchase his novels, millions watched soap operas on a daily basis.

In the novel, Pedro Camacho's radio serials become increasingly popular in Peru; even Aunt Julia and the other women in Marito's family have become fans. Throughout Lima, the papers and reviews are raving about Pedro Camacho's work, but he remains aloof and uninterested in the praise. Marito and Pedro's characters are contrasted through the parallel between the serials and literature. When Marito asks his old grandparents as why they like soap operas more than books, they protested: “What nonsense, there was no comparison, books were culture and radio serials mere clap trap to help pass the time” (98). This comparison indicates why Pedro's character is the writer with complete confidence and an air that he is creating the true art. While Marito, the writer with true literary interest, is the character who is unseasoned, hesitant and unsuccessful.

The omnipresent soap opera, according to Lisa Shaw, Stephanie Dennison in *Pop Culture Latin America!: Media, Arts, and Lifestyle* (2005) may feature “Rural setting or deal explicitly with the plight of rural-urban migrants, and at the same time, it may also offer viewers a glimpse of a
sophisticated, bourgeois lifestyle" (227). However, its melodramatic tone can be interpreted by those on the margins of society as parodic.

The novel is one of the most striking examples of the way so many postmodernist writers use the language and images of pop culture as the stuff of literature. This trend is used by Thomas Pynchon (1937-) referring few aspects of pop culture in his second novel, *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) but it seems especially strong in Latin America, where writers like Manuel Puig (1932-1990) who made much use of popular culture in his works and Guillermo Cabrera Infante (1929-2005). Vargas Llosa, often rely heavily on pop culture as a source for their fictions. Fuentes in *On Modern Latin American Fiction* (1987) praises Vargas Llosa’s *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter* in this regard. He expresses his attitude towards pop culture, which can be taken as representative of that of many of his fellow writers as well: “I’m not afraid of popular culture, I’m not afraid of the mass media, of entertainment. I feel that this is all grist to the mill of literature, as it always has been”. (146)

A crucial element that defines soap opera is the open-ended nature of the narrative, with stories spanning several episodes. One of the key characteristics of Postmodern fiction according to Tim Woods in *Beginning Postmodernism* (1999) is “an open-ended play with formal devices” (85). The best example of this sort of open-ended nature of the
narrative can be drawn from the story of Dr. Alberto Quinteros, the first of Pedro Camacho's soap operas. From the opening lines, Pedro paints a picture for the reader as well as his audience, saying, "On one of those sunny spring mornings in Lima when the geraniums are an even brighter red, the roses more fragrant, and the bougainvilleas curlier as they awaken..." (17). Television hasn't made its way to Peru then, so Pedro has to encourage his readers to envision first the environment the character is in. He also accomplishes the imagery by using Lima as the backdrop of the story. His target audience would be familiar with the location, the seasons, even the flowers.

Alberto Quinteros is an established and well known doctor who is good to his family and his friends. He is excited about his niece Elianita's wedding with Red Antunez that afternoon. At the gym he meets his nephew Richard, Elianita's brother and quickly picks up on a negative vibe from his nephew, but he was unable to figure out what makes him bother. Everyone is impressed by the wedding ceremony and reception. Elianita suddenly faints while dancing. Alberto rushes her to a private room, and when they are alone, he discovers her problem. She is pregnant and wore the tight dress in order to hide her condition. Alberto sees Red and decides to talk to him about the precautions Elianita should take during the pregnancy. Alberto quickly regrets his words when he realizes that Red
didn't know about the pregnancy and the baby most likely, wasn't his. Alberto leaves Red to process the information and goes back to the reception, reassuring the guests that Elianita is fine. Through Richard's slurred conversation, Alberto is able to catch Richard's secret. He is furious that his sister is getting married when he is the one who really loves her. Alberto realizes that Elianita's unborn child belongs to her own brother. The serial gives the reader a glimpse into Pedro's talent and his style of writing. Like Pedro's listeners, the reader is also left in suspense to find out how the story of Alberto Quinteros and his family will end. Alberto was really worried as to what would happen to Elianita and Red. As the music little by little intoxicated him, a whirlwind of “unanswered questions” (40) circled around in his mind as well as the reader's:

Would Red Antunez desert his reckless, foolhardy spouse that very night? Might he have done so already? Or would he say nothing, and giving proof of what might be either exceptional nobility or exceptional stupidity, stay with that deceitful girl whom he had so persistently pursued? (40).

These open-ended questions seem to suggest that this was purely a postmodernist writing. Though the first soap opera ended in a sort of suspense, the theme of 'incest' dominated throughout.
Vargas Llosa utilizes Lituma, the most recurrent character in his narrative, for another radio play. Sergeant Lituma, a man in his fifties, had been working out of the Fourth Commissariat of El Callao for a year. He starts his route on a cold night in the crime infested part of his jurisdiction. Officer, Shorty Soldevilla, is supposed to be on duty in the area. On his way, Lituma hears a sound in an abandoned warehouse. He thinks he is pursuing a common thief, but discovers a black man, naked, cold and confused. The man is covered in scars and doesn't speak English. Lituma has no choice but to take him back to the Commissariat. The officers there are shocked at the man's appearance and they put him in a cell until someone can decide what to do with him.

Lituma meets up with Pedralbes, an old friend, and they assess that the black man must have stowed away on a ship from Africa. Their theory would explain his lack of clothing, his scars and his inability to speak a recognizable language. That night Lituma receives orders delivered by Lieutenant Jamie Concha, regarding the black man, to kill him in cold blood. Lituma brings Arevalo with him and he is angry with Lituma for agreeing with the task in the first place. Arevalo tries to convince Lituma, to let the man escape and think up some sort of story to explain. Lituma had drawn his revolver and raised his tone: "Are you dare to suggest to me that I disobey my superior's orders and then lie to them on top of it"? (88)
But several seconds went by and he didn’t shoot. The soap opera again ends in suspense: “Would he do so? Would he obey? Would the shoot ring out? How would this tragedy of El Callao end”? (89) Again, the reader is also placed in the role of listener, sharing the suspense and curiosity of the radio audience in Lima tuning into Camacho’s serials. It is more surprising to note that almost all the soap operas of Camacho end with such open-ended questions suggesting that this novel is postmodernist in narration with such suspense in the ending.

In the final chapter in the novel, much to the surprise of the reader, Vargas Llosa wraps up the things nicely at the end, by substituting Mario’s episode in place of a tenth soap opera. Though it is not a soap opera as Marito has described the happenings of his post marital life, it ends with such sort of open-ended questions and suspense, on the lines of real soap opera. Marito has divorced Aunt Julia after eight years of marriage and is married to his cousin Patricia. Meanwhile, he has become a successful writer, while damaged Camacho has become a lowly messenger. This ending might not be pleasing to some readers who expect another soap opera from Camacho. An autobiographical segment appears in place of a soap opera episode which might confuse the reader.

“The title of the chapter ‘The marriage to Aunt Julia,’ is highly misleading” (73) observes M. Keith Booker in his book Vargas Llosa.
Among the Postmodernists (1994), since Julia disappears after the first few sentences and the epilogue in fact deals with the events that occur well after she and Marito have divorced. As a postmodern novel, it didn’t conclude with a neatly tied-up ending.

An important characteristic of any postmodern literary work tends not to conclude with the neatly tied-up ending. At the book’s conclusion, Marito returns home late and Patricia gave an unfriendly look on her face. Here, the soap opera suspense is that, the next time when Marito returns in such a condition, would cousin Patricia scratch his eyes out or break a plate over his head?, as she is a girl with lots of spirit, capable of doing what she’s promised. Though the last supposed soap opera chapter ends with Marito’s narration, it ends on a note of soap opera-style suspense, with the suggestion that the next time the narrator returns home in such a condition, the repercussions might be serious indeed. This parodies the questions which end Camacho’s soap operas.

The plots of the serials are extravagant to start with – dealing with incest in high society, the execution of an illegal immigrant, the self-mutilation of a rapist, various murders- and become catastrophic. By the end of the novel- which adds an epilogue to Pedro’s rise and fall as a writer – all the episodes have turned to disaster, with every character dying in an earthquake or a combination of shooting and panic at a soccer match.
These stories mirror Camacho's own crack-up. He has done himself by working too hard, and cannot remember the plots of his own stories, or which names go with which characters. In his stories, people keep changing the jobs and biographies, and he has even resurrected a few corpses by mistake, giving a role in one episode to a character he had kicked off in previous one. It seems that Pedro is having a breakdown, the effect of exhaustion.

Postmodern literature is characterized by heavy reliance on techniques like fragmentation, paradox, and questionable narrators. Pedro’s soap operas take a dark turn as he begins to kill off all of his existing characters so he can escape the confusion and make a fresh start. His soap operas typically end with a series of questions about what might happen next. The narrated episodes from Camacho’s soap operas become more and more bizarre as Pedro’s mind begins to deteriorate in the latter stages of the book, but in general these episodes resemble those of real soap operas. As a result, these episodes should appeal to precisely the kind of reader who would enjoy the products of this lowly genre.

Latin American popular artists have created images recognized throughout their nations and have devoted themselves to create beauty in everyday life. In this novel, Peruvian upper-class notions of family decorum are brilliantly and even movingly described by Vargas Llosa and
they seem to bear as close a relation to the author’s personal life as a young man. (For example, the young protagonist’s name is Mario Vargas, he studies Law at San Marcos University although he wants to be a writer; in later years he goes to live in Paris, Barcelona and London; after he divorces Julia, he marries a cousin called Patricia.) The author-protagonist is therefore in a sense the scriptwriter of the title and hence in the description of his coming of age as man and creative artist, the book follows the familiar pattern of the bildungsroman.

But there is another scriptwriter in the novel Pedro Camacho, who is one of Vargas Llosa’s most brilliant creations. Soon Camacho’s genius for melodrama makes him the most popular writer for radio in Peru and Panamericana climbs to top ratings. The structure of the book reflects the division of interest between the two scriptwriters. Alternate chapters describe young Marito’s courtship of Aunt Julia, and recount in novelistic form, the extravagant substance of Camacho’s soap opera plots. In other words, we move from the real-life Lima of the protagonist’s life in the first chapter to Camacho’s dream-world Lima in the next, then back to real-life Lima in the third, and so on.

What gives this alternation a particular charm is the way in which the foibles of the real-life Pedro become woven into the episodes he writes. For example, he detests Argentina (the reader eventually discovers that this
is because his Argentinean wife walked out on him). Again, all the heroes of Pedro’s soap operas are “in the flower of their age” which happens to be fifty, Pedro’s own age. And then his fictional heroines are always mysterious elusive women who are also artists, until at the very end one discovers that these are the attributes of Pedro’s own wife. All this is enormous fun and even Pedro’s gradual descent into madness, when he muddles the names of all his characters and finally kills them off in a series of disasters, has a tragic-comic effect which is both hilarious and pathetic.

Young Marito’s deepest wish is to become a “serious” writer, whereas the other scriptwriter of the title is merely a compiler of cheap fantasies. Nevertheless Pedro takes his vocation of writing with a devotion and seriousness that makes a deep impression on Marito. Gerald Guinness in *The Covers of this Book are too Far Apart* (1999) juxtaposes Mario and Marito saying:

The young “Mario Vargas” tries to write realistic stories based on stories he has heard, whereas Pedro writes highly imaginative stories based largely on the realities of his own life; in time the mature Vargas Llosa uses both the stories and the realities of his life to write an imaginative story which is largely about the act of writing in itself (284).
The novel is about literary apprenticeship. In fact, this is Llosa’s first encounter into the theme of literary mentoring. The plot of the novel is about how Marito becomes the Mario Vargas Llosa who is the author of the novel. Marito, who at the beginning of the narrative confesses to having a deep curiosity about the kinds of writers who perpetrate radio soap operas, becomes an author of serious literature through the mediation of Pedro. But at the end of the novel, after the scriptwriter’s breakdown, Marito and Pedro have exchanged roles. When final and total chaos rains down on Camacho’s fictional world, Genaro’s, the owners of Radio Central, following a public demand, cancels his show and call on Marito to take over. Marito agrees to attempt the assemblage of the broken puzzle left behind by Camacho. The Radio stations make ready for the crowning of the New King. Towards the end, Marito is the one who writes, whereas Pedro scrapes together a living, raiding the streets and police stations for sensational scraps of news.

The chief formal arrangement of the novel according to Michael Wood in The Cambridge Companion to Mario Vargas Llosa edited by Efrain Kristal and John King (2012) is:

A series of parallel events, ostensibly opposed in tone and content and implication, that finally collapse into each other,
fully revealing the weakness of a distinction that was always on the verge of breaking down. (56)

Vargas Llosa adopts a melodramatic tone in these stories that reveal the idiosyncrasies and obsessions of the scriptwriter. In each, there is a sympathetic fifty-year-old character ("in the prime of life"), which is Pedro’s age. In each there is also a pejorative reference to the Argentineans whom Pedro constantly and obsessively criticizes. These chapters are not Pedro’s scripts; they are narrations whose main plots coincide with those that are attributed to Pedro in Marito’s episodes. Vargas Llosa has explained that he neither listened to nor studied radio plays to come up with Pedro’s stories. Instead he utilized sketches and drafts of unpublished work. Some of the sources of Pedro’s radio plays could also be, as Marie-Madeleine Gladieu has pointed out in *Mario Vargas Llosa* (1989) “anecdotes taken from the scandalous Peruvian press of the fifties; in particular, articles from the newspaper *La Cronica*” (35). Jean O’Bryan-Knight in the chapter “Breaking with Narratorial Anonymity” in his book *The Story of the Storyteller* (1995) considers the novel as, “a melodramatic tale of forbidden love, spiced with sex (the slightly premature celebration of the wedding night), suspense (will the couple manage to wed?), and the threat of violence (will Marito’s father shoot his disobedient son?)” (25).
The most melodramatic of the even-numbered chapters is Elianita, who is to marry Red Antunez. The story is narrated in the third person, but the perspective is that of a perceptive and discreet gentleman: Doctor Alberto Quinteros, Eliana’s uncle, who discovers both that his niece fainted because she is pregnant and that her lover is not her fiancée but her brother, with whom she is having an incestuous relationship. Llosa utilizes Lituma, the most recurrent character in his narrative, for another radio play. He is a policeman who receives orders to kill a black man in the port of Callao, near Lima. Lituma knows that the order is immoral and is repulsed by it but feels reluctant to disobey his superiors.

The main characters of the even chapters 6-16 are all fanatics. Gumercindo Tello, the Jehovah’s witness who attempts to castrate himself in order to demonstrate his innocence in response to accusations of rape; Don Federico Telez Unzategui, a zealously dedicated exterminator of rats in Peru who is motivated by the death of his sister, a baby devoured by rodents in the Peruvian jungle; Lucho Abril Marroquin, the man who loses all his moral scruples after psychoanalytic treatment relieves his feelings of guilt about a death he caused in an automobile accident; Ezequiel Delfín, the timid murderer of landlord and would-be father-in-law; and Seferino Huanca Leyva, the orphan who becomes a crazy priest. The first five even-numbered chapters are independent, open ended stories. Beginning with
chapter 12, the characters of one story appear in another, proper names become confused within a story, plots of different radio series become entangled, and dead characters come back to life. When these inconsistencies first occur, the listening public believes they are the brilliant and intentional tricks of Pedro, but this is not the case. They reflect the growing and uncontrollable insanity of the scriptwriter who will suffer a nervous breakdown and wind up in a mental hospital.

If the climax of the late radio serials is total extinction, the highpoint of Marito’s story is the comic quest, in village after village, searching for a mayor who will marry a man who is only eighteen years old and does not have his parents’ permission. Besides few hindrances, the ceremony concludes. In his dreams, Marito begins to suspect he is in one of Pedro’s radio serials and later uses the medium as a metaphor to criticize his mother’s sentimentality: “Mama dearest, don’t begin another of your radio serials”. (353)

The two stories do not simply alternate; they are twinned. Marito meets Aunt Julia on the same day he first hears Pedro. Aunt Julia herself thinks that their romance, even before it really resembles a romance, is “A perfect subject for one of Pedro’s serials’, because it involves ‘the love affair of a baby and an old lady who’s also more or less your aunt’” (90). And because Aunt Julia recounts the plots of some of the radio serials to
Marito, Pedro gradually becomes part of their affair: “Little by little, Pedro Camacho became a constituent element in our romance” (91). Sometime later, Aunt Julia and Marito actually meets Camacho in his miserable abode, and comes to know his great secret: “When he can, he likes to dress up as the characters he is writing about: a judge, a doctor, an old lady, a sailor, a cardinal”. (155)

The implication is that writing, any kind of writing is a vocation or nothing at all. “For him, to live was to write” (130), Marito says of Pedro. It is not what he writes that matters; it is that he writes, even with his extravagant plots, strings of clichés, bundles of social prejudices and terrible solemnity about his own work. Pedro says, “We artists don’t create out of a desire for fame and glory, but rather out of love of humanity” (50). He is nevertheless the model of the writer, a man who sacrifices everything to his art. Trying to explain his affection and admiration for Pedro, Marito argues that Pedro is the only full-time fiction writer who manages to live from what he writes, and lives in order to write. But Marito is not aware the fiction Pedro writes for his radio soap operas is not really literature, no matter how popular his plots may be. He indicts all novelists who spend most of their time at their real jobs, and unlike Pedro, sees literature as a sort of secondary, ornamental occupation. In a sort of defense towards Pedro, he asks his reader: “Why should those pompous characters who
used literature as ornament or pretext be considered writers more genuine than Camacho, a man who lived exclusively to write”? (235) Marito’s ambition is to be a real writer, not a half-writer, and Pedro is the only real writer he knows. Motivated and inspired by Pedro, Marito further says:

Every day, I realized that the only thing I wanted to be was to be a writer, and every time, I also saw that the only way to become a writer was to give my body and soul to literature. I did not want to be a half-time writer, a writer by little bits, but rather, a true writer, the Bolivian writer of soap operas (235).

Of course, Marito does not end up in anything like Pedro’s madness and distress, and he does not write sentimental melodramas.

‘Love inspires Art’ is an important theme in this respect. In the novel, Marito and Pedro Camacho are considered as artists. Their lives and work are shaped by love. Marito’s life is outlined in greater detail than Pedro’s. Marito has a deep passion for writing, but he is discouraged every time he receives a negative criticism about his work. He describes writing as an art form, until he meets Aunt Julia. It is Aunt Julia who becomes Marito's reason for growing up. Aunt Julia criticizes his work but he reads every short story he comes up with. It is only after proposing her, Marito found his art and he shapes it into a career. While Marito grows, Pedro shrinks. Their middle ground is their love of writing. It is Pedro's love for
the art of writing that drives him to work incessantly; Whereas, Marito's love for Aunt Julia blossoms his talent. Pedro has to remain far from 'flesh and blood' in order to create his stories. Marito is surprised to know the fact that, it is the love of a woman that apparently drove Pedro to leave Bolivia and later drove him insane. Pedro's love and muse is the art itself, and his complete dedication to that love makes him an artistic genius. When Pedro is distracted from his work by flesh and blood issues, he loses his mind completely; his art is the only thing he knows how to love unconditionally.

Another important theme in this respect is that of sanity and insanity. Madness is a theme of a number of Pedro's stories and, from the very first one, the presentation of Richard as a positive model because he is, among other things, 'sano' (33) suggests that health and mental health are norms which would be undermined by deviation. In the main narrative, Pedro is the neurotic while Marito leads a 'normal' life, and Pedro goes mad and is destroyed while Marito evolves into a 'sano' and successful author. Pedro's narratives, which are supposedly simplistic, become ludicrously complex, but Marito's narrative, which is more reflexive and which one might expect to be more psychologically and socially elaborate, is in fact, presented with stylistic simplicity and structural clarity. The author is in control (sane). The scriptwriter is not (insane).
The idea of distance between author and scriptwriter is crucial because it ties the 'scriptwriter' to the novel's dualistic title, Aunt Julia. An important factor linking the two poles is age. Both the figures linked in the title are opposed to Marito, in that they are older than him. However, in the final chapter, both figures from the title have lost their identity towards the end: Julia has been divorced and Pedro has lost his stardom. On the other hand, the young lover and literary apprentice Marito, has become the older famous author Vargas Llosa. He has displaced the two other older figures. This is also a triumph of the serious over the popular because Julia is not only linked to Pedro through nationality, but also through her identification with popular culture. Julia is a great admirer of Pedro and becomes a fan of Pedro's soap operas. Marito likes serious literature, writes 'literary' stories, hates popular Latin American movies and does not listen to radio soap operas. He regularly disapproves Julia for her tastes. Of course, there are number of scenes where Marito's intellectual or artistic posturing is gently mocked by Julia's common sense or his own assumption of romantic gestures. It is known that the novel did in fact upset both Julia Urquidi Illanes and Raul Salmon, as they both published alternative versions.

Whatever the facts of the matter, the account of the author's coming to maturity and his relationship with the two title figures is presented in the text as a kind of winning of a victory. Again the question of age is
important. If Aunt Julia is to be seen always in connection to Pedro then Marito’s relationship to her must be seen as representative of the process of literary maturation. In Marito’s first meeting with Julia, she treats him like a child and uses the diminutive address ‘Marito’ which makes him feel like a school boy in short pants. Their subsequent relationship becomes something of a battle of the ages, as well as the sexes, with each trying for control and Marito coming out on top.

At Lucho’s fiftieth birthday celebration, Marito asserts his manhood by kissing Julia and telling the woman who previously spoke to him “dictatorially” (49) that: “I forbid you to call me Marito ever again – I’m not a little kid any more” (61). After the kiss, “Aunt Julia began to joke with Uncle Lucho about being fifty” (61), the triumph of youth thus being underscored. But in the latter stages it is Marito who is in control, standing up for himself, taking charge and protecting Julia and finally organizing the wedding. Yet, after they are married, the final chapter does not show us their relationship or tell us much about it. Instead a mature, successful author is seen. He is on top again as he married his younger cousin Patricia. Philip Swanson in The new novel in Latin America: Politics of popular culture after the boom (1995) concludes saying, “notions of distance and control are thus central to the authoring process dramatized in the novel”. (71)
Pedro’s soap operas are surreal, extreme and often darkly hilarious. He is undoubtedly a talented writer, with an eye for the absurdities and flaws of human life, but after churning out script after script for the soap operas, barely pausing for breath and working long, long days, his capacity is depleted, his mind ravaged, and the later episodes become increasingly bizarre and incomprehensible, with characters switching names and identities. Vargas Llosa emphasizes that the story of Pedro as told through the soap opera episodes is the main intended focus of the novel. In an interview to BBC Club, Vargas Llosa says, “most novels are autobiographical… all of the novels I’ve written use raw materials from my life… (including in this case) memories of Lima in the 1950s…but what is invented in the book is much more important that what are memories”. So the story of Pedro was where Llosa began, but became worried about it turning into a ‘purely imaginary exercise’. It is because of this reason; he included the tale of Marito and Julia as a contrast. Marito and Julia’s attempts to secure a life together become ever more extravagant, leading the author to comment that novels are ‘not appropriate vehicles to tell truths, a novel should tell lies as if they were truths’.

Vargas Llosa has always been particularly interested in the technical problems of fictive presentation and by now persistent readers of his work would have acquired some expertise in deciphering these often perplexing
fictional structures. He succeeds in juxtaposing the comic and serious to render a critical evaluation of Peruvian reality. Through this novel, Vargas Llosa successfully introduced new aspects of writing into the Peruvian's literary oeuvre by balancing himself as an anchor in reality which gave the soap opera world of Pedro Camacho, a context profoundly rooted in reality.