CHAPTER - I
Latin American Boom

The two key terms in any discussion of modern Latin American fiction are those of the ‘Boom’ and the ‘new novel’. The Boom is basically the sudden explosion of literary activity which occurred amongst Latin American writers in the 1960s when there was a marked increase in the production and availability of innovative and experimental novels. The new novel recognizes the fact that this type of fiction was being produced well before the Boom and has continued to be produced well after it. Defining new novel is not so easy. Of course, the most important development in the whole of Latin American literature in terms of recognition was, the growth of the new novel in 1940s and 1950s, culminating in the success of Boom in the 1960s. Speaking about the New Novel and the Boom, Philip Swanson puts it rightly in his *Latin American Fiction: A Short Introduction* (2005): “The New Novel may have been an evolving trend since the 1940s or earlier, but the Boom was really (as the word ‘boom’ implies) a finite burst of commercial activity” (84). The chronology of the Latin American Boom is quite complex and the most useful way to understand it is, as the climax of the New Narrative. Whatever may be the claims, Philip Swanson in his edited book *Landmarks in Modern Latin-American Fiction* (1990) remarks: “The new
novel can be seen as a reaction against and rejection of the assumptions and forms of traditional realism.” (1)

This chapter confines itself in elucidating the very genesis of the Boom era and the major pre-Boom writers, who paved the way for the Boom, while focusing on the ‘Big Four’ of Latin American Boom: Carlos Fuentes (1928-2012), Julio Cortazar (1914-1984), Gabriel Garcia Marquez (1927- ) and Mario Vargas Llosa (1936- ). It is this Latin American literary backdrop of the Boom that serves better in understanding and interpreting the literary oeuvre of Vargas Llosa, who was the youngest and most rebellious among the Big Four.

Latin American literary scope confines itself to the national literatures of South and Central America, Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and parts of the West Indies. When Latin American colonies began to declare independence from Europe, there arose a desire among many writers to create a literature that accurately reflected the lives and concerns of Latin Americans. If one were to probe the literary output of the Latin American literature in the beginnings, there were no equivalents to the Chilean Pablo Neruda (1904-1973), the Peruvian Cesar Vallejo (1892-1938), or Chilean Gabriela Mistral (1889-1957) until the 1940s. Inspite of the existence of a group of distinguished regionalist novelists, modern Latin America literature was thought to be a literature of poets. Neruda and Mistral, with
international recognition and living in countries like Spain, France and the United States, drew most of the public attention. When the novelists who brought about what has come to be known as the ‘Boom’ of the Latin American novel, changed this radically in the 1960s. It was because prose fiction caught up with the poetry, thereby incorporating Modernist narrative techniques. With the exception of Brazilian literature, which is written primarily in Portuguese, nearly all Latin American literature is in Spain, and is often designated by critics as “Spanish American” or “Hispanic-American” literature. Magical realism, or the introduction of supernatural or uncanny elements into the otherwise realistic narrative, also became a common feature in the works of many Latin American writers during the second half of the twentieth century. Since the 1940s and the “Boom” period of the 1960s, Latin American literature has become increasingly available to a worldwide audience.

Latin America’s best-known international literature came into being during the 1960s in a movement known as the Boom. The ‘Boom’ is a term for the explosive growth in the popularity of Latin American fiction that took place during the 1960s. The term ‘Boom’ has been widely criticized as it is an elusive concept. Critics say that it is sometimes used in literary history to define the intrinsic qualities of a number of Latin American works, while at times; it is discussed mainly as a phenomenon
embedded in the literary marketplace. The Boom was not restricted to a local or even Latin American readership, but signified as an international profile and a worldwide reputation. Novels and short story collections from various Latin American countries were published in large numbers. They were writings of exceptional quality, characterized by highly innovative and experimental forms. This production is considered the beginning of modern Latin American literature with strong international appeal. In general terms, the Boom, according to Ronald Christ in the foreword to Jose Donoso's *The Boom in Spanish American Literature: A Personal History* (1972) refers:

To a 'sudden flowering of writers' in the sixties, who won a greater deal of attention because they began, almost at once, to be translated into foreign languages and to put Latin America – with some kind of unity – on the international literary map for the first time (99).

But few assert that 'Boom' was not a sudden development or a sudden flowering of writers as the word would suggest, but a gradual one that began tentatively in the thirties and forties, accelerated in the fifties, and came to full bloom in the sixties. Few stereotypes regarding who and who not to be included in the Boom and which works to be considered as Boom novels is essential in understanding the very evolution and culmination of this period.
A number of big novels by established writers appeared in this period, as well as significant novels by new figures. But the Boom is concentrated around four central figures, the so-called Big Four: Carlos Fuentes, Julio Cortazar, Garcia Marquez and Vargas Llosa. Before the first shock waves of the Boom were felt, several other writers changed the shape of Latin American literature during 1940s. Apart from the Big Four, critics have also linked to this literary phenomenon- Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986), Miguel Angel Asturias (1899-1974), Alejo Carpentier (1904-1980), Jose Maria Arguedas (1911-1969), Juan Rulfo (1917-1986), Jose Donoso (1924-1996), and Guillermo Cabrera Infante (1929-2005), whose contribution placed Latin America on the world map.

An extremely influential figure of the Boom generation, though not a Boom writer is Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986). He was an Argentine short-story writer, essayist, poet and translator, born in Buenos Aires. He was Booms’ major precursor who attained worldwide prestige in the 1940s for his remarkably original short fiction. He was the genius of his era. His short fiction was renowned for the rich and fantastical imagery. By the mid-1930s, he began to explore existential questions. He focused on universal themes, apart dealing with the themes from Argentine folklore and history. His most famous books, *Fictions* (1944) and *The Aleph* (1949), which are considered as introductions to his work, are compilations
of short stories interconnected by common themes such as dreams, labyrinths, libraries, mirrors, animals, fictional writers, philosophy, religion and God. He was the master of short story of his period (1899-1986). The main idea of his collection of short stories is, as the original title *Ficciones* suggests: fiction. Here fiction is to be understood in the wider sense of the word to encompass cultural constructs such as society, mythology, metaphysics, and religion. A recurring theme of this work according to Stephen Hart in *A Companion to Latin American Literature* (1999) is "the way in which mankind constructs fictions which envelop the individual like a labyrinth and in which he gets lost" (176). His works have contributed to the fantasy and magical realism genres. His international fame was consolidated in the 1960s, aided by the Latin American Boom and the success of García Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967). Speaking of his influence on Latin American letters, J. M. Coetzee (1940 - ) in *Stranger Shores: Literary Essays, 1986-1999* (2001) said of him: "He, more than anyone, renovated the language of fiction and thus opened the way to a remarkable generation of Spanish American novelists" (140). In the 1950s, Borges was more highly regarded and perhaps more widely read in France than in Argentina. His influence on his own and the succeeding generation of Spanish American writers was immense. The Boom writers, in particular, García Marquez, Carlos Fuentes, Julio Cortazar, stressed the importance of his work. His work gained ground
immensely during the 1960s when Latin American writers became all the rage in Europe and the United States. He was the single most important influence on the Boom writers. Even if some writers of the Boom dislike Borges, they respected his skills and acquired his respect for the disciplined use of language.

Another Latin American who paved the way for the Boom of the sixties was Miguel Angel Asturias (1899-1974), a Nobel Prize-winning Guatemalan poet, novelist, playwright, journalist and diplomat, whose landmark text *The President* (1946) became Latin America’s most notable dictator novel. He further contributed to writing the novel of Latin America in *Men of Maize* (1949), which linguistically fuses the past and present, the magical and the real. It is usually considered to be his masterpiece. It retells the history of Guatemala, as well as that of Asturias’s own life, in the mold of Mayan myths. In 1967, Asturias was the first Latin American novelist to be awarded the Nobel Prize. His first book, *Legends of Guatemala* (1930), is a collection of nine stories that explore Mayan myths. Critic Gerald Martin considers this as ‘The first major anthropological contribution to Spanish American literature’. All his best-known works appeared in print before the Boom in Latin America. His literary experiments had a decisive influence on Latin American Boom novelists of the 1960s. They learned from him how to write engaged
novels that were not realistic. He had a very profound linguistic style that he employed to convey his literary vision. All his works manifest his deep and abiding interest in the belief and worldview of the indigenous peoples of Central America. His early work is generally held to introduce magical realism as a literary mode. The revolutionary aspect of Surrealism is found in his final novel, *The Eyes of the Interred* (1960). Asturias helped establish Latin American literature's contribution to mainstream Western culture. He was the one who drew attention to the importance of indigenous cultures, especially those of his native Guatemala. While in Paris, was associated with the Surrealist movement, and he is credited with introducing many features of modernist style into Latin American letters. In this way, he was an important precursor of the Latin American Boom.

Another writer who greatly influenced Latin American literature during its famous Boom period was a Cuban novelist, essayist, and musicologist, Alejo Carpentier (1904-1980). He accomplished notable achievements through his groundbreaking fiction. His exploration of the dictator theme and experiments placed him among the most influential authors of that period. He was widely known for his theory of magical realism and he was among the first practitioners of 'magical realism' to explore the fantastic quality of Latin American history and culture. One of the most influential works written during the so-called 'Latin American
Boom’ was *Explosion in a Cathedral* (1962). It deals with the impact of the French Revolution on the Caribbean. His major works are characterized by a passionate interest in the New World. He is best known for his novels: *Praised Be the Lord!* (1933), *The Kingdom of this World* (1949), *The Harp and the Shadow* (1978) etc. In these works, in common with other writers of the Boom period, Carpentier struggles to define the multifaceted reality of Latin America. He is probably best known for his concept “the marvelous in the real,” which he discusses in his essays and novels showing how the New World is one in which reality is perceived on a whole new series of levels, defying the European imagination.

One of the most visible writers of the Boom period was the Peruvian novelist and poet, Jose Maria Arguedas (1911-1969), who was also remembered as one of the most notable figures of 20th century Peruvian literature. All his works reflect the tensions that underlie Peruvian society. His deep understanding of Peru’s indigenous people has established his place among Latin America’s most respected writers. His first novel *Blood Festival* (1941), deals with the theme that would interest him for the rest of his career: the clash between Western “civilization” and the indigenous, “traditional” way of life. He continued to explore this theme in his next two books *Deep Rivers* (1958) and *All the Races* (1964). His later fiction include; *Everyone’s Blood* (1964) and *The Fox from the Mountains and the
Fox from the Coast (1971). The undisputed quality of his works puts him solidly in the top rank of Latin American writers, in parallel to the more visible writers of the Boom.

Another significant forerunner of the Boom was Juan Rulfo (1917-1986), a Mexican writer, screenwriter and one of Latin America's most esteemed authors. He was also one of the notable initiators of Magical Realism. His reputation rests on Pedro Paramo (1955), and The Burning Plain (1953), a collection of short stories. Pedro Paramo (1955) was considered to be one of the best examples of the pre-Boom experimental novel. Set in a Mexican village, the novel opens with the narrator searching for his father, Pedro Paramo. It gradually emerges that all the inhabitants of the village are dead. He brought hidden aspects of his own life to his writings. One of his most read and admired short stories, Tell Them Not to Kill Me! (1951) has a close relationship to a family tragedy. It bears a close relationship with the killing of his own father, when Rulfo was a child. And the main theme in his work is the search for his father. Garcia Marquez acknowledged at one stage that Pedro Paramo opened his way to the composition of his masterpiece, One Hundred Years of Solitude. Amit Thakkar in The fiction of Juan Rulfo: Irony, Revolution and Postcolonialism (2012), observes: “Anybody who has read Rulfo once will certainly be encouraged to reread his work having acquired some
awareness of its historical and geographical context" (5). His own work is often seen as a further step towards the modern novel of the Boom.

A Chilean writer whose remarkable stories and novels contributed greatly to the Latin American Boom was, Jose Donoso (1924-1996). The term 'Boom' was coined in his 1972 essay *Historia personal del "boom" (The Boom in Spanish American Literature: A Personal History)*. His first novel *Coronation* (1957), won him the William Faulkner Foundation Prize for Latin American Literature in 1962. His best known works include the novels *The Place Without Limits* (1965) and *The Obscene Bird of Night* (1970). *The Obscene Bird of Night* is formally difficult and challenging for the reader. It is the novel that marked the turning point. His works deal with a number of themes, including sexuality, the duplicity of identity, psychology, and a sense of dark humor. His prose can never be read simplistically on one level alone. It demands multiple readings and interpretation. For him, style and technique are as important as his thematic concerns. Donoso also provides a clear description of the Boom in his *The Boom in Spanish American Literature: A Personal History*, (1972). In it, he describes how the Boom suddenly internationalized Latin American novelists. His name is frequently linked with those of other Latin American writers.
Most important among the precursor’s of the Boom was, a Cuban novelist, essayist, and critic, Guillermo Cabrera Infante (1929-2005). He is in every sense, a multilingual and multicultural author. He has distinguished himself with daring and innovative novels, essays, short stories written in Spanish and English. His work won major literary awards in France, Italy, and Spain. He was one the leading contemporary writers of Latin America. He captured readers’ imagination with his *Three Trapped Tigers* (1967) that brought him international recognition. It evokes the world of Havana’s night-life and popular culture of the late 1950s. This fabulous recreation of Havana at night revolves around the obsessive themes of his writing – nostalgia for the city, music, cinema and joyful games with language. It offers a broad painting of Cuban life and manners during the 1950s, with satirical wit which gives his work its great power. It became a milestone in the booming Latin American writing of the 1960s. Critics agree that it was a key work of the Latin American Boom and a landmark in Cuban literature. Earlier recognition of his work came with his *Rites of Passage* (1960), a volume of short stories set in pre-revolutionary Cuba. His other works include: *View of Dawn in the Tropics* (1974), *Infante’s Inferno* (1979), *My Cuba* (1992) etc. Although he is considered a part of Latin American Boom generation of writers, he disdained the label. Of course, the list of those Latin Americans who paved the way for the Boom of the sixties is a very long one, but one should
acknowledge the literary contribution of all these precursors of the Boom whose technical and thematic innovations certainly had bearing on the new narrative of the sixties.

One stereotype implies that the Boom phenomenon was really an illusion, and that its principal protagonists were no better or more interesting than many other writers, less glamorous or less able to use the new science of public relations and advertising. But Gerald Martin's gives counter-attack in “The ‘Boom’ of Spanish-American fiction and the 1960s Revolutions” in *A Companion to Latin American Literature and Culture* (2008) edited by Sara Castro-Klaren, to the assumption that Boom was a mere illusion:

This seems implausible to argue against the achievement and virtues, *in their time*, of the “big four” — Fuentes, Vargas Llosa, Cortazar, and Garcia Marquez — is like arguing that Proust, Joyce, Woolf, Kafka and Faulkner are just names pulled arbitrarily out of a critical hat or else canonized according to some theological agenda. (478)

Another stereotype assumes that the ‘Boom’ was an isolated phenomenon. The truth is that, the word itself, however irritating to many critics, was well chosen: The Boom was precisely the moment when a larger number of interesting writers both good and great, were suddenly in play, and more
readers were around to buy their books and appreciate them. The Boom, then, was a grand finale, the culmination of what may best be called the 'Spanish American New Novel', which stretched from the 1940s to the 1970s. Its origins lay in the avant-garde movements of the 1920s and particularly the works of Minguel Angel Ansturias, and Jorge Luis Borges, and Alejo Carpentier – all writers who wrote their first significant books in the 1920s or early 1930s, yet still wrote fiction in the 1960s. The reason why critics often overlook this continuity is because they have traditionally seen the 1920s and the 1930s mainly in terms of the regionalist novel – which had its own boom at that time – and not in terms of the narrators whose origins lie in the avant-garde. Most important of all, Latin America's literature was the only literature in which the world responded fully to the last great utopian moment in western history.

During the 1960s, Latin American or Spanish American literature quite suddenly came to occupy the fore-front of the international stage. Reading Latin America fiction became fashionable among the elite cultural sections of Europe and US. Several factors contributed to this increased prominence of writers from Latin America. Technically innovative novels are all authored by men.

Critics generally agree that three main impulses were responsible for the phenomenon of the Boom: the political circumstances of the period,
especially the Cuban Revolution; the unprecedented quality of writing occurring at the time; and the key role played by the rise of publishing houses, both in Latin America and in Spain.

The first major impulse responsible for the Boom phenomenon can be drawn from the climate responsible for the Cuban Revolution. Major changes occurred between 1950-1975 in which history and literature were approached in terms of interpretation and writing. This phenomenon had produced a change in the self perception of Spanish American novelists. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s military authoritarian regimes ruled in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Peru and many others. 60s and 70s were the decades of political turmoil all over Latin America. This climate formed the background for the work of the writers of the Latin American Boom. The Cuban Revolution in 1959 is understood as the source of inspiration. The greater attention paid to Spanish American novelists and their international success in the 1960s, has influenced all the writers and readers in that period. The triumph of Cuban Revolution has attracted the attention of the world to concentrate on the socio, political and cultural situation of Latin America. The Cuban revolution brought together writers who in the past had often worked in isolation and in ignorance. But few say that it has created division among the Boom writers. Jose Donoso in *The Boom in Spanish American Literature: A Personal History* (1972)
places the Boom in relation to the international events surrounding the Cuban Revolution: “the support that the Spanish-American “new” writers lent to Castro at the beginning of his leadership in the early sixties served to unify them, but the gradual disenchantment of some intellectuals eventually divided them” (78). But it is the Cuban Revolution, which formed the backdrop for the consolidation of Boom phenomenon.

The second impulse responsible for the diffusion of Boom phenomenon was undoubtedly the quality in the works produced and the relatively high increase in the sales. It was not until the 1960s that the term best-seller was used in conjunction with Latin American literature due to both the developments in the publishing world and to the emergence of writers who would come to dominate the Latin American literary scene. Angel Rama notes the changes in the publishing world in his essay: The 'Boom' in Perspective. While in the 1940s and 1950s, it was usual for a publisher to issue 3,000 copies of a novel, by the late 1960s novels by the Big Four could expect to sell at least 20,000 copies. Talking about the emergence of Boom writers, Deborah A. Shaw in Encyclopedia of Latin American Literature (1997), edited by Verity Smith, observes:

The high quality of the literature produced in this period along with the new openings for Latin American writers in the book market, led to the emergence of Latin American literary
superstars, professional writers who became household names in educated circles. (115)

Latin American writers, once their reputations were established and translations began to appear, were able to take advantage of developments in the book market. The growth of the literate populations, increased distributing power and lower prices of paperbacks, all combined to guarantee high sales for the few novelists who were able to break into the international market. Well-known Latin American novelists have increased their sales in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, probably as their novels have become more accessible and readable. The success of García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* increased higher sale of his previous works than they had when first released. The novel's success also stimulated interest in other contemporary Spanish American writers, and there were reprinting of the works of Julio Cortázar and others. It also brought works that had been previously published, many of which had gone unnoticed — back into circulation, to a much broader reading public. The 1970s also saw the emergence of the Argentine writer Manuel Puig, whose highly readable explorations of gender and class oppression, sexuality and popular culture have allowed his novels to join the ranks of the international best-sellers. Writers such as Jorge Luis Borges, Juan Carlos Onetti (1909-1994), Juan José Arreola (1918-2001), Minguel Angel
Asturias and 'Big Four', have been internationally recognized for their contributions to world literatures.

The key role played by the publishing houses, especially Seix Barral was important in shaping and promoting the Boom. Although in the 1950s, Latin American literature already had a long-standing tradition; it was during that time that it began to have international visibility and recognition. Spanish publishers, especially Seix Barral, played a major role in the diffusion of the Boom. Linked with this was the prestigious 'Premio Biblioteca Breve', which was eventually granted to the authors linked to the Boom. The Boom authors made significant efforts to be recognized beyond national borders. They resisted the idea of having a reputation only at a national level. The books of such writers as Carlos Fuentes and Mario Vargas Llosa are widely distributed and translated into other major European and Asian languages. In Textual Confrontations: Comparative Readings in Latin American Literature (1987), Alfred J. Mac Adam writes, "It was the result of generations of writers toiling to convince a reading public – a small, but in general well-educated reading public – that it should take literature “made in Latin America” seriously and not read only European or North American writing" (12).

Indeed, the Boom marked an intense interest in Latin American literature. It should be characterized as the first large incorporation of a
group of authors to “mainstream” Western literature. Gregory Rabassa (1922- ) is significant as a translator and was a key to this internationalization process. He translated works by the ‘Big Four’ of the Boom. The translation activity – into many languages was an important element for its diffusion, as well as a sign of recognition. “It is evident that it was through translation, through the accessibility of the Latin American works to an international readership, that the Boom constituted itself as such and came to occupy a place in the world’s literary canon” (97), stresses, María Constanza Guzmán in Gregory Rabassa's Latin American Literature: A Translator's Visible Legacy (2011).

Latin American writers were interested in documenting their national histories, placing emphasis on significant events that shaped cultural or social identities. Latin American history attained worldwide importance and became an integral factor in the understanding of the complex Latin American social systems. This is one of the most important contributions of Boom literature. Portrayal of Latin American society became a psychological approach to the exploration of the human psyche. The writers of the Boom displayed an interest in Latin American societies. Depiction of complex Latin American political and economic structures became their goal. The Latin American landscape becomes a symbol of the characters’ personal or psychological struggles as in the literary setting of
the American writer William Faulkner, under whose influence the Boom writers flourished. The creation of mythical settings associated with Latin American cultures is among the most important characteristics of the Boom. Latin American settings became symbols that explored the development of the culture from sociopolitical viewpoints.

Unlike their previous, realism-based generation, Boom writers explored Latin American reality by means of experimental narrative forms. They were interested in breaking away from the traditional Latin American Literary scene. This break with traditional aesthetics introduced several radical elements. They are the fantastic and the magical realism movements, which are the most essential elements of Latin American literature. Latin American Boom writers depicted national historical events by means of narrative devices that used the fantastic. In a departure from realistic techniques, their approach was both experimental and symbolic. Rafael Ocasio thoroughly investigates the different approaches to Fantastic narration in his book *Literature of Latin America* (2004). According to him, “Fantastic narration is often defined as alteration of the physical world, particularly of the laws that regulate and control world events from natural and rational perspectives” (92). He gives an example: an event like a person’s flying, from the scientific point of view is physically impossible. In a fantastic narration, this event is plausible and symbolic.
This is what he says, the core of the fantastic: the development of irrational events that take place within settings that are both imaginary and highly metaphorical. An extraordinary approach to the fantastic narration in Latin American literature is magical realism. Latin American writers of the Boom produced a style known today as Latin America's contribution to the post vanguard, an international movement heavily involved in literary experimentation. Magical realism came into vogue after the publication of Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in 1966.

Chilean Jose Donoso establishes three major moments in the Boom. According to him, Carlos Fuentes would represent the first true internationalization of Latin American writing. It was he who promoted his own cause as well as that of other writers, when he travelled as cultural promoter of the new narrative. He has also proven himself as a keen commentator of the literary political scenes. The second major moment of the Boom according to Donoso occurred in 1962, when Vargas Llosa published *The Time of the Hero* which is often considered the novel that catalyzed the new narrative revolution. The arrival of Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1966) dates the third moment of the Boom and it is the book more than any other that has placed Latin American writing into the mainstream. He has been credited with making magical realism, one of the most readily recognizable features of modern Latin
American Fiction. A tribute to the Boom author’s importance is the fact that forty years later they continue to write best-sellers, and they are often cited as literary mentors by up-and-coming international writers. Although the production of the Boom writers is large and explores diverse subject matter and literary themes, the works so classified share common essential characteristics. Rafael Ocasio in Literature of Latin America (2004) observes: “The boom writers display a strong interest in breaking away from narrative devices associated with highly traditional literature, especially a realistic approach, produced throughout most of the twentieth century” (89). The Boom writers fully explored Latin American reality and history. They were fascinated by unrecorded native history from the point of view of the common people. They were not interested in official history. The major appeal of the boom writers was their documentation of native Latin American culture, particularly depiction of life in the countryside. As large cities became important technological centers in most Latin American countries, elements of rural life became literary themes.

Critics have widely discussed the fact that the Boom novels were not unique exclusively in a literary sense, and that their relevance was also valued in terms of their international reception. There was no literary manifesto among the writers of the Boom, but it is noticeable that their novels tended to be formally difficult and challenging for the readers.
Failure takes many forms. Many Latin American novels manifest the feeling that Latin American history in general has failed because there has been no progress. Latin American history is full of events, but they have led nowhere. Critics often say that, in contemporary Latin American fiction, the characters always fail even to communicate with one another.

Boom works tend not to focus on social and local issues, but rather on universal themes. Many of the Boom novels were rebellious from the general point of view of Latin American culture. Authors crossed traditional boundaries, experimented with language, and often mixed different styles of writing in their works. The Boom really put Latin American literature on the global map. Though inevitably, the Boom novel threw a new generation of Latin American writers into the international limelight, the movement had its detractors. Minguel Angel Asturias accused the Boom novels of being ‘mere advertising products’. However, one views the Boom novelists, as the first generation of Spanish American writers who were able to live from the labour of their pens. Whatever may be the claims, the Boom novelists are the ones who brought Latin American literature from the backwaters to the center-stage of the literary world. Garcia Marquez neatly summed up in 1967 when he declared:

The group is writing one great novel. We’re writing the first great novel of Latin American man. Fuentes is showing one
Susmitha 34

side of the new Mexican bourgeoisie; Vargas Llosa, social aspects of Peru, Cortazar likewise, and so on. What’s interesting to me is that we’re writing several novels, but the outcome, I hope, will be a total vision of Latin America....It’s the first attempt to integrate this world. (5)

Few assume that this unique conjectural phenomenon, the Boom, stretched from Carlos Fuentes’s *Where the Air is Clear* (1958) to his *Terra Nostra* (1975). But when most critics think about the era, they tend to concentrate on the 1960s alone and the brief but intense period from Vargas Llosa’s *The Time of the Hero* (1962), which received special attention by winning a major prize in Barcelona, and Fuentes’s *The Death of Artemio Cruz* (1962) through Cortazar’s *Hopscotch* (1963) to Garcia Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967). There is no agreement as to which was the inaugural novel of the Boom. Everyone recognizes that the sixties was the Boom’s crucial decade. So when does the boom actually begin and end? In his book *Latin American Fiction: A Short Introduction* (2005), Phillip Swanson suggests that one simple way of dating it is via the Biblioteca Breve Prize:

The award of the Prize in 1962 to the young Peruvian Mario Vargas Llosa (1936- ) for his astounding novel *The Time of the Hero*, - the first time a non-Spaniard had ever won the
prize is often seen as the beginning of the Boom. Carlos Barral’s Split from Seix Barral and the suspension of the prize in 1970 is sometimes seen as the end of the Boom: the novel which would have won it that year, *The Obscene Bird of Night* by Chile’s Jose Donoso (1924-96) has been seen as the phenomenon’s endpoint. (61)

But there are several sorts of controversies as which novel claims to mark the beginning and end of the boom. Questions and argument arose about who should be included in the boom. Who is and who is not to be included in the Boom has been widely debated and never settled. All these arguments could be endless. But by and large, the Boom is a phenomenon of the 1960s and of Spanish America.

Indeed, a significant number of novels were published during the 1960s, which are not normally included in the generic title of Boom novel. Some of these were written by authors who had established their reputation in earlier generations, others are by writers whose work was not caught up in the mass publication that authors such as Fuentes, Cortazar, Garcia Marquez and Vargas Llosa has enjoyed. While the names of many other writers may be added to the list, the following may not be omitted and hence the specific confinement here is towards the Big Four of Latin American Boom, whose works which are unmistakably associated with the
Boom: *Hopscotch* (1963) by Julio Cortazar, *The Death of Artemio Cruz* (1962) by Carlos Fuentes, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) by Garcia Marquez, and *The Time of the Hero* (1966) by Vargas Llosa. All have strong thematic connections with Latin American cultures or sociopolitical institutions.

The most cosmopolitan of all the Boom writers is Carlos Fuentes, a multifaceted intellectual who was among the most important Mexican political activists. His literary production is extensive, covering diverse genres: short stories, novels, plays, screenplays, and essays on literary criticism and sociopolitical issues. Fuentes, the most active of the Big Four, established himself as a major writer through the excellence and variety of four works in a time span of five years: *Where the Air is Clear* (1958), *The Good Conscience* (1961), *Aura* (1961), *The Death of Artemio Cruz* (1962), and *Terra Nostra* (1975).

Active in Mexico's complicated political world, he has been a diplomat (ambassador to France), and a polemical commentator on national and international events. He has been intensively concerned with the issue of Mexican identity both in his fiction and in his essays. He was influenced by Octavio Paz's *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950), a groundbreaking study of Mexican identity and thought. French thinkers like Michel Foucault (1926-1984) and Jacques Derrida (1930-2004)
enthralled him at some point. Like Vargas Llosa and Garcia Marquez, he was an early supporter of the Cuban Revolution, learned much from Cuban Alejo Carpentier (1904-1980), whose work left an imprint on Fuentes's best-known novel, *The Death of Artemio Cruz* (1962). Winner of the Principede Asturias Prize in 1994, this novel is supposed to be one of the first Boom novels. It demonstrates the main characteristics of the genre. Its narrative concerns the life story of Artemio Cruz, born on 9th April 1889, an individual who fought in and survived the Mexican Revolution, got involved in the reconstruction programme afterwards, married Catalina, the daughter of Don Gamaliel Bernal, a wealthy landowner, and died on 10th April 1959, surrounded by friends and relatives. The novel is essentially a testimony of his life and is meant also to be representative of the history of Mexico. It is also specifically a novel about the genesis of Mexican identity. It is told backwards, from Artemio's deathbed to his birth. The story of Cruz's life is then filled in by flashbacks as the novel moves between past and present.

Though he published other novels like *A Change of Skin* (1967), *Holy Place* (1967) and *Birthday* (1969), it is his massive *Terra Nostra* (1975) that was his most ambitious project in the 1970s and perhaps of his entire career. He was an important critic of Mexican and Latin American cultures, with many publications on historical, social, and anthropological
topics. He was Mexico’s best-known spokesperson and the international media often call on his expertise in Mexican issues and in immigration trends until his death in 2012. Fuentes was a major force in bringing the Boom into the spotlight in the United States. He was a talented publicist for his own work and his English was nearly perfect as well as much better than that of his fellow Boom writers at that time. He is the ideal person to lead the way for his fellow writers. He worked with his U.S. translators who took care to ensure that his novels were translated soon after they appeared in Spanish. Gerald Martin in *The Boom of Spanish American Fiction* (2008) edited by Sara Castro-Klaren, views him as the hinge which made the entire movement swing: “He would be the leading promoter and propagandist of the new wave and the one who put all the other participants in touch with one another, and in several cases, helped them with agents, translators, and even writing facilities” (480). It was he who introduced the work of authors like Cortazar, and Marquez, and Llosa, to a worldwide audience, creating numerous opportunities to them.

Among the Big Four of Latin American Boom, the one who is known as one of the founders of the Latin American Boom was Julio Cortazar. Cortazar’s *Hopscotch* (1963) is the work that denoted the Boom of the Latin American novel. He influenced an entire generation of Spanish-speaking readers and writers in the Americas and Europe. He was
an Argentine novelist, short story writer, and essayist. He has been labeled as “modern master of the short story”. He took strong political stands and expressed them through literature and essays. He is known for his novels *The Winners* (1960), *Hopscotch* (1963), *62: A Model Kit* (1968), and *A Manual for Manuel* (1973). More than Borges, Cortazar was drawn by instances of the fantastic and uncanny. His characters tend to be young people, who face amazing situations. Written in an episodic, snapshot manner, *Hopscotch* was an instant hit and best seller, whose translation into English by Gregory Rabassa won the National Book Award in 1966. It is considered a classic narrative experiment. As its title indicates, *Hopscotch* is like a game, a playful work made up of brief chapters, often consisting of newspaper articles. A few consists of quotations from other writers. The expendable chapters furnish details about the main plot, which is ultimately very traditional. It involves Horacio’s quest for Lucia, known as La Maga, his lover, a strange woman he loves and who represents truth. Perhaps what *Hopscotch* proposes is that, playfulness and humor are essential to interpret the most pressing issues of human condition. That being the case, the novel deserves a very important place in literary history.

Most Latin American novelists are in some way dissatisfied with their respective societies. The most extreme case of dissatisfaction is that
of Julio Cortazar. The characters in his novels search for open doors, which will lead them to the other side. But Cortazar’s quest ends in failure as his characters never reach the other side. Even the novels of Fuentes are populated with Mexicans who, having longed to put their youthful ideals into practice, and having hectically rejected the corruption of their elders, ends up mimicking it, themselves corrupt and defeated. For that matter, D.P. Gallagher in *Modern Latin American Literature* (1973) says, “Most contemporary Latin American writing is indeed about failure of some kind or another failure to materialize a glimpsed ideal”. (90)

The most internationally renowned of the Boom writers is Garcia Marquez, who achieved significant critical acclaim and widespread commercial success, mostly for introducing magical realism to the literary world. Among the novelists, he is the most prominent author to emerge out of Latin America in the 20th century. Considered as Latin America’s most prominent fiction writer, Garcia Marquez produces works representative of magical realism. Like other writers of the Boom, he is a multifaceted intellectual, a novelist, short story writer, essayist, and scriptwriter. He is well known as a political commentator on current conditions in his native Colombia. He is a figure of international importance. His books appear on best-sellers lists in Spanish-speaking countries in the United States. Life in
a remote town with many colorful characters and unusual living arrangements provided inspiration for his early short stories.

The era of Macondo had begun when his novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was published in 1967. Of all contemporary Latin American novels, none has captured the public imagination more than *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. It has sold hundreds of thousands of copies in Latin America and Spain, and many more in numerous translations. The main reason for the book's success may be that it can be read on many levels. Extracts had been appearing in magazines all over Latin America. Critical reviews by Carlos Fuentes were extremely positive. Fuentes had written several advance reviews that the novel was a masterpiece and Latin America's "Bible". And early in 1967, Vargas Llosa in a chivalrous fashion, had declared that the novel was another glorious version of *Amadis*:

Had this ever happened before in the history of world Literature? Had any book been considered a classic before it was even published? Had any timeless classic ever been an immediate bestseller and turned its writer overnight into a celebrity? (501)
In his study of the Boom and 1960s Revolutions, Gerald Martin in *A Companion to Latin American Literature and Culture* (2008) edited by Sarah Castro-Klaren rightly puts it:

Now that there was a Garcia Marquez, there could really be a Boom, now there could be anything. This man was magic. His book was magic, his name was magic: Gabo, as he now became known, was a Warhol-era dream and not just for 15 minutes. (486)

The novel became an instant best seller with thousands of copies sold every week. Marquez had created perhaps the first literary work recognized as a masterpiece in all Latin American countries. This was also the peak of the Boom period. Nearly all his works explore a remote, imaginary town called Macondo; the region where Garcia Marquez was brought up. The richly charted town of Macondo is his fictional world, his contribution to Latin American literature. He created the literary setting of Macondo, which reflects social, economic, and political problems and the way of life in an isolated village. Yet the Macondo, whose hundred years of solitary history is recorded triumphantly in the novel, had to be built, brick by brick, in its creator’s imagination.

*One Hundred Years of Solitude* depicts the story of a family the Buendias, whose members have various social and economic functions in
the small town of Macondo. They are products of several historical periods; the title points to one hundred years in the lives of five generations of male Buendias. The colorful characters and a complex plot make the novel a timeless classic with international appeal. Speaking of his contribution to narrative techniques, Rafael Ocasio in *Literature of Latin America* (2004) says, “Macondo’s ambivalent atmosphere, where real and unreal events seem to coexist, is Garcia Marquez’s impressive contribution to new experimental narrative techniques in Latin America” (130). His extensive literary production is extraordinary because of its superb literary quality and because of its exploration of diverse characters and literary motifs. In his *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (1981), he experimented with the narrative techniques of the detective genre. In the novel *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1985), he offers an unusual love story, based loosely on his parents’ idealized romantic courtship against the wishes of his mother’s parents. The Colombian landscape is central to an understanding of his characters’ often peculiar behavior. His popular appeal is his ability to present uncanny events as normal – or at least possible. His worldwide reputation as a ‘bestselling writer’ continues. It is evident upon his 2002 publication of *Living to Tell the Tale* (2002), the first volume of his autobiography, which sold nearly 500,000 copies in Latin America and Spain within forty-eight hours of its release. His international reputation
reached a peak in 1982 when he received the Nobel Prize in literature. He thus becomes an important part of the Latin American Boom.

But the youngest and the most individually rebellious among the Big Four of Latin American Boom is Jorge Mario Pedro Vargas Llosa (1936-), a Peruvian-Spanish writer, critic and literary giant in the Spanish speaking world. Some critics consider him to have had a larger international impact and worldwide audience than any other writer of the Latin American Boom. He is perhaps the best known of the Boom writers, for both his literary and political careers. What links Vargas Llosa to the Boom is his technical virtuosity, the innovative ways he finds to tell his stories. Among the Big Four of the Boom, Vargas Llosa, however, is kept to the last, since his work differs from the other three as he seeks more to express reality in its complexity, via the modernization of the techniques of realism.

Vargas Llosa is a master of dialogue and shifting perspective, whose vast literary output include historical novels, political thrillers, murder mysteries, humorous works and detective stories. His writings frequently carry political, spiritual, and offer controversial critiques of the racial, class, and economic hierarchy in contemporary Latin America. His novels have been translated into numerous languages, marking his international critical success. At home and abroad his works have received critical
Vargas Llosa was one of the first Latin American writers who successfully wrote about his own society. He went beyond the literary achievements of the Indigenous writers who had dominated the literary scene since the 1920s. According to Vargas Llosa, the Latin American novel was primitive until the first decades of the twentieth century because, imitating the European novel, it confused description with art. In his estimation, in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, no Spanish American novelist wrote a single work of literary merit, portraying reality-faithful or unfaithful – that was convincing. It is true to some extent that none among the glittering galaxy of Spanish-American writers is more expansive or articulate about his own work than Vargas Llosa. He has considered himself a committed writer whose duty is to point out societal inequities. His fiction combines an analysis of Latin American history with his own life experiences and those of Peruvians in general.

His literary production is an interpretation of Peruvian reality. His prose fiction in particular is an interpretation of problems inherent in the society of Peru. As a realist writer, he expresses concerns regarding militarism, the inner workings of society, the class structure, the process of
urbanization, and the political system, which are within the realm of his literary scope.

He is the master of modernist narrative techniques. Though he mentions Faulkner (1897-1962) as a key influence on his literary production, his writing methods basically involve the use of raw materials that he will modify in the creative process. Unlike Garcia Marquez, he does not dazzle his reader with power of a wild imagination. Instead, he persuades his readers from the very first line of any of his narratives, that they are being told a story of considerable human interest. He projects many realistic details into his novels. One of his main sources of inspiration is undoubtedly his own experience as a native Peruvian. As a youth he attended Leoncio Prado military school that provides the main setting for *The Time of the Hero*. His journeys to the Peruvian jungle helped him to create some of the key places and characters of *The Green House*. The dictatorship of Odria and his experience as a student in San Marcos University forms the basis for *Conversation in the Cathedral*. His own first marriage with Julia Urquidi, provides a fictionalized version of *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter*.

In the majority of his novels, Vargas Llosa employs the latest technical innovations of the new Latin American Narrative, such as flashbacks, interior monologs, fragmented time sequences and breaks in
the narrative structure. It is true as Sara Castro Klaren in her article "Desire, the City and the Dogs of Paradise", in Miguel Angel Zapata’s edited book, *Mario Vargas Llosa and the Persistence of Memory* (2006), remarks: “Vargas Llosa has taught his readers to accept fragmentation, inversion and chaos as the prevailing socio-historical arrangement of things". (29)

Despite Llosa’s interest in structural innovation, he is also known for the power of the story telling. Indeed, many of his works are severely critical of Peruvian society and illustrate the author’s concern for the harsh social realities of his home country. The main theme of Llosa’s narrative fiction in the 1960s is the brutality of a corrupt, unjust, hypocritical, and frivolous society. With his early novels, Vargas Llosa became an immediate sensation for his masterful depiction of the effects of political corruption on human aspirations. These novels were critically acclaimed and commercially successful. Aspects of Peruvian historical, political, and social reality form the backbone of these works. It is Peru, from city to jungle, which is the subject matter of his early novels. They highlight a society plagued by decay.

In his later novels, Vargas Llosa continues to highlight the failings of contemporary society. His most successful novels in Peru are those which treat the Peruvian middle class and their environment. The public is
more comfortable when it reads literature reflecting its own experiences. For example, *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter* has been very popular because the middle class reader can identify cultural points of contact associated with the Peruvian milieu, which are not overtly critical of Peru. On the other hand, *The Time of the Hero* was denounced for being scandalous when it first appeared.

Peruvians and Latin Americans across the political spectrum cheered in 2010 when Vargas Llosa was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, only the sixth Latin American writer to be so honored and the first in 20 years, since Mexico’s Octavio Paz (1914-1998) in 1990. The Nobel committee recognized Vargas Llosa “for his cartography of structures of power and his trenchant images of the individual’s resistance, revolt and defeat.” He has been praised for his unblemished examination of hypocrisy, most often training an eye on Peruvian society and politics. Vargas Llosa’s oeuvre covers enormous territory, from his first novel – *The Time of the Hero* (1962) to his recent novel *The Dream of the Celt* (2010). He had the fortune of publishing his first novels during the 1960s, precisely, a moment when the international reading public began to take notice of Latin America.

Vargas Llosa was born on March 28, 1936, in Arequipa in southern Peru. He was the only son of Ernesto Vargas Maldonado and Dora Llosa
Ureta, who separated a few months before his birth and he was taken by his mother to Bolivia. Vargas Llosa’s maternal grandfather obtained a diplomatic post in the Peruvian coastal city of Piura and the entire family returned to Peru. Despite the separation of his parents, Vargas Llosa would remember his early years as happy ones. Later in 1946, at the age of ten, he moved to Lima and met his father for the first time. A year later, his parents re-established their relationship, and they moved the family to Lima.

His mother always encouraged Vargas Llosa, as it became clear that he wanted to be a writer. But his father was alarmed at Llosa’s desire to become a writer; and to break him of his literary dreams, he decided to enroll him in the Leoncio Prado, a Peruvian Government Military boarding school, which he attended from 1950-52. The two years that Vargas Llosa spent as a cadet were difficult ones and he was exposed to a brutal reality. In his last year of the high school, he had discovered that the country had severe social problems. In his article *A Passion for Peru* (1983) to *The New York Times*, he recollects: “I wanted to be identified with the poor and to be part of a revolution that would bring justice to Peru”. The succession of many styles of government with varying degrees of success reiterates the fact that Peru is a difficult country to govern because of a number of environmental, political, biological, and cultural factors. These
constraints and their impact on the human condition became the subject matter of the literature of Llosa. In 1952, he withdrew from the military academy and finished his studies in Piura, where he worked for the local newspaper, *La Industria*.

In 1955, at the age of 19, he shocked his family by courting and marrying Julia Urquidi, the sister of his uncle’s wife, ten years older to him. However, their marriage lasted only a few more years, ending in a divorce in 1964. A year later, he married his first cousin, Patricia Llosa, with whom he had three children: Alvaro Vargas Llosa, Gonzalo, and Morgana. From a creative standpoint, however, it would be the unsettling experiences of his youth in Piura and Lima that would provide much of the raw material for his early writings.

In 1959, Vargas Llosa moved to Paris and, until 1974 he lived in France, London and Spain. It was during this absence from his home country that he established himself as one of Latin America’s finest authors. Llosa commenced writing at an important moment for Latin American literature. His initial contributions to the development of the Latin American narrative were found primarily in his role as a technician. In 1959, he published his first collection of short fiction, *Los Jefes (The Leaders)*, which won him ‘The Leopoldo Alas literary prize’ in Spain and signaled the beginning of a long and productive publication career for him.
After the first edition in Spanish, Vargas Llosa added one more story to the subsequent editions. Together, six stories are concerned with adolescence, machismo, and violence - themes that reappear more fully developed in his later novels. In fact, the reader comes to view violence as an integral part of Peruvian society.

It was the release of his first novel, *The Time of the Hero* (1962) that would catapult Vargas Llosa onto the literary scene. The novel, a harsh critique of contemporary Peruvian society, provoked serious official reaction in Peru. The plot is based on Vargas Llosa’s own experiences at Leoncio Prado Military Academy. Written in a complex and experimental style, it won immediate praise from literary critics. It won him the Seix Barral prize in Barcelona in 1962, opening the doors of Europe to Spanish American narrators.

Under huge reader expectation and peer pressure, Vargas Llosa had begun the initial drafts for his second novel *The Green House* (1966), which for many critics, his grandest achievement. During the year 1964, he continued writing reviews and articles on Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), Victor Hugo (1802-1885), Hemingway (1899-1961), and Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986). The same year he made a second trip to the Amazon jungle to carry out further research for the novel. This introduction to the exotic jungle opened his eyes to an entirely new Peru he
never imagined. His reputation as one of Latin America’s leading writers was solidified with the publication of *The Green House* in 1966, which is an examination of both rural and urban aspects of Peruvian existence. In it, he explores the theme of prostitution. This novel was published when he was still in his twenties.

The book met with an enthusiastic critical reception and garnered enough prestigious awards to place him among the leading figures of the Latin American Boom. Almost immediately after publication, it was awarded three important prizes—Peru awarded it the Premio Nacional de la Novela, Premio de la Critica Espanola, and the $22,000 Venezuelan Romulo Gallegos award for the best novel written in Spanish during the previous five years, the highest honour bestowed on a writer in Latin America. Thus, *The Time of the Hero* and *The Green House* are probably the most optimistic novels that he ever wrote. Gerald Martin in *The Cambridge Companion to Mario Vargas Llosa* (2012), edited by Efrain Kristal and John King, observes: “The world they portray is grim, but some social progress is shown to be possible and the author criticizes society because he sincerely wants change and is prepared to work for it”.

His third novel, *Conversation in the Cathedral* (1969), is arguably the greatest novel about Peru ever written. In 1953, during the government
of Manuel Odria (1897-1974), Vargas Llosa enrolled in the University of San Marcos, Lima, to study law and literature. For him, Odria’s dictatorship left an indelible mark on his generation. He participated in clandestine student political meetings to protest the Odria’s regime. As a newspaper reporter, he investigated crime cases that put him in direct contact with Lima’s corrupt Mafia underworld of crime and prostitution, which forms the basis of *Conversation in the Cathedral*. Specifically the novel attacks the dictatorial government of Manuel Odria, by showing how a dictatorship controls and destroys lives. The novel can be considered as the culmination of his first phase of writing as well as his personal anguish for Peru.

In *Great World Writers: Twentieth Century, Volume I* (2004), Patrick M. O'Neil observes:

In his first three novels in particular, Llosa set out to tell interesting stories that would be enhanced by the complex form in which they were presented. For example, the author avoided traditional omniscient narrators, preferring instead a combination of multiple voices often heard in a rapidly shifting narrative that jumps both spatially and chronologically. (1157)
In this context, Vargas Llosa’s novels often require the active participation of the reader, who must patiently unravel the intricate web that the author presents. His novels of sixties primarily seek an answer to the question posed at the beginning of Conversation in the Cathedral: “At what precise moment has Peru fucked itself up?” (3). As Efrain Kristal in The Cambridge Companion to the Latin American Novel (2005), argues pertinently: “His literary works were informed by a view that Peruvian society was too corrupt to be reformed. He fashioned a literary world where social respectability is a mask for corruption”. (73)

His achievements in Captain Pantoja and the Special Service (1973) and Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter (1977) are all the more remarkable. The 100,000 first-edition copies of Captain Pantoja and the Special Service itself is a good indication of the commercial success of this substantially different but still typical novel. In it, Vargas Llosa ridicules the military. The novel is a critical portrayal of distorted social values. Humour, one of the elements absent to a large extent in Vargas Llosa’s earlier novels, is one of the basic ingredients in this novel. Militarism is the focus of the novel which offers an in-depth look at army functions, from an ironical perspective. The purpose of this novel was to stimulate the military officers to solve long standing social problems. In a 1999 prologue to Captain Pantoja and the Special Service, Vargas Llosa says that the
novel is based ‘on a fact’, a real event during his trips to the Amazons. It is an extraordinarily accomplished and skilful novel, full of technical invention and variation. Vargas Llosa juxtaposes a combination of styles – oral and written, everyday and literary, slang and official language – and demonstrates how effectively to re-create this stratified and fragmented language system novelistically.

Vargas Llosa’s fifth novel, *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter* (1977) combines a fictional account of a period in his own life, with a picture of Lima in the 1950s. It provides a satirical look at Peruvian radio soap operas, and also introduces new aspects of writing into his literary oeuvre. Popular culture and its diffusion is one of the major concerns of the novel. Readers who were associated with Vargas Llosa’s writing strictly, openly disappointed with his novels of the 1970s as they were less demanding than those of the 1960s.

His later novels include: *The War of the End of the World* (1981), a historical novel, which interprets a Brazilian religious conflict that represents a radical change from his previous literary perspective; *The Real Life of Alejandro Mayta* (1984) and *Death in the Andes* (1993) which are literary explorations of political violence in revolutionary contexts; *Who Killed Palomino Molero* (1986), a murder mystery; *The Storyteller* (1987), which thematizes the Westernization of indigenous peoples through

Vargas Llosa was busy in the area of literary criticism too. Two of his most important publications are *Gabriel Garcia Marquez: History of a Deicide* (1971) and *The Never ending Orgy: Flaubert and Madame Bovary* (1975). He views *Madame Bovary* as the first modern novel in terms of narrative technique. His study on Garcia Marquez, which is an exhaustive 667-page analysis, is still one of the best source books on that writer. These studies are valuable to the public because they provide insight into how Llosa views himself as a writer. In her book, *Understanding Mario Vargas Llosa* (1990), Sara Castro-Klaren examines the chief themes of his entire fictional world: “Violence in an endless complex of modulations, hatred, alienation, perversion, corruption, betrayal, lying, treason, deceit, injustice, murder, and machismo”. (21)
For Vargas Llosa, the Peruvian historical context is more important than the literary tradition. The Peruvian context reveals characters from all walks of life engaged in social, political, psychological, and military conflicts. Political groups, the oligarchy and the military are also criticized and blamed for the lack of progress. Indeed, one of Vargas Llosa’s principal literary concerns is how institutions impact upon individual destinies. He also attempts to expose the indecencies of his country. One critic has aptly pointed out that, Vargas Llosa’s early novels are profoundly discontented visions of Peru. D.P. Gallagher in *Modern Latin American Literature* (1973) translates and quotes Vargas Llosa’s ideas of a novelist’s task:

> Novelists who speak well of their country should be distrusted: patriotism, which is a fruitful virtue in soldiers and in bureaucrats, is usually a poor one in literature. Literature in general and the novel in particular are expressions of discontent. Their social usefulness lies principally in the fact that they remind people that the world is always wrong, that life should *always change*. (122)

The entire strategy of his art seems to be directed at fulfillment of this aim, so that his fiction not only attempts to tell the truth about Peru, but attempts also to find its way to the proper formal structure and language to
tell it. He sees literature not as an entertainment but as an instrument of change.

For him, a novel, like life, is a journey with unexpected twists and turns; and the novelist is both a traveler and an explorer. On several occasions he has indicated that, before writing a single sentence of a novel, he has already sketched out an itinerary for his characters, but he is always willing to allow the original plan to change, as his creative process unfolds. He wants to feel surprised by the paths they may ultimately take. Minor characters sometimes become protagonists, while some that appear to be central, lose their original significance in the process of writing and rewriting.

He is interested in what he calls ‘the truth of the lies’ of fiction, the ways in which great writers create alternative fictional worlds in which the fiction becomes more persuasive than reality itself. For example, in his novel *The Feast of the Goat*, Llosa treats historical events with literary license to enhance the fiction in one hand and to convey his own opinions on the other. It is a novel that seeks to embody deeper ‘truths’. This is what Llosa refers to as ‘the truth of lies’. In his first collection of essays *Making Waves* (1997) edited by John King, he maintains that fiction inevitably falsifies:
It distorts the even flow of historical time; it transforms experience into something very different: language; and it reshapes the chaos of reality into an order the reader can understand. But through such falsification, fiction can reveal more profound 'truths'.

Like Carlos Fuentes and Garcia Marquez, Llosa embraced the idea that literature had a political role to play. He wrote his first novels, inspired by Jean-Paul Satre's conviction that engaged, literature can contribute to the political transformation of society. His love for ideas led him into a political crusade for a new direction to Peruvian society. After his unsuccessful bid to become president of Peru in 1990, he returned to literature with a more circumspect view of political action. Luis Leal in Mario T. Garcia's *Luis Leal: An Auto/Biography* (2000), considers Vargas Llosa as a wonderful and tireless writer despite his involvement in politics. He notices a certain tendency among the Boom writers of writing long novels:

When he wrote the two-volume *Conversation in the Cathedral*, he said that he threw away almost two thousand pages that he didn't use in the novel. It's incredible, his capacity for writing long novels like *The Cathedral*. That's another tendency among the Boom writers. They write long
novels. Before the Boom writers, most Latin American novels were short. (94)

Vargas Llosa has mainly lived in Madrid since the 1990s. He acquired Spanish citizenship in 1993, though he still holds Peruvian nationality. He often reiterates his love for both countries. In his Nobel lecture In Praise of Reading and Fiction (2010) he affirms:

I carry Peru deep inside me because that is where I was born, grew up, was formed, and lived those experiences of childhood and youth that shaped my personality and forged my calling, and there I loved, hated, enjoyed, suffered, and dreamed. (5)

He further added: “I love Spain as much as Peru, and my debt to her is as great as my gratitude. If not for Spain, I never would have reached this podium or become a known writer…” (7). He never felt the slightest incompatibility between being Peruvian and having a Spanish passport: “I have always felt that Spain and Peru are two sides of the same coin, not only in my small person but in essential realities like history, language, and culture” (7). He further says: “All my books were published in Spain, where I received exaggerated recognition, and friends like Carlos Barral, Carmen Balcells, and so many others were zealous about my stories having readers”. (7)
The works of Vargas Llosa are viewed as both modernist and postmodernist novels. While *The Green House* and *Conversation in the Cathedral* are considered as carrying clearly the elements of the modern novel, *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter*, *The Real Life of Alejandro Mayta*, and *The Storyteller* appear to follow a postmodernist mode of writing.

He is respected for his insightful examination of social themes. His focus on exploring the social implications of South American politics has attracted wide praise from commentators and social activists. In the 1960s, Llosa was a Marxist who supported the Cuban Revolution. In the 1970s, after witnessing the authoritarianism of Fidel Castro's government, he became disillusioned with the Latin American Left. Some reviewers have faulted Llosa's shifting political allegiances throughout the years, arguing that his early writing in 1960s is the finest work. Some critics claimed that his first novels lack a true Marxist revolutionary consciousness. They asserted that, since the 1990s, Llosa has split his attention between literature and politics, resulting in inferior and prejudiced works. Many viewed his opinions as a microcosm of the tumultuous South American political climate. Critics have lamented the fact that his latter novels have not reached the same level of critical realism present in his previous novels.
Jonathan Heawood in his critical review criticizes Vargas Llosa’s unsure and anxious characterization saying, the older he gets, the more difficult he becomes: “It’s not that his work is more obscure or challenging, but he makes things increasingly hard on himself. He writes about historical figures but seems unsure of his ability to fictionalize them”. Jorge Lafforgue claims that Vargas Llosa’s novels are contradictory and deceitful.

Critics have consistently ranked him as one of the most significant authors to emerge during the Boom era. But Donald L Shaw in *A Companion to Modern Spanish American Fiction* (2002) contends: “What to some extent distances Vargas Llosa from other Boom writers is his almost exclusive preoccupation with the shortcomings of strictly Peruvian reality” (155). But the issue of debate among critics is Vargas Llosa’s flair for experimenting with narrative forms. Some have praised his works for their rejection of Latin American literary conventions and their unique authorial voice. Others considered his works to be confusing and overtly dense. Despite such claims, he has remained as one of the most dominant contemporary Latin American writers. A serious elucidation of his significant works will be carried out in the following chapters.