

even among the elite—with foibles, private hates and love. It was a very Trollopian vision of the world, as Snow knew: he was rewriting [Anthony] Trollope's Palliser novels a century on." Like Trollope (and unlike most novelists), Snow wrote about the world of work. But he lacked the great 19th-century novelist's ear for dialogue, and his prose did not sing.

Snow also "loved to strike" his un-Trollopian note about the future, Watson observes. "Like [H. G.] Wells and Aldous Huxley, he foresaw a brave new world: a planned economy directed by scientists, technicians, and planners, along with those

who had learned how to listen to them." Although a kind man himself, says Watson, the novelist saw life as "a power-game" and was "ideologically ruthless." Snow was "a highly conservative Communist," who believed in the necessity of a one-party state to control "the infinite forces of communication and production about to be unleashed by technology. The free market, for Snow, was not even an option. Nor was democracy."

As it turned out, observes Watson, the bones of "Lord Corridor of Power" (as one wag called him when he was made a peer in 1964) held not the future but the past.

Two Elements of Style

"From *Letters to a Young Novelist*" by Mario Vargas Llosa, in *Partisan Review* (No. 2, 2002), 236 Bay State Rd., Boston, Mass. 02215.

To succeed, a novelist must create a fiction that "liberates itself from its creator and real life, and impresses itself on the reader as an autonomous reality." And how does one accomplish that? In significant part through that mysterious thing called style, writes Vargas Llosa, the Peruvian novelist and one-time presidential candidate.

A writer's style must, in Vargas Llosa's view, have two elements: "internal coherence" and "essentiality." Molly Bloom's famous monologue at the end of *Ulysses*, for example, is incoherent. James Joyce's "power to bewitch derives from a prose that is seemingly ragged and fragmented, but beneath its unruly and anarchic surface retains a rigorous coherence, a structural consistency that follows a model or original system of rules and principles from which it never deviates."

A style need not be pleasant in order to succeed. Vargas Llosa is irritated by Louis-Ferdinand Céline's "short, stuttering little sentences, plagued with ellipses and packed with exclamations and slang," but novels such as *Voyage to the End of the Night* are finally hypnotic. Alejo Carpentier, "one of the greatest novelists of the Spanish language," writes in an entirely different style, rife with "stiffness" and "bookish mannerisms," yet his prose has a saving coherence. "His style has a conviction that makes readers feel that

he tells the story the only way it could be told: in *these* words, phrases, and rhythms."

"Essentiality," the second element of style, is much harder for Vargas Llosa to define. It is easier to describe its opposite: a style that makes us "conscious of reading something alien, not experiencing the story alongside its characters and sharing it with them." It creates "a fissure that exposes all the artifice and arbitrariness that fiction depends on." Readers "realize that the same stories, told in a different way or in other words, would be better (which in literary terms simply means more persuasive.)"

Jorge Luis Borges, for example, has an unmistakable style, cold, elegant, almost intellectual, which has exerted a great, and to Vargas Llosa's mind unfortunate, influence on his many epigones. In their hands, Borges's style fails to ring true. "Precisely because it is essential, Borges's style is inimitable." Gabriel García Márquez writes in a very different but no less essential style, bringing almost as many imitators to grief.

The paradox is that Vargas Llosa thinks writers can develop a style only by endlessly reading other novelists, by seeing William Faulkner develop his own style between his maiden novel *Mosquitoes* and his subsequent *Flags in the Dust*. Then they must put all this aside and search for their own voice.