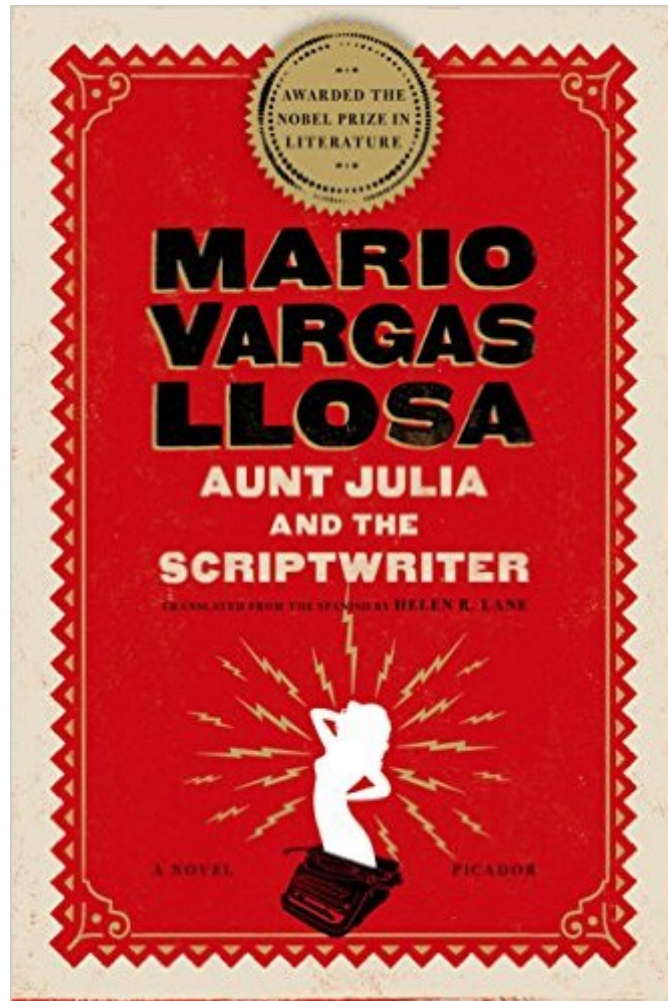


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Aunt Julia And The Scriptwriter: A Novel



Synopsis

Mario Vargas Llosa's brilliant, multilayered novel is set in the Lima, Peru, of the author's youth, where a young student named Marito is toiling away in the news department of a local radio station. His young life is disrupted by two arrivals. The first is his aunt Julia, recently divorced and thirteen years older, with whom he begins a secret affair. The second is a manic radio scriptwriter named Pedro Camacho, whose racy, vituperative soap operas are holding the city's listeners in thrall. Pedro chooses young Marito to be his confidant as he slowly goes insane. Interweaving the story of Marito's life with the ever-more-fevered tales of Pedro Camacho, Vargas Llosa's novel is hilarious, mischievous, and masterful, a classic named one of the best books of the year by the New York Times Book Review.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

At its most basic level, Vargas Llosa's most famous novel is a portrait of the writer as a young man. The semi-fictional, semi-autobiographical Mario is a young student and would-be writer whose careers and aspirations are disrupted when he falls in love with his aunt-in-law, much to the horror of their many friends and relatives living in Lima. Pedro Camacho, an eccentric (to say the least) Bolivian scriptwriter, has been hired at the radio station where Mario works, and the youth envies the prodigious output of Pedro's intricate soap operas and hopes to learn from his new mentor the secrets of being an artist. The chapters alternate between descriptions of Mario's amusing and increasingly complicated life and Pedro's formulaic and decreasingly coherent scripts, as each character is gradually overwhelmed by the burdens and expectations they've created for

themselves. On a deeper level, "Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter" is about artistic failure: Mario's writing suffers because he is too busy living life to the fullest, while Pedro's well-being deteriorates because he barely experiences life at all. While Mario's life is the stuff of literature, his various attempts at short fiction are too concerned with artistic affectation: heavy symbolism and laborious overwriting doom his every effort. In contrast, the scriptwriter is so overwhelmed maintaining the pace of the scripts for ten different serials that he can't keep track of his own sense of reality, much less his fictional characters and elaborate plots. The final chapter, which some readers have found disappointing, actually completes this theme: the writer who balances a passion for life and devotion to art is the one who ultimately succeeds.

Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter is without a doubt Mario Vargas-Llosa's most entertaining book, intelligent without being difficult and hilarious without being patronizing. Some of the most subtle points are lost in translation -- "escribidor" in the original title, for example, has a sense of someone simply taking dictation or producing a text by rote compared to the word "scriptwriter" used in the English language version -- but that is the only significant weak point and is not enough to withhold a five-star rating for this wonderful book. The book's account is semi-autobiographical, with two story lines alternating chapters -- a style employed in several other Vargas Llosa novels -- until they begin to link together like cogs in the gears of the narrative. But it is the way they mesh together that is part of the magic in this book. Without giving away the story line here, let it suffice to say that at certain points you'll find yourself smiling and flipping back through the pages uttering "but didn't he..." or "I thought that..." The story itself offers a fascinating look at several aspects of life in Peru, one of the most complex and interesting countries in the world. But it does it effortlessly; using a love-torn teenage protagonist, a sexy older woman, an enraged father, an eccentric serial writer, and a compelling cast of misfit radio artists. Though certain parts (especially the story of Julia) are well documented, the exact extent to which some of the rest of the book is based on real life is still being debated.

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