

## Vargas Llosa deserves honor

The Nobel committee was right to award Mario Vargas Llosa the prize for literature this year.

Vargas Llosa is one of the pre-eminent writers in the Spanish-speaking world, and also one of its most contentious intellectual figures. Revered for his mastery of literary form and his groundbreaking techniques, he belongs in the company of Octavio Paz and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, both of whom have also won the Nobel Prize in literature.

However, because of his morphing but ultimately conservative political views, many in Latin America have resented his award. They should

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see beyond the politics. Born in Peru in 1936 to middle-class parents, Vargas Llosa received a privileged education that included Catholic schools in Peru and Bolivia, an elite military academy, and a prestigious university in Madrid. After Spain, he worked as a journalist in France, while continuing to write short stories and plays.

His first international success was "The Time of the Hero." The novel is regarded as one of the finest works of Latin American literature. It centers on adolescent boys in a military school based on the one he attended as a teen. The plot involves a murder by a gang of students and the subsequent cover-up by school authorities.

Upon publication, the book unleashed great controversy for its vivid portrayal of the cruelty of the military school.

Officials at Vargas Llosa's old school publicly burned 1,000 copies. That only served to increase book sales and add to the author's notoriety.

But the novel was much more than a coming-of-age tale.

Its depiction of rigid hierarchies and violent group dynamics mirrored Peruvian society under harsh military rule. That became Vargas Llosa's signature style, which fuses fiction and reality in gritty and disturbing ways.

Vargas Llosa has authored more than 30 novels, plays and nonfiction works. One of his most acclaimed novels, "The Feast of the Goat," centers on dictator Rafael Trujillo, who ruled my country, the Dominican Republic, for 31 years. Vargas Llosa captured the horrible reality of living in an authoritarian society.

After he and his wife returned from Europe in 1974, his political views began to molt and his involvement in Peru's national politics grew, peaking in 1990 when he ran for president on a conservative alliance ticket. He lost the election to Alberto Fujimori, who would eventually be exiled.

Once a Communist Party member, Vargas Llosa eventually denounced Fidel Castro and caught a lot of guff some years ago for criticizing Mexico's then-long-ruling party, the PRI, calling the country "the perfect dictatorship." Today, he derides leftist leaders such as Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez.

But whatever his politics, Vargas Llosa has made extraordinary contributions to the world of literature.

Fittingly, in announcing the 2010 Nobel Prize, the Swedish Academy praised Vargas Llosa "for his cartography of structures of power and his trenchant images of the individual's resistance, revolt and defeat."

For that, he deserves the Nobel Prize.

— McClatchy Newspapers

