

## A Tribute to Mario Vargas Llosa

This issue of PortVitoria focuses on Mario Vargas Llosa, the Peruvian-born writer who in 2010 was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. Vargas Llosa writes both fiction and non-fiction. His fiction is amongst the finest written by any Latin American novelist. His non-fiction reveals that he is also a public intellectual who is not concerned about pressures from his influential socialist peers. Not only does he have the ability to think critically and independently but he also has a wealth of knowledge of Latin American history and literature. On top of this he has demonstrated a tremendous generosity towards fellow writers whose political opinions differ from his. His love for democracy and individual freedom often appear in his essays and also in his fiction. Our review section has a review of his 2000 novel *The Feast of the Goat*, and of his 2010 non-fiction book 'Sabres e Utopias' (*Sables y Utopias* in Spanish). The first is the anatomy of a tyranny through the fictionalized account of Trujillo's dictatorship in the Dominican Republic from 1930 to 1961. The second is a compilation of selected articles chosen and prefaced by Carlos Granés. The leading article, by the Swedish journalist Johan Norberg, describes –with great wit– the reaction against giving Mario Vargas Llosa the Nobel Prize, simply for being a liberal in the classic sense of the word. What Norberg describes is an example of the 'us and them' attitude which is at the heart of all forms of prejudice.

Joel Mokyr's article on the Enlightenment and that of Norman Berdichevsky on Uruguayan identity, both cover themes that are close to Vargas Llosa. The Enlightenment –the period when scientific truth was finally separated from entrenched traditions and customs– is the foundation of modern Western Civilization. The Left in general denies this role of the Enlightenment while the Latin American Left denies that Latin America is a legitimate part of the Western Civilization. A fierce critic of nationalism and racism, Vargas Llosa recognises a single culture shared by all the Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America. He also views Latin America as a part of the West by virtue of language and history.

In his essay on the Enlightenment Mokyr shows how its innovative ideas, such as the belief in 'useful knowledge', contributed to advance the state of humanity, pointing out that the various improvements in the quality of life obtained since the year 1700 surpass the sum of health improvements obtained in the last five thousand years of civilisation. Finally, Norman Berdichevsky's article on Uruguayan identity is a humorous account of the lengths Uruguayans take to protect their language from Brazilian 'luzismos' and to assert themselves as a distinct culture from that of Argentina. Although one could say that the topic falls under the theme of nationalism, the Uruguayans' yearning for identity in no way qualifies as a dangerous type of nationalism. I am almost certain that Vargas Llosa would agree.