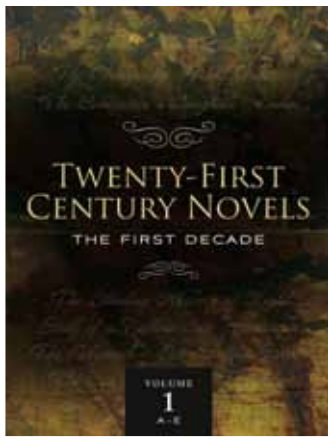


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SAMPLE SPREAD

The Feast of the Goat

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Joaquín Balaguer is Trujillo's puppet president and supporter. Balaguer appears as a dutiful cipher, following Trujillo's assassination; however, he fills the power vacuum.

Antonio Meryt Barberá is a disillusioned politician who becomes angry at the hypocrisy and cruelty of the Trujillo regime. He joins other conspirators in plotting the Goat's death.

Agustín Cabral is General Trujillo's former secretary of state and part of the regime's inner circle. He is conflicted in the atrocities at the hands of the country's leader that are revealed in the story.

Urania Cabral is the daughter of Agustín. Her family's experiences illustrate historical events of the Trujillo government and its demise. Over the course of a day, her long-held secret and reason for self-hatred is revealed.

Colonel Johnny Abbes García is head of Servicio Inteligencia Militar (SIM), the Dominican Republic's intelligence service. He is a brutal and ruthless man, "an arch-demon of great refinement," according to Kim. As Trujillo's enforcer, he does the dirty work.

Amado García Guerrero, or Amadito, is a disillusioned army lieutenant. To prove his loyalty, he gave up his beloved and later was forced to kill her brother. Following Trujillo's assassination, he and Maza fight the SIM members who come to arrest them.

Antonio de la Maza is one of Trujillo's bodyguards. Because his brother is killed in a government cover-up, he vows revenge. He elects death rather than capture and torture after Trujillo's assassination.

General José Román, nicknamed Pupo, is a conspirator and wealthy former Trujillo supporter. He agrees to form a provisional government as soon as he is shown Trujillo's corpse. When that actually happens, however, Roman fleeces in apparent impotence.

General Rafael Trujillo, known as the Goat, the Chief, and the Benefactor, is based on the historical dictator of the Dominican Republic from 1930 to 1961. The novel depicts Trujillo's political and personal life on his last day.

Ramón Trujillo, the general's son, is a well-known playboy. Although a disappointment to Trujillo, he serves in the military. He is also prominent in the vengeance-obsessed post-assassination developments.

front of the reader at the same time Urania is fleeing them. In another narrative thread, as the assassin anticipates their encounter with Trujillo, they gradually remember the events that have brought them to this vengeful point. In this way, memory and motivation unite Urania's story



The central figure of *The Feast of the Goat*, Dominican Republic president Rafael Trujillo, speaks in his ceremonial presidential commission. © Hulton-Deutsch Collection/Corbis

to those of the assassin? In connecting these characters thematically, Vargas Llosa helps readers understand the extent to which Trujillo's evil permeated society. Trujillo's cult of personality determines his governance. In this immoral regime, Argentina offers Trujillo his fourteen-year-old daughter as appeasement. Agustín is the victim of his own ambition; Urania is sacrificed, and Trujillo's impotence is witnessed by Urania. Humiliated, he deflowers her with his fingers and berates her as his thoughts. Trujillo's encounter with Urania is the cruelest of the acts in the novel. During Trujillo's reign his supporters grew in power, but the costs became intolerable. For Urania, confrontation with her past assuages her psychological pain, while the assassin chooses murder as their revenge.

Style

The three interwoven story lines, delivered by an omniscient narrator, are an affecting and effective style choice. Because the focus alternates between first Urania, then Trujillo, and finally the assassin-conspirator, the individuals become part of a horrific tableau by the close of the novel. The tone of each strain is quite distinctive. The narrative voice is sometimes very close, mirroring

the individual at hand, or is set at a measured distance, allowing a sort of cinematic long shot. One of the prominent overall effects is an understanding of how each individual's story is also an important part of the overall story of the Dominican Republic.

As Laura Miller notes in *Salon*, Vargas Llosa's structure of two time frames and three distinct narrative facets is "set up to deliver gods of exposition." The juxtaposition of the characters offers a sort of intimacy that is at times compelling (in Urania's case) and at other times repulsive (in Trujillo's case, as when he tortures and abuses people). This is also where the author's mix of researched historical detail combined with his imaginative genres accumulates both weight and significance as the story reaches its final scenes. The assassination of Trujillo comes roughly midway through the novel, but Vargas Llosa reinforces the continuance of the dictator's influence by repeatedly shifting back to scenes of the living Trujillo.

Critical Reception

Reviewers of *The Feast of the Goat* have been impressed by Vargas Llosa's research of the atrocities attributed to

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mario Vargas Llosa, born in Peru on March 28, 1926, is a prolific novelist, journalist, social critic, and political activist. All of Latin America took notice when his groundbreaking novel *The Time of the Hero* was published in 1962. The book won the Spanish Critics Award and the rage of Peru's military. He soon rose to prominence during the Latin American "Boom." Vargas Llosa's many novels vary in tone, narrative style, and theme. They include *The Green House* (1962), *Heart and Soul* and the *Scepterbird* (1982), *The War at the End of the World* (1983), and *Death in the Andes* (1996). In 1990 Vargas Llosa ran for the presidency in Peru, but lost to Alberto Fujimori. Outlasted by Fujimori's harsh rule, he moved to Spain. He also has homes in London and in Lima, Peru. Vargas Llosa won the 2010 Nobel Prize in Literature.

Trujillo's military. Most see Vargas Llosa's narrative choices as adeptly accomplished and praise his imaginative venturing into the thoughts of Urania, Trujillo, and the conspirator. Alan Cheuse of *SCFare* considers him a



This photograph shows the car in which Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo, the subject of *The Feast of the Goat*, was assassinated. © Bettmann/Corbis

An easy-to-read layout includes helpful sidebars, consistent categories and more than 270 images.

Themes

King uses the major characters of *Duma Key* to explore the untapped powers of the human mind. Each of these characters has experienced brain damage in some way, but each has been given, in return, unusual powers: prescience, clairvoyance, the power to create reality from imagination. Imagination and self-expression are powerful tools that come with a heavy responsibility, as they can affect the material world. Both Wireman and Edgar tell the reader repeatedly, “God punishes us for what we can’t imagine” (286). Though this is said in a negative context—referring to the horrors one falls to imagine—it can also be read as a comment on how most humans use a small fraction of their mental capacity. Significantly, all three characters with brain injuries have been injured on the right side, the side of the brain associated with creativity and self-expression.

An associated theme concerns memory and how memory works. Edgar, whose verbal memory is impaired by his injury, uses the technique of thinking sideways to remember words and names when he cannot easily access them, making associations between words until he arrives at the correct one. Afflicted with Alzheimer’s disease, Elizabeth Eastlake is losing her memories, but through her artwork, Edgar is able to access them. Elizabeth tells Edgar, “Art is memory, Edgar.... The clearer the

MAJOR CHARACTERS

JACK CANTORI is hired by Edgar’s real estate agent to assist Edgar while he is on the island.

ELIZABETH EASTLAKE, a wealthy elderly woman suffering from Alzheimer’s disease, owns almost all the property on Duma Key. Edgar comes to know her after meeting Wireman, her caretaker.

EDGAR FREEMANTLE, former CEO of a building company who was seriously injured in an accident on a building site, has moved to Duma Key in hopes of aiding his recovery.

ILSE FREEMANTLE, Edgar’s younger and favorite daughter, is in college.

MELINDA FREEMANTLE, Edgar’s older daughter, teaches in France.

PAM FREEMANTLE, Edgar’s former wife, divorced Edgar shortly after his accident.

XANDER KAMIN, Edgar’s psychologist, recommends the movie *10 Minutes*.

GEROME WIREMAN is Edgar’s newest friend and caretaker of wealthy octogenarian Elizabeth Eastlake.



Author Stephen King’s *Duma Key* is set on a fictional Florida Key off the coast of Sarasota. © Most Wikimedia.org/Edgar

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY NOVELS: THE FIRST DECADE

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