

Travesuras de la niña mala:
The Temptation of the Impossible

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ABSTRACT

Mario Vargas Llosa's novel *Travesuras de la niña mala* can be interpreted as an artistic expression of the author's unsettled relationship with his country, Peru. But the role played by an enigmatic femme fatale moves the analysis in a different direction. By reading Vargas Llosa's text in comparison with classics of Western canon, I intend to re-evaluate the prevailing negative judgment of the Bad Girl. By pulling together different textual strands, we have evidence enough to redeem her existence. Hence, it is that her disputable choices hide something enviable: the magnitude that only those who defeat their destiny can have.

Keywords: Madame Bovary, Mario Vargas Llosa, Sartre, The Bad Girl, *Travesuras de la niña mala*.

La novela *Travesuras de la niña mala* de Mario Vargas Llosa puede interpretarse como una expresión artística de la relación conflictiva del autor con su país, Perú. Sin embargo, el papel de una enigmática mujer fatal orienta el análisis hacia una dirección diferente. Al leer el texto de Vargas Llosa en comparación con los clásicos del canon occidental, pretendo reevaluar el juicio negativo predominante sobre la Niña Mala. Al reunir diferentes hilos textuales, encontramos evidencia suficiente para reivindicar su existencia. Es ahí donde sus decisiones cuestionables ocultan algo envidiable: la magnitud que solo poseen quienes vencen su destino.

Palabras clave: Madame Bovary, Mario Vargas Llosa, Sartre, La Niña Mala, *Travesuras de la niña mala*.

The story is not new: a man loves desperately an impossible woman. The Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa's (1936) novel, *The Bad Girl* (2007) [*Travesuras de la niña mala*], is a love story but it is not a romance in the canon of Western tradition for Vargas Llosa describes the most ridiculous and cruel aspects of love. As a matter of fact, the text is open to different interpretations. The details description of European cities calls for a sort of "topographic realism" (Collard 2008, 348) filtered by the narrator's subjectivity. Erwin Snauwaert marks the novel's metanarrative aspect: "[t]he Bad Girl appears also, although perhaps not so obviously, a recurring theme in the author's work: that of literature" (2012, 2).¹ Afterall, Vargas Llosa's fictional and non-fictional writing often turns his life experiences into literature. If placed in historical perspective, the sentimental and dramatic relationship between the two protagonists belongs to a post-boom trend that creates a new space of realism for a public less ideologically leaden. Accordingly, Stephen Henighan argues that the end of the Cold War made it possible for Latin American writers to lose interest in politics and ideology and focus on the private and domestic sphere (2009, 371). On the other hand, Vargas Llosa is a writer who always brings his origins into his texts. Symbolically, the fictional representation becomes the allegory for the turbulent relationship between Vargas Llosa and his country, full of nostalgia and dissipation, but also passionate. With reason, Oswaldo Estrada interprets the sentimental affair as illustrative of the nation: "a metaphor for a politically sick Peru, unstable and clinging to the unattainable dream of belonging to another reality" (2010, 152).² Certainty, the colonial history of Perú, its inherent inequalities, is the stage from which Vargas Llosa begins his narration. Countries like Peru "do not yet constitute real nations" because in Latin America the "notion of individual sovereignty is still an unfinished business" (Llosa 1990c, 51). The project of modernity remains an "unfinished business" because an ever-present split between a modern West and an indigenous society. *The Bad Girl* embodies the possibility of transforming oneself and assuming a new identity abroad, thus Mariana Meló-Vega writes: "the story of the bad girl is the story of many Peruvians, who, faced with the impossibility of escaping the narrow social hierarchies of Peru, emigrate abroad looking for social promotion" (2007, 8). Accordingly, Otilia's real name and origins place her in an ambiguous and conflicted position. Coming from a poor family, she is labelled a "huachafita," a derogatory term that betrays her exclusion from Lima's elite. This label haunts her throughout the novel, even when Ricardo nicknamed her "little Chilean girl," reminding her of her past and her constant effort to erase it. This conflict of belonging, this desire to be anything but a

¹ Unless otherwise stated, translations from Spanish are mine.

² For a deeper view on the political history of Perú see Elizabeth Farnsworth (1988).

“huachafita,” is essential to understanding her fragmented identity. Ultimately, in her process of transformation, one cannot avoid a central question of analysis: who, in the end, is the bad girl?

The immigrant nature of the protagonists and their inherent solitude not only raises questions for intercultural studies but also reminds us a motif typical of Latin American literature: exile and its corresponding social marginalization.³ Cecilia Esparza, reconducts the story between the two protagonists to an encounter between classes: “the love story between Ricardo Somocurcio, a Peruvian upper middle class and the bad girl, a mysterious woman who comes from the popular class, which begins in Peru and develops in Europe, a place where the characters emigrate in search of a better future” (2008, 176). Not surprisingly, Ricardo’s dream is simply that of living in Paris, the city of lights, while hers is a dream of social redemption. However, *The Bad Girl* remains essentially a love story, although stained by darkness. Fernando Lafuente considers the text as Mario Vargas Llosa’s attempt to give himself to a love story and to the concept of “sentimental novel” (2006, 50). Yet, such an interpretation would not be correct. More adequate is Guillermo Lescano Allende’s view, according to whom love occupies a privileged space in Vargas Llosa’s narrative tied to: “rebellion, social freedom and [...] artistic freedom” (qtd. in Pol Popovic et al. 2010, 16). Love assumes the feature of an instinct that knows no reason, an evil possession. Ricardo is attracted to the Bad Girl, whose real name is Otilia, as much as the Bad Girl is attracted to Fukuda, the Japanese mafia boss, as “a sickness (...) He makes me feel alive, useful, active. But not happy. It’s a kind of possession” (2007, 137). She seems to enjoy the intoxicating tension between Eros and Thanatos, about which Carole Vance remarks: “The tension between sexual danger and sexual pleasure is a powerful one in woman’s life. Sexuality is simultaneously a domain of restriction, repression, and danger as well as a domain of exploration, pleasure and agency” (1997, 327). Indeed, while she is dying sedated by morphine, she is also offering Ricardo an insurmountable theme for his novel: “love as the destruction of reason” (Sánchez 2007, 108).

Loneliness is the price that many times we have to pay for the defence of freedom, love, and ideas. Yet the satisfaction of all our desires, from the most sublime to the most perverse, does not come without sacrifice. With this in mind, what I intend to do in this manuscript is to re-evaluate the prevailing negative judgment of the Bad Girl. Seemingly, hers is the story of a woman of humble origin in Peru, who becomes a lawbreaker overseas, who must lie, steal, betray and finally join a criminal organization to end up punished for her daring. The problem is that she has been often presented, although without further analysis, as a postmodern version of Madame Bovary, hence a sexually liberated woman who

3 On the Peruvian exile and its cultural implications see Rose (1998) and Köllmann (2014).

clings perversely to her bodily desires. However, by pulling together different textual strands, I believe we have evidence enough to redeem her existence to an extent to look at her with admiration rather than disgust.

Characters in the mirror

The text, which begins in the 1950s in Peru and ends in Madrid in the 1990s, is grounded on Ricardo Somocurcio's lifelong love, obsession, erotic attraction with the elusive Bad Girl whom he met as a teenager in Lima and re-encounters, under different identities, in different cities throughout his life. While Peru undergoes guerrilla fighting, dictatorship, and armed rebellion, in Europe he embraces the existentialist atmosphere of Camus and Sartre in the 1960s, the hippy culture and the sexual revolution in London, the French poststructuralist discourse of Foucault and Barthes in the 1970s, and finally the multicultural scene of Madrid in the 1980s.

An attentive reader might find in the story between Ricardo and the Bad Girl a degree of similarity with the love story between Armand Duval and Margarita, a courtesan who gives herself to different lovers and who eventually dies of consumption in *La dame aux camélias* (1848) by Alexandre Dumas *fils*. However, the Bad Girl herself is not a courtesan so to speak but someone eaten by her own ambition. In this sense, if a parallelism is due that would be Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856).⁴ Allen Thiher in his reconstruction of the French novel noted that "in her first affair the physical contact of the lovers is secondary to the way Emma integrates her affair into the aesthetic realm of ideal lovers" (2001, 118). In this sense, Emma projects herself into the heights of a romantic passion so as to reenact in adulthood the relationship she never had with her father. Jonathan Culler insightfully observes that the "successive episodes of the book record Emma's failure to find a life which accords with her expectations and show how the form of each failure leads to hopes which animate and direct her next attempt at self-fulfilment" (1974, 139). Under this perspective, if we consider Emma a character starving for emotions, then she surely makes a progenitor for the Bad Girl. Scholars have already hinted at the similarity with Emma Bovary without deepening the discussion. Luis Rafael Sánchez defines the Bad Girl as the half-sister of Emma, "a cosmopolitan Emma" (2007, 109). Sabine Köllmann, without further exploration, grasps in the *Bad Girl* and Ricardo relationship a re-enacting of Emma's and Charles Bovary's dynamic. That is, the story of a "ruthlessly ambitious and thrill-seeking woman exploiting a decent, but weak and

⁴ In the essay *La orgía perpetua. Flaubert y Madame Bovary* (1975), Vargas Llosa discusses the structure and significance of *Madame Bovary* and celebrates Flaubert's achievement as the first modern novel "erected around the smirky silhouette of the antihero" (133).

unambitious man" (2014, 208). The reference to "unambitious" is somewhat problematic for we should define ambition in advance. Considering that both Charles and Ricardo obtained what they longed for, they are indeed the most successful characters of all those they interact with.

Seen through Emma's eyes, Charles Bovary is a mediocre man. Flaubert, on the other hand, cannot fully censure him and neither does the reader. Introduced as the narrator's classmate, a technical stratagem that allows the author's omniscience, Charles is staged as the representative of French provincial society: clumsy, pathetic, undistinguished, and incompetent. Flaubert does not say it, but by describing the ugliness of his hat as he enters the classroom, he reveals altogether the misery of the world behind it. Perhaps a mediocre doctor, he is slightly more than a pharmacist, and when he acts as a medical Don Quixote in the episode of the clubfoot, he ends up producing the amputation of the patient's leg. Emma yelling at him all her anger for the inconsonance between his capacity and the capacity his profession demands, parallels the gap between her expectations and what he can offer her. Given all that, Charles is not a mediocre man, I would not subscribe Daniel Schwarz's assumption: "Charles Bovary is a well-meaning mediocrity (...) He is one of the most imperceptive figures of Western literature, unable to read his wife's feelings or recognize his wife's machinations" (2014, 115). Instead, he is one of the most underrated actor non-protagonists of Western modern literature. On more than one occasion, Emma holds against him his lack of ambition, he knew nothing, he desired nothing, "[h]e did not know how to swim, or fence, or shoot a gun" (Flaubert 2004, 38) his conversations dull, and his tone flat. In fact, Charles had fulfilled all his ambition by marrying her:

So he was happy, without a care in the world. A meal alone with her, a stroll along the road in the evening, her hand smoothing down her hair, the sight of her straw hat hanging from a window hasp, and many other things in which he had never imagined he would find pleasure, now made up even the tenor of his happiness (2004, 31).

At night, he would watch over Emma and Berthe sleeping, fancying about the future. The child would be going to a boarding school; he wanted her to play piano, eventually she would settle with a young man with good prospects. And that would last forever. He loves her to a degree to appear weak, he sees nothing, suspects nothing, he deceives himself until the very end when her sordid features are brought to light one by one. And when the façade of respectability Emma had built finally comes down, he dies on the same bench she had betrayed him for so many nights.

In Vargas Llosa's novel, Ricardo's definition of ambition overlaps that of Charles. He is the good guy searching for a conventional life. A Peruvian emigrated to France in his early twenties, twenty-thirty years later he is still an outsider. As a translator and interpreter for UNESCO in Paris, as foreigner, he maintains the hybrid condition of "being present without being present, of existing but not existing" (2007, 122). Ricardo reckons himself not only uprooted, a perpetual foreigner, but also lacking in substance. He's cornered in the moment of translating one person's language into another's as if he did not possess his own. His is a profession for ghosts, "I felt less ghostlike as a literary translator than I did as an interpreter" (2007, 120), thus, sketching a passive being who lets the words of others pass through him. Salomon Toledano, the authority among the interpreters' world, knows what Ricardo ignores, they are not going to leave any imprint: "we haven't done anything except speak for other people" (2007, 117). A meaningless existence is that of the interpreter, compelled to make a living out of someone else's words without remembering any of those words because none deserves to be remembered. He moves along capital cities, Paris, London, Tokyo, Madrid but the global space of his setting never brings any substantial change in his life. He is a man encaged in his fixed pattern, his life has never been "something more than the sum of its routines" (2007, 161). Yet, Ricardo seems not to consider the apocalyptic vision, the little apartment he has in Paris is the maximum of his expectations. Vargas Llosa depicts a character lonely, somewhat shy, anonymous, almost invisible, surrounded by premature deaths of relatives and friends. Despite the odds, his life is far from being insignificant. St. Augustine is quoted as saying: "the man who is lost in his passions is less lost than the man who has lost his passion." Ricardo lived accordingly.

Hidden in the traffic of history, in the lateral course of contemporary lives, he is immersed in the unavailability of his desire, simultaneously a wasteland of expectation and a chimera almost within reach. His love is unconditional, masochistic, obsessive, and clearly irresponsible since he does nothing to protect himself and his self-esteem from his lover's pathological behaviour. Aware of this, he does not refrain from admitting: "[l]ife wouldn't have meaning for me if she died" (2007, 183). Attracted to her by a combination of tenderness and desire, there is something in his feeling that evokes images of Florentino Ariza, the protagonist of García Márquez's *Love of the Times of the Cholera*.⁵ At the age of seventy-six Florentino finally consummates a lifetime's love for Fermina Daza, by now

⁵ Domínguez Castro analyzes thematic parallels between the mischief of *The Bad Girl* and Gabriel García Márquez's *Memoria de mis putas tristes* (2011). Drawing from Roland Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse*, Oswaldo Estrada (2010) makes an explicit connection between *The Bad Girl* and *Love in the Time of Cholera* (I own the reference to Estrada to the anonymous reviewer who seemed to have appreciated this manuscript).

seventy-two, who had broken their engagement some fifty-one years before. Ricardo reproduces the same perpetual and moving wait, the obstinate trust in life, and the slow process of aging without regrets. He defines the Bad Girl as a "nightmare" (2007, 283) a "madwoman" and an "unscrupulous female" (2007, 88)⁶ but she is also, "the illusions that make existence something more than the sum of its routines" (2007, 161).

Indeed, challenging his conformism is a woman dominated by an idea to the extent to being incapable of recognizing the limits of decency. The role of *femme fatale* is taken by a mysterious character. The Bad Girl is called Lily, the Chilean girl, at first. Then she becomes a Guerrilla fighter under the name of Comrade Arlette. In Paris, she is Madame Arnoux married to a French diplomat, in London she is the aristocratic Mrs. Richardson, wife of a country gent. In Tokyo, she becomes the submissive Kuriko some sort of sex slave to a Japanese gangster (with reason Oswaldo Estrada has noted that Fukuda is representative of the Japanese who controlled Peruvian politics for over a decade (2010, 171)). In the end, as life is slowly closing on her, she is the grateful Mrs. Somocurcio and, the reader discovers at last, the poor Otilia, daughter of the Peruvian Arquímedes, builder of breakwaters. Always in between lies and truth the reader never knows where her life ends and the one she claims to live in begins. With life always lived well beyond the limits of morality, rather naively she finds a justification for her doing: "by doing these things, I live more intensely" (2007, 172). María Regina Ruiz refers to the Bad Girl as a simulacrum in Baudrillard's terms: "it does not have a referent, a territory or substance" (2009, 145). Alternatively stated, this is a character that displays itself not as a reality but as an illusion.

Opportunely, Dr. Roullin, the doctor in charge of her recovery, concludes that it is difficult for her to distinguish between the world in which she lived from the world in which she believed to live: "[b]ut she, and all those who live a good part of their lives enclosed in fantasies they erect in order to abolish their real life, both know and don't know what they're doing. The border disappears for a while and then it reappears" (2007, 208). Defined by her first husband, Monsieur Arnoux, as hypocrite and inhuman (2007, 66), from the very start, she strikes the reader as being a woman of immense egoism, inherently unsatisfied, spontaneous and mischievous, bold and provocative, a woman worn out by an insatiable appetite for more. While Ricardo's idea of happiness is living in Paris with her, rather cruelly she reminds him that: "I'll never be satisfied with what I have. I'll always

⁶ On the symbolic level, the relationship between the Bad Girl and Ricardo can be interpreted as a metaphor for the relationship between the writer and Peru. Interestingly, in his essay, "The country of a thousand faces" Vargas Llosa describes his relationship with Peru in similar terms: "Peru is for me a kind of incurable disease and my relationship with it is intense, rough, full of the violence that Passion is made of" (1990, 246).

want more" (2007, 61). Always on the lookout for adventures, the stability of married life depresses her. Consequently, she rejects the romance Ricardo can offer because incapable of coping with a more intimate human relationship. The Bad Girl is meant to be a free individual reinventing herself every few years in another country with a different identity, and a sexually liberated woman. In truth the descending parable of her life sounds like a condemnation: she remains trapped in a hell of pain due to her wrong choices and an empty freedom. During her life, only two factors will remain constant: her desperate attempts to get away from the poor Otilia, the servant girl she was as a child, and the repeated return every few years (either to mend wounds of the body and the spirit, or to take a rest from which to build momentum for her next social ascension) into the arms of Ricardo, devoted lover and safe harbour.

When they first met, she called herself Lily. Wearing a skirt and blouse that clings "perversely," Lily dances the mambo like a "demonic whirlwind" (6). Since then and in the decades that follow, she awakens Ricardo's lust and enslaves him to her unlimited ability to fulfil his desires. Regardless of her many disguises and regardless of the years between their assignments, Ricardo always recognizes Lily's essence. But each time the reencounter is emotionally violent and once drives him to the point of suicide; each time she dismisses his reaction as a bland interlude between more rewarding love affairs. Ricardo loves her nonetheless. Based on Stephen Henighan's reading this is possible because "as someone who does not live in his country, he remembers through Lily the Lima environment of the fifties, for which he feels great nostalgia" (2009, 384). On the contrary, Ricardo does not feel nostalgia for Peru, "I didn't have relatives or friends there" (2007, 265). He is a stranger there too. There is no place he longs to return, and if there is no longing neither there is nostalgia. Instead, as in a Greek tragedy, Vargas Llosa has designed two characters divided by opposite destinies. Ricardo who: "the only thing I really wanted in life with the passion others bring to the pursuit of fortune, glory, success, power, was having her, with all her lies" (2007, 96), and on the other side of the spectrum, the Bad Girl, a character who could not accept "the life of a middleclass Parisian, without surprises or mystery, submerged in strict routine and devoid of adventure" (2007, 231). Here is when *Madame Bovary* enters the discussion. But while Emma cannot be redeemed, an attempt for the Bad Girl can be made.

The postmodern Madame Bovary (?)

The parallelism that works well for Charles and Ricardo, cannot be reproduced with Emma and the Bad Girl. Indeed, the similarity is more in terms of plot than character. Just as *Madame Bovary* explores the provincial life of the

1830s, *The Bad Girl* does it in the 1960s, the 1970s, and the 1980s. According to Vargas Llosa, *Madame Bovary* originates in a “theme [that] was an old demon that had pursued Flaubert since his adolescence [...] the downfall of a woman whose irresistible desire to live beyond the limitations that her condition [as a woman] imposed, led first to adultery and then to disaster” (1975, 98). Hence, Emma’s story becomes a story of social, gender, and even erotic subjugation. From Vargas Llosa’s perspective, Emma is an embodiment of the modern world, where people are often transformed into the slaves of objects. Likewise, the *Bad Girl*’s story is about female self-destruction in rejecting social limitations. In *Madame Bovary*, Vargas Llosa writes, “love and money support and activate each other” (1975, 161). In a similar way, the *Bad Girl* associates freedom with fortune and, according to the narrator, she is “ready to do anything not to be conquered and to keep moving higher” (2007, 100). What the narrator, Ricardo, still ignores at this stage, are the reasons behind her ruthlessness.

Emma Bovary is not meant for the innocent simplicity Charles can offer. She feels dissatisfied with her life in Yonville, the lack of elegance and adventures in the province, the petit bourgeois in the yawny countryside. She has a restless temperament, devoured by a greedy need for sensations, satisfied by nothing and no one, not her wedding nor her husband, nor her daughter nor her lovers; she lives engulfed in an existential void. The ecstasy and passion she reads about are not going to be found in the placid existence Charles can honestly provide. She feels marriage as being a degradation, a denial of her lofty ideals, she suffers the lack of luxury, novelty, and the deprivation of love because above all Emma does not love Charles. She never did. Details make him intolerable to her: his clothes, the surface of his overcoat, his placid back, his face, his stubby fingers, his thick lips. She is irritated by his rough habits; after meals, he would run his tongue over his teeth, she hates the way he munches an apple, the gurgling sounds every time he swallows his soup. At the death of Charles’s father, Flaubert magnificently condenses her indifference: “I’d have liked to see him again!” She said nothing. Eventually, realizing that she ought to say something: ‘How old was he, your father?’ ‘Fifty-eight!’ ‘Ah!’ And that was all” (2004, 223). What is more, she hates him. She has sacrificed herself, her dreams, and yearnings, for a little man, for the silence of the village. She hates his gestures, his voice, the dullness of his sight, and his very existence; “leave me alone,” she replies each time he gets closer. Her life is made of unbearable details: “the surface of his overcoat summed up all the banality of his being” (2004, 91). A visual image renders the extent of her desperation:

But it was at mealtimes, especially, that she could not bear it any longer, in that small ground-floor room with its smoking stove, its squeaking door, its sweating walls, and its damp flagstones; it seemed to her that all the bitterness of life was

served up to her on her plate and that, along with the gusts of steam rising from the boiled beef, she could feel a kind of stagnant dreariness rising from the depths of her soul. Charles was a slow eater, and she would nibble a few nuts or, leaning on her elbow, amuse herself drawing lines on the oilcloth with the point of her knife (2004, 59).⁷

They are not arguing; it is an evening like thousands, nothing happens, nothing ever happens to threaten their inescapability. They seem not to have much in common, yet the addition of the details between them, the dampness of the room, Charles eating slowly, turns boredom into an oppressive condition of disgust. He would talk for hours on end about the surface of things, every person he had met, the prescriptions he had written, the villages he had visited, in a flat monolog with no emotions. Emma is there; she does not listen, nor she makes any comment; she plays with the point of her table-knife vainly drawing an escape that does not exist. As life is closing down on her, she begins poisoning herself. She is first poisoned by the books she misreads, filled with mistresses, love affairs, sobs, tears, and nightingales. She tries to stir the flame of her passion by imitating feelings she does not experience:

Nevertheless, faithful to the theories she believed in, she tried to make herself experience love. In the garden, by moonlight, she would recite all passionate lines of verse that she knew by heart and, sighing, would sing him melancholy airs; but afterwards she felt just as calm as she had felt before, and Charles seemed neither more in love, nor more deeply moved (2004, 40).

The dramatic effect is created by the interval between illusion and reality, the distance between desire and its fulfilment. In Emma's case, her 'love ideal,' created through her readings, is destroyed by the boredom of her marriage and a life of adultery. No matter how hard she tries, there is always a defection between the ideal world she perceives in books and the affairs she holds tight. Emma projects into her lovers her aesthetic ideals of passion and ecstasy failing to understand that she is the one lacking the passion she is looking for. On this account, Emma is short of genuineness. The Bad Girl is less dreamy and idealistic than Emma. Indeed, since childhood, she set very clear social goals, and knows that to achieve them, she will have to make multiple sacrifices. Successively, her behaviour is made of impudence, iniquity and manipulations of people and her past. Indeed, she

⁷ Erich Auerbach in *Mimesis* describes the scene as such: 'Elsewhere too he seldom narrates events which carry the action quickly forward; in a series of pure pictures—pictures transforming the nothingness of listless and uniform days into an oppressive condition of repugnance, boredom, false hopes, paralyzing disappointments, and piteous fears—a grey and random human destiny moves towards its end' (2003, 489).

manipulated the past as if it had no power over her. In this vein, Bovary's tragedy is ideal (love) and economic (final bankruptcy) while the Bad Girl's tragedy is essentially social. Neither woman wants to resign herself to her lot; yet, there is a gap that separates these characters. While Emma, inspired by the romantic novels she reads, looks for an exciting love life and confuses love with sex, Otilia's aspirations are much more terrestrial and pragmatic: she wants to break away from her Peruvian origins. Daughter of a cook and a builder of breakwaters, Otilia since childhood had decided to flee the trap of her destiny and become "rich, very rich" (2007, 252). She felt ashamed of her poverty, her humble origins, she hated the precariousness, the insecurity of her house, the garbage in the street of Lima. From this background of distress is formed her ambition to flee the prison of poverty and marginalization for "she was never resigned to her fate" (2007, 248). This Ricardo understood very well, that she would do "whatever she had to do to no longer be Otilia" (2007, 252) even if that meant "leaving pieces of her skin and her soul along the way" (ibid). Hers is a story of social redemption; it is not about greed for money. She craves to break with her past, she longs to jump to another social class, even if it costs her mental and physical health. Sick with dissatisfaction, the Bad Girl's resentment toward Ricardo is resentment toward his lack of a bigger design. The routine of her daily life is suffocating her: "[t]hese two little rooms are a prison and I can't bear them anymore. I know my limit. This routine, this mediocrity, is killing me" (2007, 268).

In the end, Emma and Otilia die of a painful death. But it is a death different in kind and different in degree. Emma's life is a caricature created by her imagination, by her pathological need to have a lover so as to reproduce the stories she reads about. She openly fails, as a woman, wife, and mother. Flaubert lets us know that Berthe, her daughter, walks around with holes in her stockings and that Emma would consider her as being especially ugly. On Thursday nights, back home from the secret meetings with Leon in Rouen, she hardly bothers to give her child a kiss, but she lies awake till dawn reading novels full of orgies and violence. She is just too self-absorbed to be concerned about somebody else's life. Her propensity for boredom, her natural shallowness, her poverty of reasoning, the banality of her dreams, and her terribly average soul, all of which considered make her a being incapable of loving. A mix of lust, rage, and hatred, this is Emma Bovary. She is explicitly fated to fall. Emma fails to see that the emptiness she feels is a doom spoiling all her relationships. All the same, her most substantial mistake, as slippery it might sound, is not that of making Charles a cuckold, but the more vulgar demand for the power of attorney giving her the right to act for her husband in financial affairs. What really brought her down was not the void inside, but that in her wallet.

Notwithstanding the parallelism, antithetic is Vargas Llosa's text. Nearly fifty, Ricardo meets the Bad Girl again. Her relationship with the Japanese Fukuda left her morally and physically broken. Entangled in a relationship that was perverse and devious, she had become victim and accomplice of his tortures. Abandoned by Fukuda, proven in body and spirit, "a skeleton of a woman" (2007, 166), first she suffers from fear of being alone: "[i]t hasn't happened before, even though I've had extremely difficult moments. If you must know, I'm sick with fear" (2007, 170), then she dies of cancer.⁸ However, before death, Vargas Llosa does something that Flaubert never did. He rescues his female protagonist. Whereas Emma is indifferent to her daughter, the Bad Girl, to some extent, cures Yilal, the mute Vietnamese boy, the adopted child of Ricardo's neighbours. Her perversity melts into motherly affection toward the silent child who, after having seen the war horrors in his country, must have decided not to talk again. And in his horrors, she sees her own. Two years later, after learning about the willpower that she exerted to get out of poverty, Ricardo not only comprehends the reasons for her ambitions, but her ambition makes him stronger.

Hence, when she leaves him again to live with a rich elder Frenchman, Ricardo finds the strength to treat France as Lily treated Peru: he sells his Parisian apartment, moves to Spain, delves deeper into literary culture and lives with an Italian girl thirty years younger. By allowing an indispensable egoism to occupy a place in his life, Ricardo avoids the fate of his idealistic friends: Paul, who dies for the revolution, Juan, who dies of AIDS because of his commitment to the age of free love, and Solomon, who dies for the love of a woman who never wanted to be loved. Already attacked by an incurable cancer, the Bad Girl comes back to rely on him. She looks for him in Madrid and Ricardo discerns in her face the burden of time: "She was old" (2007, 281). With an aged face and a broken body, she is now ready to spend with him what is left. She transfers to him everything she has inherited from the old Frenchman, and promises to behave with him like a "model wife" (2007, 285). After having been many women and explored the destructive paths of a loveless choice, now she is once more Otilia. This is why we should consider the comparison with *Bovary* more in terms of plot than character. They share the same non-conformist character and contempt for hypocritical social norms, but Otilia does not have the inexhaustible appetite for wealth that Emma has. Her need is somewhat nobler, more related to Gatsby's green light than to Emma's readings. "Now I know that you're happiness for me" (2007, 255) she confesses to Ricardo a few years back just before relapsing into her former self. As she abandons him for the last time, she does not take the little money they keep in

⁸ Stephen Henighan, suggests that this relation may be interpreted, at a symbolic level, as a metaphor for what the Peruvian people, represented by the Bad Girl, suffered under the ruling of the Velasco Alvarado (1968-1975) and Japanese Peruvian dictator Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000).

the strongbox, and in a fit of love, she gives all the money they have to an anonymous clochard as an act of gratefulness for her happiness. The reader feels that she is capable of love, and this awareness we have is almost the only source of sympathy for her that Vargas Llosa allows us to feel.

Referring to Emma Bovary, “[i]t is because she feels that society is fettering her imagination, her body, her dreams, her appetites,” Vargas Llosa writes in “La orgía perpetua” “that Emma suffers, commits adultery, lies, steals, and in the end kills herself” (1975, 14). Flaubert captures Emma and makes her a prisoner. He tortures Emma by chaining her to the airlessness, the staleness of her environment, by denying her vague desire, that of escaping her condition. He wounds Emma by trapping her among objects that disgust her: a mediocre husband, his body, his manners, perhaps his smell, in a gloomy room, forever hers. The shattering boredom she feels is what makes her constantly waiting for something to happen. And when she realizes the hopelessness of it all, that the succession of identical days, the repetitiveness of domestic life was not going to change, that no coming event would have possibly changed the course of that misery, just then she gave up to desperation: “[b]ut as the storm still raged on and her passion burnt itself to ashes, no help came and no sun rose, the darkness of night closed in on every side, and she was left to drift in a bitter icy void” (2004, 111). As one day is not just one day, but always the same day, she slips out from one man to another, until she rediscovers in adultery, “all the banality of marriage” (2004, 258). Just then it is when there is nowhere else to go. The trajectory of Emma’s yearning leads inexorably to her poisoning herself. Flaubert’s depiction of Emma Bovary’s suicide by arsenic is a scene that has left an indelible mark on Vargas Llosa’s imagination. He confessed that Emma’s suicide had a cathartic effect on him:

I remember having read, during those days, the episode of her suicide with anxious, avid anticipation, having hastened to my reading and rereading of this scene as others in similar circumstances take to religion and the parish priest, to drinking, or to morphine, and having each time found consolation and a sense of proportion, a revulsion against chaos, a taste for life in those heartrending pages. The fictional suffering neutralized the suffering I was experiencing in real life. ... Emma was killing herself in order that I might live (1975, 16–17).

Flaubert’s description of Emma’s agony is in all likelihood “the most detailed record of someone’s death in Western literature” (Castelli 2023, 42). Emma’s suicide is not moved by contrition or grief; she has no sense of contradiction, but desperation whose crescendo has been mounting since earlier days at her father’s farm. Flaubert spends ten pages of naturalistic description, observing her nausea, thirst, breathing, vomiting, the convulsions. The French author is clearly doubling Emma’s image overlapping her erotic self with that of a woman in agony. The

sacrament is administered upon her eyes “which had so fiercely craved every earthly luxury,” upon the nostrils, “so greedy for caressing breezes and erotic scents,” upon the mouth, “which had opened to lie,” and had “cry out in lustful pleasure,” upon the hands, “avid for pleasurable sensations,” and finally, upon the soles of her feet, “once so swift in speeding her to satisfy her desire” (2004, 289). A few minutes before the end she asked for her mirror and cried. She had just seen the mask of her defeat. At last, the taste of ink, to say that she no longer existed.

On the contrary, Vargas Llosa grants Otilia a freedom Emma never had. The Bad Girl can be anyone she wants to be, wherever and whenever she wants. While Emma’s reasoning is smashed by her self-justification, the Bad Girl dies fully aware of who she is: “I don’t regret anything I’ve done” (2007, 286). She is simply annihilated by a social need that was indeed absolutely rooted in her. Her lifegoal of social emancipation did not obscure her reason but her consciousness: “I don’t regret anything I’ve done. Well, except having made you suffer” (ibid). Here Vargas Llosa applies to Otilia’s body the same criteria of punishment that Flaubert had applied to Emma. As she is approaching death, the Bad Girl is a human ruin: “Her breasts had been removed and the nipples crudely replaced, leaving thick, circular scars like two red corollas. But the worst scar started at her vagina and meandered up to her navel” (2007, 290). The body that was used to seduce older men to achieve an empty and transitory pleasure is now a metastasis of pain and rejection: “[i]t isn’t only the pain. It’s that I feel so much disgust for my body” (2007, 181). Vargas Llosa does not describe the details of Otilia’s death. Indeed, when the novel ends, she is still alive. But the reader knows that she has only thirty-seven days left. The reader is left to wonder on the reasons why Vargas Llosa punished the Bad Girl so brutally, with a violence that is rarely seen in a romance of sorts. A feminist perspective would probably conclude that she does not reach emancipation. But this would be a misleading conclusion. Her death is in some sense necessary and instrumental. It would be a mistake to believe that her death embodies the defeat of the working class. Instead, at a symbolic level, her destruction is the price she pays for having rejected emotions. It is a judgment, on the side of the invisible author, on the attempt to subordinate life to purely pragmatic goals. With her death, Vargas Llosa affirms the power of pure feelings. She dies, Ricardo goes on.

Here a last moment of redemption takes place. The Bad Girl did not only confer the gift of words to the mute child but to Ricardo as well. Their chaotic relationship and their always unfinished love offer the narrator “the subject for a novel” (2007, 292), precisely the story of the bad girl. It is Otilia, no longer the Bad Girl, to give Ricardo the last missing piece in the construction of his identity; it helps him become what he truly is: a writer. Only with her death will he finally

find the courage to use his own words and turn life into literature once more. In this regard, the stormy love relationship, and her death, can be seen as instrumental for a literary initiation. Example of metafiction, Ricardo with his novel can ultimately realize what in the essay "La tentación de lo imposible," Vargas Llosa requires of fiction: "real life is small and miserable, compared to the splendid realities that are built by fictional achievements, in which the beauty of the word, the elegance of the construction and the effectiveness of the techniques, make even the ugliest, low and vile shine as artistic achievement" (2004, 147). Art sublimates life so that, at some altitude, life can imitate art.

Saving the Bad Girl

The bad girl demands attention from lovers and readers alike. Is she wicked, admirable, or both? Vargas Llosa, almost imperceptibly, has introduced a code to read the novel when in the last chapter he tells us about *Metamorphosis*, a theatre play in which Marcella, Ricardo's lover with whom he briefly lives in Madrid, works as a scenographer. In sum, a story of animals that alter shape, form, and colour as soon as there is an external movement. The biological process of metamorphosis is a resource for survival. Viewed in Darwinian terms the prey changes so that the predator does not recognize it. Allegorically, we can think of metamorphosis as Otilia's opportunistic disguise is essential to her social climbing. Ultimately, Otilia's metamorphosis is an extreme strategy to keep alive that unconditional and obsessive love that Ricardo feels for her, which, she knows well, is "the best thing that ever happened to [her]" (2007, 181).⁹ She feeds on the imposture, the drama of the characters that she creates and periodically destroys. A chameleonic woman of great intelligence, beauty, attractiveness, daring, and, above all, ambition. A woman who throughout her life sacrifices, over and over again, her identity, her happiness, her stability every time she felt locked in the average social network. Although she tries to temper her restlessness and limit her aspirations, she cannot reconcile herself to the suffocation of petit-bourgeois existence: "but I'm not like you," she explains to Ricardo, "I don't know how to be resigned. I've tried, you've seen that I've tried. I can't" (2007, 268). Her reproach is not to him but to all those who do not attempt to reach the impossible. While it is correct to admit that human beings are defined by their desires, the Bad Girl is not the reflection of what she pursues but of the desolation she comes from.

Mariana Meló-Vega explains that the Bad Girl understands identity as a construction and a performance by "playing with the construction of different subjectivities" (2007, 8). As it happens, she rejects the idea of being the same person throughout her life. She is determined not to be herself. Not only she is ashamed

⁹ Emphasis is mine.

of her humble origin, but she also fears that, by recognizing it, she could reconcile with mediocrity, in her case featured by the misery in which she was brought up.

Even so, it is not a life of luxury and fast wealth that she craves for. She is not a mere social climber, perhaps not at all, because to be so she could simply have accepted the life of luxuries and privileges that some rich or powerful lover could have offered her. Vargas Llosa makes clear throughout the narration that her beauty conquers. Instead, she is averse to commitment to an extent that she does not commit even to the same identity for too long. Because identity is also a cell, the most durable straitjacket that we are forced to use. And even a luxuriant cell is not suitable for her. She fights identity by changing it every so often, as if it were the skin of a snake. Fittingly, at the end of each journey, she changes names and appearances. She not only strips herself of her identity, but she breaks it irremediably from the inside making it impossible to ever go back. Accordingly, she escapes from Robert Arnoux stealing his savings, she divorces David Richardson who discovers her bigamy, and when her father suggests moving to Paris, thus, reconnecting somehow her identities, she never wrote again to her family. In this process of going through life closing past identities and opening new ones, inevitably she makes suffer those who love her the most, and coincidentally, each new identity tears away a part of her former being. Her masochist behaviour is an artistic reminder that the essence of every human being is change, recurrent metamorphosis, and that this change is a sign and meaning of freedom.

In this relationship with increasingly renewed identities, the Bad Girl looks more like an actor. There is an almost mystical detachment in the simplicity with which she adopts a new identity to soon put it aside at her discretion. Ready to start a new part, she looks more like someone who, in each work she interprets, configures a path to redemption. In all her changes and amended masks, the Bad Girl is acting. At first, she is a modern Macbeth walking on the world's stage aware that life is "a tale Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing" (Act 5, Scene 5). Aware of the senseless and evil of her condition, she breaks free from her original dimension making full use of her free will. She could very well be a character in Calderón de la Barca's *"La vida es sueño"* (1635). Scholarship considers the play's chief concern as being "Segismundo's transformation from a man unable to control his passions into an exemplary princely figure" (Soufas 1985, 287). Played with the vague line between reality and perception, the central theme is the freedom of the human being to configure his/her life, without being dictated by a supposed destiny. Simply stated, the issue is to 'understand' to what extent are human choices mediated by genetics, environmental factors, or even destiny. In short, to what extent is free will free? The issue is solved when Sigismund, "a

composite of man and beast" (119),¹⁰ contrary to all expectations, apparently repents at the final moment, affirming the redemptory power of individual free will. And so does the Bad Girl, a "freewheeling person" (228), creator of her own imagination, "she'd travel free all around the world" (10), refusing to accept her lot in life, "[d]eep down she preserved her dignity. Her free will" (206), shattering each time the mold into which she is held as in captivity. Yet, while Segismundo doubts the reality of his sensory impressions, ["What is life? / A frenzy. / What is life? An illusion, / a shadow, a fiction, / and our greatest good is but small; / for, all of life is a dream, / and even dreams are dreams."], (2182–2187), she never does. Is she acting in a sort of Sartrean bad faith?

Somewhere along the line, this reading of the Bad Girl as the embodiment of the idea that life should be assumed as a project of constant change, to which nothing constrains, introduces an idea of freedom rather similar to Jean-Paul Sartre's theory of existentialism. Sartre proposes that there is no pre-existing blueprint for human beings, no fixed essence or nature. We are not imbued with any special divinity, nor are we (by nature) rational. We are neither imprisoned by unconscious forces (as Freud had maintained) nor determined by specific economic conditions (as Marx had held). Born into the world as body/matter, we proceed to make the choices by which we form our own nature. In Sartre's analysis, each individual is the sum of his or her actions; "We are what we choose to be" (2007, 35) he insisted. Because we must choose at every turn between a variety of possibilities, we are "condemned to be free" (2007, 42). Sartre's viewpoint struck a balance between optimism and despair. While freedom and meaning depend on human action, all human actions, by necessity, are played out within a moral void—that is, within a universe lacking divine guidance and absolute values. To our profound despair, we seek meaning in a meaningless world. Simultaneously, to disclaim responsibility for those actions by blaming external causes is to act in "bad faith," in other words, a flight from freedom and responsibility is a form of self-deception and inauthenticity. "We are alone, with no excuses" (2007, 23), he concluded. Famously, such a theory takes shape in *Nausea*, Sartre's most successful novel. How did Roquentin arrive at his crisis of despair? At the core, there is the distinction between existence and essence. This is the distinction that Roquentin discovers one day when he picks up a pebble on the seashore and is suddenly overcome by an unpleasant feeling; it is the impression of being confronted by a bare existence. For him, rather unexpectedly, the essence of the stone disappears; he "sees through" it: "How unpleasant it was! It came from the stone, I'm sure of it, it passed from the stone to my hand. Yes, that's it, that's just it—a sort of nausea in the hands" (1964, 20). That stone exemplifies to him life reduced to pure existence: disgusting and fearsome. This is a point that all

¹⁰ All references to Calderón's play are cited parenthetically by verse numbers in the text.

existential writers have repeated time after time: the detestability of existence. Why is it at all? Isn't it simply nothing or rather meaningless? The result is nausea.

It is against this background that we should place the Bad Girl. She is the embodiment of a chain of decisions, taken in full consciousness, hence without bad faith, that forge her existence, her identity, in the terms of Sartrean freedom. She also moves in a world without moral standards; as an existentialist and as an emigrant she knows there is no social, religious, or political system that can choose for her. Hence, she must assume total responsibility as a self-interpreting animal that has the ability to define her essence, to choose what she wants to be or do. As much as for existentialist characters, there is no way out. Vargas Llosa punishes his hero by giving her an atrocious death. Human beings beginning in the loathsome emptiness of the existence, create their essence — one own self — through the choices that one freely makes. Hence one being is never fixed. One is always becoming, and if it were not for the contingency of death the Bad Girl would never end.

Donald Shaw entrusts Vargas Llosa's critical writings to "High Modernism" (2002, 404), proposing that this modernism had "plainly led via Borges directly to the Boom" (2002, 407). In terms of modernism, the impact of James Joyce (1882-1941) in Latin American literature dates back to the 1980s, with the writer Carlos Fuentes describing the new experimental fad as "Joyceisación" or "Joycismo."¹¹ Joyce's sphere of influence on Vargas Llosa merits a comparison "in terms of style and overall (diegetic) content" (Goodridge 2022, 157) that this manuscript cannot grand. However, the rough transposition of the Bad Girl into modernity, her journey toward independence is similar to the one Stephen Dedalus is about to start in Joyce's *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916): "I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race" (2000, 213). By the end of the novel, Stephen Dedalus has undergone various epiphanies wherein he has learned his true mission in life—to pursue significance through art and the humanities—not religion—not only for himself but for the betterment of his native country, the "conscience of [his] race." Stephen Dedalus, in his unfaltering confidence, thus declares his destiny. The idea is that Stephen is not able to truly commit to his artistic calling until he has severed the ties of his past and truly experiences life as an independent individual. So, does the Bad Girl; she is capable of utterly embracing her existentialist condition only after she has thrown off all the ties with her previous life. The nationalistic undertone is missing in Otilia's journey she does not feel for her country the same connection that Daedalus feels for Ireland but *nolens volens* she is an extension of Peru. She undertakes the task of bettering

¹¹ Foremost works analysing Joycean poetics and Latin American prose are Gerald Martin's (1989) and Robin Fiddian' (1989).

herself, with lightness and detachment; she cultivates, creates, and molds her destiny with the hammer of her will. And each new identity is a witness of a heroic feeling bequeathed to the future generations of Peru.¹²

In this regard far from being a common criminal, she is unique. She is one of the few characters that make a good cut for Ezra Pound's poem "Portrait d'une Femme," a complex portrait of a woman, a figure whose intellectual depth has to be carved out of superficiality. The woman in question might be the symbol of a society incapable of recognizing original art, or a victim of her society. The opening line ("Your mind and you are our Sargasso Sea") has long been recognized as bizarre (Quinn 1972, 61). Pound distinguishes between 'your mind' and 'you.' Already Thomas Dilworth noted that "'Your mind' depersonalizes; 'and you' seems to repersonalize" (1966, 222). This would go in accordance with the final line "Yet this is you," the attempt to humanize a person by shifting the attention from the monetary images that fill the verses. The analogy between the woman and the *Sargasso Sea* is another moment of ambiguity. Laurence Perrine in his poem's analysis offered a reading for the Sargasso Sea that has become common knowledge by now. A place of seaweed where Spanish galleons and pirate ships have sunk and the ocean "has collected treasures from all over the earth and from all its centuries" (1966, 52). Thus, if the Sargasso Sea is the metaphor for the woman portrayed in the poem, or of her social interactions, this is a charming woman, a good talker and listener, whose mind is full of "oddments of all things." The sea is a passageway, but one that is not for everyone. Hence, this is a woman somewhat unique. On the other hand, the Sargasso Sea is also a place of debris, a recipient of land garbage. Under this perspective, the woman becomes the receiver of trash, that is she collects only gossip. And, as the sea is everchanging, she is incapable of anchoring anywhere. Hence her inconsistency. Against those two contradictory views, we have to place our judgment of Pound's femme. In the first case she is exceptional, in the second one she is filthy.

In Pound's poem, "great minds" and "bright ships," that is philosophers, writers, artists, have asked for her when they were at a loss. She gives back bits and pieces, some of which proved to be useful, some did not. While she has always been a second choice, a moment of transition in between destinations, she does not seem to mind it:

¹² In an essay written in the 1990s, Vargas Llosa writes that the disappearance of indigenous culture seems to be unavoidable if Perú is to establish a modern society: "[to] renounce their culture -their language, their beliefs, their traditions and customs- and adopt those of their former overlords" (1990b, 337).

You have been second always. Tragical?
 No. You preferred it to the usual thing:
 One dull man, dulling and uxorious,
 One average mind — with one thought less, each year.

This is a woman, fairly beautiful and rather intelligent, who rejected the common path which includes marriage and domestic life, a dull husband who considers a wife as a mere commodity to showcase his ability to please and to obtain. Instead, she chose a life made of superficial relationships, (implicit is the idea that this is what modern interactions are) people she can bewitch with her charm, and by whom she is flattered without being harmed. Again, based on the significance we make of the Sargasso Sea, the poem assumes one connotation or another. Seemingly, this is a woman who over the years has accumulated nothing of importance. She did nothing of importance, she left no legacy. Alike the Sargasso Sea, people have used her as a source of pleasure and the poverty of her human interaction has drained herself of anything that once was her. On the contrary, her transience is what defines her, not in the sense of an ephemeral nature but originality. The final line "Yet this is you," is not meant to underscore her achievement but to underline her uniqueness. She would not be who she is if she had things to call her own.

Likewise, the Bad Girl jumps from one man to another one, from one life to another one, without ever truly committing. She speaks poor English and poor French, hence the degree of intimacy with her partners always remains on the surface level. As the lady in Pound, the Bad Girl is profound out of lightness, being no one is the identity she chose "to the usual thing." Pound claims that the lady's choice sets her aside from other women, making her the one worthy enough to write about. Indeed, Vargas Llosa, and Ricardo, have recognized the Bad Girl's originality making her story worth telling. The poem concludes with the speaker noting that despite all the things she seems to own, none of which are important, and all the things that are given to her, none of which remain, she truly owns nothing. Despite this constant exchange, there is nothing that truly belongs to her, yet it is this transience that defines her. Equally transient is the Bad Girl, for a woman to whom change and transformation are her only true identity, having nothing, in the sense of no one, is not a blame but a choice.

Finally, Otilia's dream can be reevaluated if we parallel it to perhaps the most dramatic dream in the world of fiction. That of Jay Gatsby. Vargas Llosa actually wrote an essay on Gatsby: "Gatsby is a man whom a fateful agent, inflaming his desire and his imagination, puts in question the real world and shoots into the dream" (2002, 95). As it is, there is a good deal of Gatsby in the bad girl, who concerns herself with "money, [and] finding a man who was powerful and very rich" (2007, 255), and in Ricardo, the "cheap, sentimental" (ibid) reference point of

the hatred she feels her buried past in Peru. As Nick Carraway observes strangers getting drunk at a party and Gatsby losing it all for a chimera, so does Ricardo watch the century and the possibility of being happy passing like a vanishing fad. His great ambition is to live a quiet life in Paris, but that seems no possible: another life, like the mud on the bad girl's boots, keeps showing up at his doorstep. John F. Callahan reads *The Great Gatsby* (1925) as a complementary human impulse and complexity of human personality visualized in "projections of that sometime struggle, sometime alliance between property and the pursuit of happiness" (1996, 380). David Dempsey refers to the book's failed romance plot as an "esthetic fatalism" upon a belief that "to be disillusioned was a necessary condition for understanding the world" (1946, 121). But, of course, as Laura Goldblatt reminds us Gatsby is essentially the story of a dream: "portrayal of Gatsby's dream as hollow to its core, a core that he traces to the very origins of modern European settlement in the hemisphere" (2016, 118).

By enlarging this character to the level of literature, what Fitzgerald implies is that Gatsby's dream was worth more than the means he used, which are never fully disclosed to the reader. Gatsby stands as a monument against history's current. His determination made it possible for him to become what he believed he had to become in order to ransom Daisy back: "there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life" (2001, 3). Famously, the dream is symbolized by the green light at the end of Daisy's dock, a projection of Gatsby's wishes, a desperate promise of recapturing the past against the current of time. Important to observe, what motivates Gatsby is not the desire for material objects but the need for the evanescent and the intangible. He built a Babylonian mansion not to live in it but to live across the dock where Daisy lives, for her to see it. In a similar fashion, the Bad Girl is not attracted to the riches but to everything Europe represents to her: the promise of the future, the ideal of freedom, and the dream of social mobility. Her ambition is to create for herself a Dionysian future that her native land would deny to her. But then deception sets it. Reality has finally caught up with Gatsby's imagination. After the car accident, which will play as the turning point in Gatsby's life, as he is alone in his mansion waiting for Daisy to call, Nick, the narrator, intervenes to offer an insight into Gatsby's mind: "I have an idea that Gatsby himself didn't believe it would come, and perhaps he no longer cared" (2001, 103). The moment Daisy reappears, Gatsby surrenders his Platonic dreams; love becomes a corruptible reality. Like the Dutch sailors, "he set out for gold and stumbled on a dream. But he journeys in the wrong direction in time as well as space. The transitory enchanted moment has come and gone for him and for the others, making the romantic promise of the future an illusory reflection of the past" (Ornstein 1956, 141). Otherwise stated, Gatsby's dream of Daisy is perfect only until it is not tangible, afterward "he no longer

cared." Otilia, a Gatsby-like figure, "always dreamed about what she didn't have, ever since she was little" (2007, 248). Eventually, at intervals, she reaches out for her dream, a Pyrrhic victory that lasted short and left her indefinitely broken. Hence, life has been a process of inner redemption to discover in the end that she was dreaming the wrong dream. "I know this now" (2007, 287) she admits to Ricardo as she tries, successfully, to win him back. However, her ultimate deception is accompanied by the prospect of admiration from the side of the reader. Ricardo, acting on behalf of Vargas Llosa, well condensed her behaviour, there is something in her "impossible not to admire, for the reasons that lead us to appreciate well-made works even when they're perverse" (2007, 268).

In conclusion, if we read *The Bad Girl* paralleling her existence to that of those who acted with the same audacity, same in kind different in degree, then condescendence becomes sympathy and perhaps pity. Without blinking she would toss away anything and anyone if her next conquest could guarantee the social status, of which wealth is a mere consequence, that needs to confirm her security. Her heroism, and beauty, is that she refuses to be diminished by the poverty of her destiny and by the modesty of conventionality. A character of appetite, not for sex or money, but for life itself. The French philosopher Jules de Gaultier refers to a Bovarysme phenomenon, as the inherent inability to adapt, the continual need for one to think oneself different from what one is. "It is a state of conceiving oneself as different than one is while being quite unable to realize that conception" (Petruso 1985, 46). Thus, it is a type of impotence, inherent is a principle of failure. The Bad Girl suffers from Bovarysme but she is less a Bovary-like character than she is comparable to solitary heroes of Western literature. A sublime, in its romanticized version, individuality, terrible and beautiful, she cannot settle for less than everything she wants. Therefore, *The Bad Girl* rather than being a novel about an apocalyptical Peru versus a wealthy Europe where life is "richer, happier, more beautiful, more everything than anywhere else" (2007, 9), has to be conceived as a text of human nature and individual ambition, ferocious and unfulfilled as in the most daring example of human achievements.

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