CHAPTER - V
UTOPIAN RECONCILIATION
(The Bad Girl)

While Vargas Llosa’s early novels of the 1960s were politically engaged and concerned with the theme of corruption, he shifts his gear and introduced humour in 1970s. His most recent novels amount to a new direction in Vargas Llosa’s literary trajectory, when he introduced love and eroticism, to convey his new theme: reconciliation; and this he did with The Bad Girl (2007). Certainly it was an important change and it yielded him good result. Even, female characters in his earlier works were the allies of men or the objects of their sexual desire, who behave according to patterns of female obedience and submission. But in his last four novels, Vargas Llosa shifts his focus to a more sombre exploration of sexual abuse and its consequences on individuals and even on generations to come.

The Bad Girl, originally published in 2006 in Spanish as Travesuras de la Nina Mala, is a first-ever love story by Vargas Llosa. Translated from the Spanish by Edith Grossman, it is a tale of apparently unrequited love that spans four decades and three continents. In raw, the novel follows the story of a good boy who fell in love with a bad girl. He treated her with tenderness; she repaid him with cruelty. The bad girl mocked the good boy’s devotion, criticized his lack of ambition, exploited his generosity
when it was useful to her, and abandoned him when it was not. No matter how often the bad girl betrayed the good boy, he welcomed her back, and thus she forsook him many times. So it went until one of them died. The bad girl, who is in search for pleasure and power appears in diverse guises in most likely and unlikely places to test/tease/tortment Ricardo Somocurcio, the ‘good boy’ of Miraflores, who passionately follows her. She eventually accepts the love of Ricardo, whose patience is tried in every chapter of the book. The bad girl and the multiple masks she wears are the backbone of the story.

The story unfolds against the backdrop of Peruvian revolution, the Swinging Sixties, the emergence of AIDS, etc. Brendan Hughes in his article on the novel says, “The Bad Girl is not only a story of thwarted love, it reveals a haunted swath of the third world diaspora”. Each chapter takes place in a different city: Lima, Paris, London, Tokyo, Madrid. It covers Peru under dictatorship, Cuba under revolution, the London hippie, the toxic world of wealthy Japanese smugglers, and the Italian theatrical set designer in the Madrid neighborhood of Lavapies, and so on. It is true as Luis Reyes in his analysis of the novel contends: “The author's novels are assemblies of multiple stories, the minimum standard is binary: two stories that run parallel first but then converge and intersect”.
A consummate master of narrative fiction, Vargas Llosa is able to present his character, the bad girl, with sufficient ambiguities, mysteries and ellipses so that each chapter of the novel can be read as either a fantasy or a reality. Each chapter of the novel moves chronologically according to the history of Peru, from 1950s until the late 1980s, and to the chronological life of Ricardo. Each chapter tells exactly the same story, or rather a variation on the same theme, as the repetition of an obsession. In each chapter, the bad girl appears in the life of Ricardo; in each chapter she is the object of his erotic drives; in each chapter the erotic is contrasted with an encounter with the death or agony of a character. She appears and disappears from Ricardo’s life in the most extraordinary circumstances, and is unable to differentiate. Every time she appears in the novel, she enters the world of Ricardo’s drab reality as if she was a woman of flesh and blood, but she is also a fantasy.

Above all, Vargas Llosa is a great storyteller. Though he never loses sight of his main plot, he takes time to build fascinating side stories. The striking characters in the side stories who come in and out of text are far more memorable: Yilal - a mute Vietnamese boy with a slate around his neck, Paul- the bisexual Peruvian artist who lives a sort of hippie in London, Mrs. Stubard- an older British woman who commissions
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paintings of her dogs, Elena - a Venezuelan pediatrician in Paris who goes out of her way to help the bad girl… and so on.

Few critics argue that the book is a rewrite (rather than simply a recycling) of the French modernist Gustave Flaubert’s classic novel Madame Bovary (1856). In fact, a close examination of the plot gives a feeling that this novel is unique and completely different from that of Madame Bovary. It tells the stormy relationship of two lovers sick for four decades, against the backdrop of the tumultuous political and social changes that were experienced in the second half of the twentieth century in places like Lima, Paris, London, Tokyo and Madrid. Although the setting of the novel takes place during the important political moments, the central action is Ricardo’s feelings towards the so-called bad girl. The novel shows the evolution of Vargas Llosa to themes of erotic, coming to describe scenes quite explicit with sexual content, drawn in his novels Praise of the Stepmother (1988) and The Notebooks of Don Rigoberto (1997), where this issue is much more pronounced.

The Bad Girl is a noteworthy novel, especially with regard to Vargas Llosa’s evolving concept of literature. The narrative can be read as an allegory of the writer’s relationship with literature. Despite Ricardo’s best attempts to forget her, Vargas Llosa demonstrates the power of the writing vocation to enrich his life. As the two protagonists travel from Lima to
Paris, London, Tokyo, and Madrid, the reader also travels through some of the most critical moments in Vargas Llosa’s life as a writer. During these adventures, the bad girl changes names and identities in the same way that his concept of literature has evolved over the past five decades of writing. Moreover, it is interesting to note that Ricardo is employed as a translator, perhaps indicative of another role for the writer, especially with regard to the need for interpretation (cultural translation) in the creation of his narratives.

James Lasdun in a review rightly considers Vargas Llosa's immense resources as a novelist, which is energetically applied to the surface of this tale of obsessive love. Ricardo is not a great artist, but an interpreter and translator. Nevertheless, his life is a parallel to Vargas Llosa’s own. They were born around the same year; they lived more or less in the same cities around the same years, and their lives- whether they liked it or not – were both deeply intertwined with the vicissitudes of Peruvian history. In the novel, Ricardo decides to translate the Russian writer, Ivan Bunin. He had been studying Russian, first for practical reasons, but then he becomes enthralled with Russian language, culture and literature. When asked in an interview as how Ivan Bunin entered into the novel, Vargas Llosa reveals how he became interested in Bunin and why he plays such an important
role for Ricardo. He remembered the enthusiasm with which he read Bunin in French translations in the 1960s:

I was fascinated with Ivan Bunin because he is a complex personality. He wrote wonderful stories – also novels – but the short stories are totally apolitical masterworks. But he himself was very political and suffered a lot because of his political convictions. This aspect is, of course, avoided in the novel, because Ricardo is totally apolitical. He doesn’t pay any kind of attention to politics. (Kristal, 212-220)

In the novel, when his friend Paul asked Ricardo if he would be interested in going to Cuba on a scholarship to receive military training, he expressed his disapproval and stated his “petit bourgeois mediocrity” (23): “I had absolutely no interest in politics; in fact, I despised politics, and all my dreams were focused – on getting a nice steady job that would let me spend, in the most ordinary way, the rest of my days in Paris” (23). Ricardo lived in a number of the same cities in which Vargas Llosa lived roughly around the same time. Vargas Llosa notes that this is the only autobiographical material in the novel. The love story is imaginary, but is set in countries in which he had lived there. Peru, Lima, in the 1950s; Paris in the 1960s; London in the 1970s; and Madrid in the 1980s. He says:
I think I have been lucky to live in a period in which humanity has had the most extraordinary changes in all aspects of life. In a way, circumstances put me in places in which these changes were happening in a very intense way. (Kristal, 212-220)

Indeed the novel includes a running commentary on the major political and historical events in Peru from the 1950s until the late 1980s, stopping short of Vargas Llosa’s own political campaign for the Peruvian presidency. Vargas Llosa ran for the Peruvian presidency in 1990, with the expectation that he could make a difference to his nation. After his unsuccessful bid, a less optimistic vision has informed his writings – imparting a growing sense that all struggles to prevail over our intractable feelings of discomfort are doomed to failure. The main relationship in the novel, between Ricardo and a mysterious woman, the ‘bad girl’, is Vargas Llosa’s most searching allegory about his own relationship in Peru.

Told in a first-person narrative by Ricardo, it recounts a love affair between Ricardo and the bad girl, which alternates between periods of ecstasy and deep despair for the narrator. In Vargas Llosa's version, the plot relates the decades-long obsession of its narrator, a Peruvian expatriate, with a woman with whom he first fell in love when both were teenagers. She comes in, and out of Ricardo's life. Wherever duty sends
Ricardo, the bad girl shows up; initially teasing him and holding him, later consenting to make love with him before she flees again. In the process of transforming from utopia to reconciliation, she appears to Ricardo in diverse guises:

- Lily, the Chilean girl in Lima
- Comrade Arlette, the Guerilla fighter in Paris
- Madame Robert Arnoux in Paris
- Mrs. David Ricardson in London
- Kuriko in Tokyo
- Mrs. Ricardo Ricardo Sumocurcio in Paris
- The Bad girl in Madrid

No matter the disguise, she goes with anyone who might try to pin her down to what she calls “this routine, this mediocrity” of a settled, middle class life. But it is to the settled, middle class Ricardo that she repeatedly returns to continue the love affair they began as teenagers in Miraflores.

The plot moves chronologically according to the history of Peru, from 1950s until the late 1980s, and to the chronological life of Ricardo. Extraordinary things happened during the summer of 1950s in Lima. People kept falling in and out of love. Ricardo had been living with his aunt Alberta since the death of his parents. The most notable event of that summer was the arrival of two sisters, Lily and Lucy in Miraflores from
Chile whose flamboyant appearance and unmistakable way of speaking attracted all the Miraflores boys and especially Ricardo. Ricardo fell in love with Lily instantly and he likes the way she talks, which is so different from that of other Peruvian girls. But his friends were suspicious about the Chilean girls who never opened their doors and because of their makeup and the clothes they wore. Other mysteries related to them were unexpectedly clarified on March 30, 1950 at the party given by Marirosa Alvarez, the fat little pig. Marirosa’s aunt, Adriana, identified them as false Chileans and the awful rumour about them had spread all at once: “They’re not Chileans, they don’t know a thing about Chile! They lied! They fooled us! They invented everything” (17). She asked them about their family in Santiago, where they lived in Santiago, about the relatives and friends of their family in Santiago, making Lily and Lucy swallow the bitterest pill of their short lives. It was the beginning of the real life to Ricardo, when he turned fifteen on the last day of the summer of 1950. He never knew the complete story of the false Chileans, and neither did anyone else except the two girls. Chapter one ‘The Chilean Girls’ thus begins and ends with their appearance and disappearance in Lima.

The story then jumps to Paris in the 1960’s, where Ricardo met his childhood friend Paul, a Peruvian communist who belonged to the Movement of the Revolutionary Left, or MIR. In 1960s, Paris was
experiencing the fever of the Cuban Revolution. The Cuban government had given MIR a hundred scholarships for young Peruvians to receive guerrilla training. One rule the scholarship recipients had been carefully taught was not to disclose their real names. By chance, Ricardo meets Comrade Arlette, who is in-fact the “Chilean” girl who disappeared from Lima, the moment her identity was disclosed as false Chilean. A period of ecstatic happiness follows for Ricardo when Comrade Arlette moves into his room, and becomes his lover. When she left for Cuba, by the way of Prague, she became the talk of all the young Peruvians in the MIR as she was having a passionate love affair with Comandante Chacon. Thus, the bad girl, promising to return in three months, again disappears from Ricardo’s life.

When he met her again after three years, he doubted that she might have changed her identity again: “The truth is, you look wonderful. I suppose I can’t call you Lily the Chilean girl or Comrade Arlette the guerrilla fighter anymore. What the hell’s your name now?” (55) She laughed: “Now I use my husband’s name, the way they do in France: Madame Robert Arnoux” (55). Their relationship resumes, and Ricardo again enjoys a period of ecstatic happiness. He told her that he hadn’t forgotten her for a single moment, and he loved her as much as he did the first day in Lima. Later he was surprised at her abrupt departure. When he
met her husband Monsieur Arnoux to find out her whereabouts, Robert broke out: “All of UNESCO knows. I’m the laughing stock of the agency. My wife has left me, and I don’t even know for whom. I thought it was you, senor Somocurcio” (84). He too realized that the bad girl was like a cloud in the sky: “I always knew she lied, about her family and her childhood” (87). She had drawn all the money from his account in Switzerland and disappeared. Ricardo slowly emerges from the crisis he had been in since the disappearance of the ex-Chilean girl, the ex-guerrilla fighter, the ex-Madame Arnoux.

Vargas Llosa successfully connects the bad girl’s earlier abrupt disappearance in Paris to her mysterious re-appearance in London in ‘Painter of Horses in Swinging London’ which deals with the mismatched pair- Juan Barreto, who makes charcoal portraits in London and an old lady, Mrs. Stubard. Towards the end of the 1960’s, Ricardo’s work takes him to England, where he meets an old school friend, Juan Barreto. It is through this character Juan, Vargas Llosa introduces London hippie culture. Juan was a hippie, who didn’t believe in vegetarianism. Many hippies came from the middle or upper classes. Their pacifism, naturism, vegetarianism, their eager search for a spiritual life was sympathetic. Their philosophy wasn’t based on thought and reason but on sentiment and on feeling. When Mrs. Stubard insisted Juan to describe in detail what the
hippies were like, where they came from, and what kind of lives they led, he brought three of his hippie friends for tea: two girls and a boy – Rene, Jody and Aspern. The get-together proceeded fairly well until they told Mrs. Stubard that they formed a love triangle and that the three of them making love, was their homage to the Holy Trinity – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and an even more determined way of putting into practice the slogan “Make love not war”. (104). She was puzzled staring at the trio Juan had brought to her house. Juan’s relation with Mrs. Stubard turned into something more than friendship and he finally moved into her house. In 1972, the hippie movement went into rapid decline and became a bourgeois style. Juan later became a victim of an unknown disease and died.

Ricardo’s relationship with the bad girl resumes after four years, as he manages to meet her in London, as Mrs. David Richardson. He thanked her for making him so happy at Russell Hotel and showing him for the first time that she loved him too. But she abruptly left him and flies to Japan, when her husband David Richardson discovered that she is married to Robert Arnoux in Paris. The bad girl’s traits become even more monstrous in the Dragoman’s episode ‘The Dragoman of Chateau Meguru’.

Vargas Llosa’s reveals Japanese nightlife through the character Salomon Toledano, the Dragoman of Chateau Meguru, who boasts of
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speaking twelve languages and being able to interpret all of them in both directions. In 1979, Salomon accepted an offer to travel to Tokyo to work as an interpreter and keeps posting details about Tokyo’s underworld dealings to Ricardo. Tokyo was the most expensive city in the world, and though Salomon’s salary was high, it was disappearing in nocturnal trips to the Ginza, the Tokyo district of the night, which Salomon and Mitsuko, his Japanese lawyer visits: “But who cared about money when happiness was in balance!” (171) All the exquisite refinement of Japanese culture is shown in the houses of assignation or maisons closes, called by the Frenchified name of chateaux, the most famous of which was the Chateau Meguru, a true paradise of carnal pleasure: “Everything was possible in the chambers of the Chateau Meguru: excesses, fantasies, phantoms, extravagances…” (172). Saloman and Mitsuko had lived through unforgettable experiences in the discreet reserved rooms of the Chateau Meguru.

Ricardo flies to Japan as Saloman informs him that he saw the bad girl in the guise of Kuriko, the mistress of a sinister Japanese Yakusa boss, Fukuda. Fukuda is a Japanese gangster who inhabits the shadowy fringes of criminal society in modern-day Tokyo. Rebecca Riger Tsurumi in her book The Closed Hand: Images of the Japanese in Modern Peruvian Literature (2012) provides a character analysis of one of Vargas Llosa’s
unforgettable Japanese Villains, Fukuda: “A one-dimensional figure who personifies cruelty, Fukuda supports the affluent lifestyle of Kuriko, his mistress and the Japanese incarnation of the “bad girl,” and she, in turn, works as a mule in his dangerous international smuggling operation” (74). When he met her in Tokyo, the most disastrous facts about Fukuda were revealed. Fukuda is a monstrous voyeur who beats Kuriko, forcing her to perform in degrading animalistic postures with his underworld cohorts. On the very night she arrived in Japan, Fukuda made her his mistress, one among several. It was difficult for him to believe anything she said because, ever since he met her, she always told him more lies than truths. He was terrified at one point that she’d end up with her belly ripped open by bullets, or in an African jail. But he decided to move heaven and earth to rescue her, because he loved her more and more each day: “And I would always love her, even if she deceived me with a thousand Fukudas, because she was the most beautiful and delicate woman in creation: my queen, my princess, my torture, my liar, my Japanese girl, my only love”. (188)

To satisfy her Yakusa boss, she even went to the extent of involving Ricardo in cruel trap. She took him to Fakuda’s apartment and when he was overwhelmed by the immeasurable pleasure, he saw Fukuda half-hidden in the shadows beside the large television set, two or three meters
from the bed, sitting on a chair, motionless and mute. When he obliged the bad girl, that Fukuda was there, she said desperately in anguish: “And what do you care if he’s here or not, silly? Don’t look at him, forget about him” (205). Ricardo becomes unwittingly involved in a command performance for Fukuda’s benefit. Paralyzed by astonishment, he understood everything: “Fukuda hadn’t surprised us, he was there with the complicity of the bad girl, enjoying a show prepared by the two of them” (206). He realized that he had fallen into a trap. And the surprising things that had happened were clarified - they were carefully planned by the Fukuda and executed by the bad girl, submissive to Fukuda’s orders and desires. He was exhausted, distressed, offended and kept repeating like a mantra:

“It’s your fault, Ricardo. You knew her. You knew what she was capable of. She never loved you, she always despised you. What are you crying about, little puissant? What do you care if that midget, that Yakuza was there, watching you fuck his whore? What do you care about what happened? Who told you to fall in love with her? You’re to blame for everything, Ricardito, you and no one else. (207)

He is victimized as she uses him to satisfy her voyeur lover. Vargas Llosa astutely links this episode in Tokyo to the next most interesting episode, ‘The Child without a Voice’ in Paris. Back in Paris, Ricardo vows never to
see her again. However, fate once again intervenes. Ricardo made friends with Simon and Elena Gravoski and their nine-year-old Vietnamese adopted son, Yilal. Yilal was mute not of organic deficiencies but of a trauma in his infancy, perhaps a bombing or some other terrible event in the war of Vietnam that had left him an orphan. The doctors suggested that in-time, he would recover the power of speech. The only profitably miraculous thing done by the bad girl was her involvement in retrieving Yilal’s power of speech. The bad girl ringed-up Ricardo four times since the episode in Japan; but Ricardo intentionally kept silent for three times. It was Yilal who received her fourth call. His parents and Ricardo wondered: “Was it possible Yilal had spoken to Kuriko? Was it possible the boy broke his silence when his parents weren’t nearby and couldn’t see or hear him?” (222). The bad girl seems to be the only option left to clear all their doubts as to whom she spoke and what she heard on her fourth call.

Finally when Ricardo met her in La Rhumeria, she told with trembling seriousness that Fakuda left her because she was on file with the international police and was infected with AIDS and was also raped by the Lagos police in Prison. It was difficult for Ricardo to believe anything she said: “Is this great melodrama true? Isn’t this another of your stories? Were you really in prison?” (231) Despite his unbelief in her, it was painful for
him to see her so ruined, so badly dressed, looking so old. When Ricardo asked her about the phone call, as who answered her fourth call, she remembers that very moment when she exchanged very few words in French. Yilal’s voice was so delicate and it seemed feminine to her. The boy had spoken to her, there was no doubt about it. They enjoyed throughout the day and of all things the bad girl told him, the only thing believable truth was that, Yilal had exchanged a few words with her. In course of time, Yilal was transformed from “the mute” to “the chatterbox” status.

When the bad girl’s health was deteriorated, Ricardo, with the help of Elena, arranges for her hospitalization where she regains her health. Dr. Roullin revealed some unpleasant details to Ricardo about the bad girl on her discharge that, the rape probably never happened; and that Fukuda didn’t drop her; she escaped from him. He further said that Fukuda subjected her to all kinds of abuse, for his amusement. And worst of all, he said the thing that has left the deeper scar in her mind, was breaking wind, which excited Fukuda very much. Fakuda had her drink a solution of powders that filled her with gas. He destroyed her personality and everything in her that was worthy and decent. But a period of happiness ensues for Ricardo as she married him to obtain a legal passport and new identity for herself. However, after few months, her abrupt departure made
Ricardo sink deeper and deeper in despair. When Ricardo entered his apartment on Rue Joseph Granier, he found a note on the bed:

I’m tired of playing the petit bourgeois house wife you’d like me to be. That’s not what I am or what I’ll ever be. I’m very grateful for everything you’ve done for me. I’m sorry. Take care of yourself and don’t suffer too much, good boy. (297)

This makes even the reader to feel pity of Ricardo. He spent the rest of the night in thought. Somewhere deep in his heart he is doubtful of accepting her again in his life, despite her misdoings. An inner voice nags him:

You’ve been expecting this, fearing this, right? You knew it would happen sooner or later, ever since you moved the bad girl to Rue Joseph Granier seven months ago. You knew the mediocre, boring life she had with you would weary her, and once she recovered her health and self-confidence, and remorse or her fear of Fukuda had vanished, she would arrange to meet someone more interesting, richer, less a creature of habit that you, and undertake a new escapade.

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He sternly decided to forget about the bad girl and further decided coldly to die, jumping off the bridge into the dirty waters of the Seine. He reached Pont Mirabeau and when he was about to jump, a drunken vagabond saved
his life. When he reached his apartment, the very appearance of the bad girl once again irritated Ricardo and the reader as well: “I changed my mind and here I am back again” (301). Once again he rekindles his romance with her.

In this novel, Vargas Llosa successfully implements the technique of ‘Chinese box’ as he narrates one story within another, or within a frame. Each chapter is related to it preceding or the chapter that follows it. Every minor character and incident is linked with the main action. All the characters are in one way or the other related to the main character Ricardo.

The technique of ‘Hidden data’ is also implemented by Vargas Llosa. He succeeds in withholding the information and releasing it at the most dramatically appropriate moment, a modernist technique that demands reader participation and turns all novels into detective stories in a cinematic fashion. For example, the mystery related to the true identity of the bad girl is revealed only towards the end, in the sixth chapter ‘Arquimedes, Builder of Breakwaters’ in a most appropriate moment in the life of Ricardo through her father. Arquimedes disclosed the bad girl’s true-self saying, “Otilita always dreamed about what she didn’t have, ever since she was little” (342). Ricardo couldn’t control his laughter when he finally knew her name: “Lily the Chilean girl, Comrade Arlette, Madame
Robert Arnoux, Mrs. Richardson, Kuriko, and Madame Ricardo Somocurcio was, in reality, named Otilia. Otilita. How funny”. (343)

At this moment, Vargas Llosa presents the separation of the bad girl and Ricardo, which occurred in an unexpected and brutal way. One day when he returned from his office to the apartment on Rue Joseph Granier, he saw her sitting in the living room with a packed suitcase. Gathering her strength and without beating around the bush, she came out with the sentence she prepared well in advance:

I didn’t want to go without talking to you, so you don’t think I’m running away. For the sake of what you love most, I beg you not to make a scene or threaten to kill yourself. Both of us are too old for that kind of thing. Forgive me for speaking so harshly, but I think it’s for the best. (368)

He felt infinitely weary and dropped into the armchair. She added:

I’m suffocating here. These two little rooms are a prison and I can’t bear them anymore. I know my limit. This routine, this mediocrity, is killing me. I don’t want the rest of my life to be like this. You don’t care, you’re happy, better for you. But I’m not like you, I don’t know how to be resigned. I’ve tried, you’ve seen that I’ve tried. I can’t. I’m not going to spend the rest of my life with you out of compassion. (368-369)
Before she left, she reminded that their marriage was only to obtain papers for her: “So don’t demand an accounting from me about anything” (369). For the sake of his mental health, he had decided to forget about her right away; because this time the separation was definitive, the end of the love story. He questions himself: “Could this farce more than thirty years old be called a love story, Ricardito”? (371)

The subsequent scene shifts from Paris to Lavapies of 1980s. Convinced that she will not return, because this time she has explained her reason for leaving, Ricardo eventually becomes involved with Marcella, an Italian theatrical set designer twenty years his junior, and moves to Madrid with her. Soon he was abandoned by Marcella, who has fallen in love with a fabulous dancer and young choreographer, Victor Almeda. It didn’t disturb Ricardo because by then, he had decided to leave Marcella with her dancer and return to Paris. Two days later, he was enormously surprised to see the bad girl again in Madrid. This is her final return to him: “I’ve decided to put an end to my madness. I’m going to spend my final years with my husband. And be a model wife” (392). He wanted to slap her, kick her out, do all the physical and moral harm to her one human can do to another, and at the same time, he was totally moved to see her body; there were no shadows; she looked like a human ruin. She looked like one of those living corpses shown in photographs of concentration camps: “I felt
an indescribable horror because I was absolutely certain she hadn’t been gravely ill but was gravely ill now and would die soon” (400). She asked him to sign on the papers on which she transferred everything she had, on his name. The doctors operated on her the second time and gave some devastating facts. She lasted another thirty-seven days, during which she behaved, just as she promised she would, like a model wife.

The ending is poignant: four decades later, at a very close end of death, knowing that in his life he was an interpreter and translator, she proposes that, if it ever occurred to him to write their love story, he shouldn’t make her look too bad:

Because you always wanted to be a writer and didn’t have the courage. Now that you’ll be all alone, you can make good use of the time, and you won’t miss me so much. At least admit I’ve give you the subject for a novel. Haven’t I, good boy? (403)

When the novel was published, Vargas Llosa announced that it is partly the story of his life and love. If all the women in his life treated him like that, one can only feel pity. W.H. Auden once said “If equal love is impossible then let me be the one who loves more”. After reading the novel, one can only conclude that Auden must have been right. The tortures of the main character Ricardo, who is madly and wholeheartedly
in love with the bad girl seem rather pale compared to the hell in which the cold blooded heroine and her changing partners have to rot. This hell is place for survival, for sexual perversion. Ricardo falls in love with her, because of her mambo-acrobatics and profound irony. He loses track of her, finds her again, runs into her on various continents, because of his work as a translator. Wherever he goes, he meets the same bad girl. While searching for the mysterious and evil girl, he wanders through bizarre microcosms, through the new-rich world of horse fanatics, the blossoming hippie culture in London, the Japanese underworld which mostly consists of smuggling aphrodisiac (drug that is said to give people a strong desire to have sex), the brilliant Italian theatre sets.

Exploring and analyzing the question of woman’s liberation in the novel is a major task, as the novel centers on a sexually liberated woman (the bad girl) who is in search of individual emancipation through transgressions of all social norms. The issue of female sexuality and its relation with liberation of women occupies an important and debatable position in Feminist discourse. Vargas Llosa’s attitude on liberated female sexuality had been an ambivalent one.

The urban world of 1960s, 70s and 90s presented a much changed scenario for a sexually liberated woman. Diane E. Marting begins his argument in her book, *The Sexual Woman in Latin American Literature:*
Dangerous Desires (2001) with the premise that women novelists avoided the subject of sexual women until the 1960s. In a chapter “Dangerous (to) Women: Introduction,” Marting presents a brief history of the sexual women in Latin American literature. According to her, in the novels of pre-1960s, sexually active women characters were depicted exclusively as prostitutes, adulteress, and fallen women and were punished for transgressing established social norms, or died as a result of admitting and acting on their desires. In the novels from the 1960s, sexual women have been metaphorized as the new heroes in search of social freedoms. But by the 1970s, novels criticized society for repressing women’s transgressions. Marting argues: “One explanation may be that sexual female protagonists are dangerously isolated from other female characters, not by a voluntary individualism or hypocritical misogyny, but by the social ostracism and isolation caused by their lack of orthodoxy”.

The Bad Girl is the first novel by Vargas Llosa that explores the possibilities of love. The Dream of the Celt, his most recent novel, is also a tragic version of The Bad Girl, in which a bond of friendship develops among a jailer and a prisoner who profoundly hold different convictions. In both novels, characters who keep reinventing themselves, voyage from a utopic world of fantasy to a harsh confrontation with reality. As opposed to The Bad Girl, which ends with the possibility of love and the affirmation
of life by a character who is facing death, *The Dream of the Celt* ends with a feeling that life is not worth living. The character, who feels betrayed in life and in love, and dissatisfied with the compensations of friendship, arrives at a fatalistic acceptance of death. In this sense, Vargas Llosa’s last two novels share the feeling that the sources of human dissatisfaction will not be resolved by rebellion or through fantasy. The culture of rebellion creates its own utopias. A new name is the symbol of a new identity. Jaguar in *The Time of the Hero* and the bad girl have lost their original proper names. They have assumed new names that identify them as transgressors.

This novel is as sexually explicit as any of Vargas Llosa’s works, but its sexuality is tinged with pain and sadness. As sexuality and the erotic imagination cease to be the main driving forces of the relationship between the novel’s main protagonists, Vargas Llosa begins to explore a new theme: love. He develops this theme very astutely. Indeed, the bad girl as well as Ricardo are aware that the trauma in the distant past is the obstacle to a loving relationship between them.

The great revelation in the novel is the past of the bad girl. The author reveals the facts about the bad girl when Ricardo, by chance meets an old man named Arquimedes, who turns out to be the bad girl’s father and who is mysteriously endowed with knowledge of building
breakwaters. Arquimedes went on talking about her that she wanted to be like the whites, the rich people. She was a Peruvian girl of indigenous origins, the daughter of Andean immigrants to Lima, who grew up in sordid poverty. When Ricardo discovers the bad girl’s Peruvian roots, his focus on her as the object of his erotic fantasies, is transformed into feelings of compassion for her sufferings. When she was still a child, she won a contest, on Radio America, imitating Mexicans, Chileans, Argentines and won a pair of skates for a prize. She conquered the Arenas family where her mother worked as a cook and won them over and they treated her like a member of the family. They let her be friends with their own daughter and they spoiled her. After that she was even more ashamed of being the daughter of her own father and mother and turned her back on her family when she was grown.

It took thirty years for Ricardo to understand why Lily, the Chilean girl didn’t want to have a boyfriend and didn’t invite anyone to her house in Miraflores. At that moment, for the first time, he thought she was right to refuse to return to Peru after her marriage, to despise the country that reminded her of all she had accepted, suffered, and done to escape. In fact there is no trace of her being interacting with other women. She seems to be totally isolated and there by willingly maintained distance with women. And it is only after knowing the true past of the bad girl, Ricardo could act
with more compassion on her. Efrain Kristal in *The Cambridge Companion to Mario Vargas Llosa* (2012) aptly observes:

> The revelation is moving, but it is also sobering and overarching: sobering, in that the novel becomes a meditation on the effects of trauma; and overarching, in that this theme offers a key to Vargas Llosa’s entire oeuvre. (139)

In recent times, most writers frequently deal with sexual themes. It is difficult not to forget that sexuality, at least in Latin America, has become very common in literature recently. Unlike the earlier generations, the recent generation of Latin American writers, deal with themes like infidelity, eroticism, sexual transgression, etc., due to the cultural transformations which granted freedom to them. Consequently, the figure of a sexually liberated woman cannot be found regularly in the Latin American fiction. Few critics are of the view that, the irregularity is due to writers’ obsessive preoccupation with the politics of Latin America. Vargas Llosa argued in his article ‘Politics and Literature: The Odd Couple’ in *The Writer in Politics* (1996) edited by William H. Gass and Lorin Cuoco:

> In Peru, in Bolivia, to be a writer means, at the same time, to assume a social responsibility: at the same time that you develop a personal literary work, you should serve, through
your writing but also through your actions, as an active participant in the solution of the economic, political and cultural problems of your society. (61)

Indeed sexual and erotic themes had been used in Latin American poetry much earlier, than in prose. Tajuddin Ahmed in his article *In ‘prison-house of love’: The Bad Girl and bad girls of Mario Vargas Llosa*, aptly notes: “Only after the realization which came during the 60s that sexuality too could be discourse of social critique, sexual themes found their due importance in Latin American novels”. (311)

Sexual behavior, leading to self liberation exists as a theme in the Boom novel too. Lucrecia, in Vargas Llosa’s erotic novel, *In Praise of My Stepmother* (1988) is the first fully developed sexually liberated woman character. It is she, who after an intense sexual encounter with her stepson can wake up and experience emancipation from the oppressive mundane reality: “One morning on opening her eyes, the phrase “I have won sovereignty” came to her. She felt fortunate and emancipated, but could not have said what it was that she had been freed from” (109). Vargas Llosa indicates in an epigraph for an illustrated book, *Erotic Drawings*: “Eroticism has its own moral justification because it says that pleasure is enough for me; it is a statement of the individual’s sovereignty”.
The bad girl in *The Bad Girl*, did not utter anything on sovereignty but she certainly fought for it till her death. In a way it seems it is for this, she takes up her first mask. The immense physicality of her existence was best revealed when she danced, which attracted Ricardo. Even at a tender age of fourteen, she managed to develop a way of her own, to use sexuality wisely. She has a firm control over her own sexual desire that has been a trait which stayed with her for a long time and helped her in all her adventures and misadventures. After many years, when Ricardo met her in Paris in the guise of a guerrilla fighter, she changed her appearance but still in firm control of her sexuality. The situation has not changed much, a few years later when Ricardo met Madame Robert Arnoux, a new incarnation of the bad girl. But on this occasion, she demands her own desires be satisfied, despite the death news of Ricardo’s close friend Paul. : “I have no reason to be in the mourning. I hardly knew your friend Paul… And just like that, as casually as she would…” (78) It is this obsession with pleasure, erotic and others that works as the driving force behind the innumerable disguises and masks that the bad girl wears and the crimes she commits.

The sexual pleasure is a metaphor for all the other things for which she strives. The moment she recovered from her health and self-confidence, and when the fear of Fakuda had vanished, she prepared for
yet another betrayal. She explains her position and her true intension when she left a note in his apartment on Rue Joseph Granier for the final time: “I’m tired of playing the petit bourgeois house wife you’d like me to be. That’s not what I am or what I’ll ever be. I’m very grateful for everything you’ve done for me. I’m sorry. Take care of yourself and don’t suffer too much, good boy” (297). She believes and wishes to enjoy greater pleasure of life. The pleasure is all the more intoxicating to her, as enjoying them involves deception and transgression.

Vargas Llosa seems to say that pleasure is not possible without transgression. He acknowledges the influence of George Bataille (1897-1962), a French intellectual and literary figure, for whom eroticism, sovereignty, and transgression are at the core of his writings.Eroticism, according to Vargas Llosa, is the way in which culture, and particularly the arts, enriches life; the sexual life of people and the act of love can become an artistic creation by introducing images and rituals that come from the arts and literature to this human experience. This is new in his literature. He says: “I think that my idea of literature has changed to the extent that I have been changing” (Kristal, 212-220). But probably, in the end, all of these changes have not transformed essentially what literature has always meant for him: “a very rich way of facing, of fighting the frustration, the
suffering, the disappointments that life produces in all human beings”.
(Kristal, 212-220)

According to Bataille, human beings will be unhappy and will not experience true pleasure unless they transgress those very norms and taboos that make collective life possible. In the editor’s preface to Vargas Llosa’s *Touchstones: Essays on Literature, Art, and Politics* (2011), John King talks about the terms like ‘evil’ and ‘sovereignty’ which refer to the writings of Georges Bataille: “Bataille argued that the desire to transgress (evil) is inherent in all of us, for it is through transgression of different prohibitions that we can assert our own individual sovereignty”.

However, Vargas Llosa metes out a punishment and placed the bad girl, in that very situation from which she always tried to run away; and to do so, she used her sexuality with an amazingly meticulous cunning. She does not want to belong to the ordinary Peruvians. As Comrade Arlette, she does not want even to listen anything about her poor motherland. Until her adventure with Fukuda, she was in control of her sexual adventures. But, in her relation with Fukuda- the Japanese Yakuza boss, there was a clear role reversal as the bad girl degraded herself to the role of sexual slave. According to Kathleen Barry in her book *Female Sexual Slavery* (1979), “Female sexual slavery is present in all situations where women or girls cannot change the immediate conditions of their existence; where
regardless of how they got into those conditions they cannot get out; and where they are subject to sexual violence and exploitation”. (139)

Vargas Llosa punishes the bad girl for her reckless perusal of pleasure and power. Her condition as explained by Dr. Roullin at the last part of the novel lets us know that Fuduka destroyed her personality and everything in her that was worthy and decent. What shocks Ricardo as well as the reader all the more is that when Dr. Roullin said, “She was not deceived. She was a willing victim. She endured everything knowing very well what she was doing” (283). This absolute annihilation of one’s own self by those very transgressing pleasure for which she had broken all the possible norms, makes her situation pathetic. The question is why does Vargas Llosa allow the girl to be punished so brutally?

Vargas at one occasion argued that the literary imagination is a compensation for the insufficiencies of life. The bad girl’s character can be read as a counter statement to his own doctrine. As a girl, she has suffered severe trauma associated with sexual violence, and as a result, the narrator understands her need to escape into a world of fiction. It is further analyzed by Dr. Roullin, a specialist in traumas at Dr. Zilacxy’s clinic in Petit Clamart:

Living in the fiction gave her reasons to feel more secure, less threatened than living in the truth. It’s more difficult for
everyone to live in the truth than in a lie. And even harder for someone in her situation. It will cost her immense effort to become accustomed again to the truth. (284)

When the bad girl required immediate psychological treatment to help her recover “hopefulness in life”, Elina, using her power, admitted the bad girl for treatment in Dr. Zilacxy’s clinic. He expands this view to Ricardo:

You’ll find this strange. But 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. I mean sometimes they know and other times they don’t know what they’re doing. (285)

And as a final word, he further suggested: “This is my advice: “Don’t try to force her to accept reality. Help her, but don’t force her, don’t rush her” (285). In the end Llosa brings her down to suffering and all her masks fail to protect her from her own self. With her suffering, the question whether Vargas Llosa has punished the bad girl, and if so, from what perspective we need to appreciate his attitude towards liberated sexuality and its possible relation with female emancipation, needs to be clarified.

Vargas Llosa unfolds their love story, using chance and coincidence. Although this technique could easily be seen as unrealistic manipulation of
the novel, it impresses the reader as entirely believable, since he has imbued his tale with a sense of destiny and gave reasons to support their chance meetings. Ricardo and Lily are fated to be together, so naturally their lives will play out such that, they are repeatedly brought together at the most critical moments of their lives in Paris, in London, in Tokyo, again in Paris, and finally in Spain, which seems rather implausible. Episodes like, Ricardo’s encounter with the father of the bad girl and retrieval of Yilal’s speech further insists on coincidence and chance, which play a major role in the novel. The novel possesses an intensifying, almost exhausting suspense and the bad girl demands attention from lovers and readers alike. Few questions haunt the reader throughout: Is she wicked, or admirable, or both? Where will she be the next time the good boy encounters her? What will she call herself? How long can he endure? Will she ever return his affection in kind?

Vargas Llosa presents a series of dichotomies in the novel, most notably the characters of the good boy and the bad girl. Ricardo is blessed with an ability to enjoy simple pleasures in life. He achieves his dream of settling in Paris at the age of twenty five and leads a modest life as an interpreter for UNESCO. He had a simple wish that she would say yes, make love, marry and end up in Paris, rich and happy. He had dreamed of living in Paris, inspired by the books written by Paul Feval, Jules Verne,
Alexander Dumas. Those novels filled his head with adventures and convinced him that in France, life was richer, happier, more beautiful, more everything than anywhere else.

By contrast, from an early age, the bad girl has sought recognition, money, social prestige, and excitement in life. Ricardo appears to be a kind of lovesick guy who does not know how to get rid of the passion he feels for the bad girl. Both are different in their attitudes and hence represent two opposite poles. The bad girl is concerned with money and made it clear to Ricardo: “I’d only stay forever with a man who was very, very rich and powerful, which you’ll never be, unfortunately” (80). When he asked her what if money wasn’t happiness, she gave a staunch reply:

Happiness, I don’t know and I don’t care what it is, Ricardito. What I am sure about is that it isn’t the romantic, vulgar thing it is for you. Money gives you security, it protects you, it lets you enjoy life through and not worry about tomorrow. It is the only happiness you can touch. (80-81)

Besides being hurt for what she had said, for him, happiness was having her and living in Paris. Travelling and seeing every country was what she likes the most. But she always considers him as a good boy and refers him who keeps telling cheap, sentimental things: “Go on, go on with your cheap, sentimental things, you sentimental man” (202).
Ricardo is a reincarnation of sorts of Santiago in *The Conversation in the Cathedral*, due to his impotent empathy with the misery of his fellow Peruvians. With regard to her sense of pride and need to rebel, the bad girl is a female reincarnation of Jaguar in *The Time of the Hero*. Like Santiago, Ricardo is also aware of the social injustices of Peru. Like Jaguar, the bad girl becomes cruel. As Ricardo observes: “she was a grown woman, convinced that life was a jungle where only the worst triumphed, and ready to do anything not to be conquered and to keep moving higher” (136). Looking at her, no one could have imagined the difficult life she must have had since she was born. The unfolding of the bad girl’s life is also a motif of contrast. The more she ascends in terms of social status, wealth, and power, the more she descends in terms of human dignity, personal freedom, and both physical and mental health. Dr. Roullin considers Ricardo as the only one who can in a way resurrect her from the death bed: “It may surprise you to hear that you’re probably the only person in the world who can help her”. (284)

The political subplot of the novel further develops the structure of contrasts. Paul, a Latin American revolutionary leader in Paris and his communist comrades, idealistically believe that they can successfully bring about a revolution in Peru and thus improve the life of their fellow countrymen. This belief is an illusion, as they are brutally killed and the
revolution fails. Ricardo is not so politically engaged, but he aids and
encourages Paul, because he has developed a personal friendship with him.
Ricardo’s uncle, Ataulfo Lamiel, keeps informing him about the
increasingly desperate situation of Peru. Peruvian society was sinking
deeper and deeper into poverty, ignorance, and brutality. When the
military dictatorship in Peru finally ended, elections were held, and in
1980, Peruvians re-elected Fernando Belaunde Terry as President. Ataulfo
was happy and had hopes that political change would improve his country,
but in reality Peru’s economic and political situation has worsened.
Ricardo felt like a complete stranger when he returned to Lima after
twenty years, to say goodbye to Uncle Ataulfo. He noticed that the
coexistence of wealth and poverty in Lima, made the rich seem richer and
the poor seem poorer.

Vargas Llosa’s depiction of the characters Juan Barreto and
Salomon Toledano adds an ironic twist to the theme of opposites. Juan
lives a double life. In New Market in the presence of his wealthy clients
for whom he paints horses, he is a model of propriety. He makes every
effort to protect his source of income. In contrast, when he is at his pied-a-
terre in London, he leads a dissolute life of bisexual that results in his
death from AIDS. Salomon has always admonished Ricardo for falling in
love and insisted that romantic love only brings unhappiness. He even
introduces Ricardo to his world of sex with no emotional attachments and sex for hire. Then, while in Tokyo on an assignment, Toledano falls madly in love with Muriko, a Japanese lawyer. The relationship becomes suffocating for her, and she tells him she no longer loves him. Devastated, Toledano commits suicide. Thus, Vargas Llosa’s portrayal of Juan and Salomon adds an ironic twist to the theme of opposites.

Throughout the novel, Ricardo’s relationships, along with the other important characters in his life, mirror his love affair with the bad girl. His best friends die like flies, always at a very young age and with different causes. Paul returns to Peru and dies for the political cause. Juan dies with AIDS. Salomon commits suicide. His Aunt Alberta, with whom he lived since the death of his parents, dies of old age. Uncle Ataulfo, his primary family tie dies. The Gravoskis, his closest friends in Paris, leave for Princeton University, US. Marcella, with whom he has moved to Spain, leaves him for Victor. The bad girl’s death at the end of the novel is a traditional ending for such a story, but Vargas Llosa innovatively recasts the ending, as the bad girl’s final words provided Ricardo with the novel he wanted to write.

It is true as Stephanie Merritt in a review notes: “Vargas Llosa has successfully captured the exquisite pain of sexual obsession and the human capacity for cruelty and created a compelling narrative that brims with
compassion”. As seen in many of Vargas Llosa’s other novels, this author has an endless fascination with the complexities and quirks of ordinary people. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that, for Vargas Llosa, there are no ordinary people, but each individual possesses hidden resources that awaits the right occasion before they come into play. *The Bad Girl* continues in this tradition, and presents a heroine who will rank among Vargas Llosa’s most memorable creations. Eventually, the main underlying idea in his recent fiction in general and *The Bad Girl* in particular evolves: the sources of human dissatisfaction will not be resolved by rebellion or through fantasy; and thus, through the process of transformation from a utopic world of fantasy to a harsh confrontation of reality, Vargas Llosa’s successfully conveys his new theme: human reconciliation.