

**IT'S THE ECONOMY, STUPID:
CONTEMPORARY POSTMODERN FICTION AND ITS CAPITALIST
ROOTS**

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ROOTS

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Introduction: a map of the mountain to be climbed

Authors and novels do not have the same place they used to. Parents complain that their children do not read and would rather watch television or play video games. But this is also the case for adults. Books have to compete against several other attractive entertainment options, and thus successful novels today are the ones that have been the most aggressively marketed and hyped, pressed into shortlists for prizes that will be put up on the covers of future editions of that book and any ones that follow. At times film versions, trailers and franchises follow. Of course, this is not the case for every successful novel, but there is no denying that today, a large crowd assembles to a book launching with very little idea of what the contents are, let alone an opinion of the work. The packaging, the presentation, the public relations are all-important. And this is the hallmark of a postmodern era where appearance, not reality, is what dominates, a place where reality is much more difficult to perceive than appearance.

How did this come about? Much of what is called postmodern – the multicultural, the paradoxical, the decentredness, the blurring of distinctions not only of conventional binaries such as good and bad or black and white but also of materialism and spiritualism — is supported by the system of the world economy as it exists now in this stage of late capitalism at the beginning of the 21st century. The virtual world represents the peripheral pockets of the rest of the world to each corner so that everyone watching National Geographic will know of the crocodile habitat in Australia without ever experiencing it firsthand or being told about it directly by someone who has. In a blog relating to Susan Sontag's article titled 'The Image World', Jina Huh discusses this disconnected

interconnectedness and describes how a capitalist society requires a culture based on images.

'It needs to furnish vast amounts of entertainment in order to stimulate buying and anesthetize the injuries of class, race and sex. And it needs to gather unlimited amounts of information, the better to exploit natural resources, increase productivity, keep order, make war, give jobs to bureaucrats. The camera's twin capacities, to subjectivize reality and to objectify it, ideally serve these needs and strengthen them.

And when [the] virtual world becomes charged with a full system of image production and consumption, [the] virtual world (the image of reality), having massive images becoming more visual and portraying reality in resemblance, starts to show the characteristics of what photography can do to reality:

1. the virtual world makes exotic things near, intimate, and familiar things small, abstract offering participation and alienation in our own lives and those of others,
2. virtual world becomes like a well designed Hollywood movie so that people are frequently disappointed, surprised, unmoved in real life,
3. internet implements an aesthetic view of reality ('This incident would make a good blog'),
4. Virtual world having a lot of images and discussions furnishes a ruling ideology through creation of myths, working as a spectacle for masses, and an object of surveillance for rulers. Social change is replaced by a change in virtual world.'

— 'Sontag, Image world'

It is established, then, that there is a certain way that culture is produced and disseminated today that is vastly different from only a few decades ago. What brought about this change and how does it affect literature is a question that many academics and

researchers have all bit by bit astutely covered. What I propose is that this state of affairs is a direct result of the developments in the economy starting from the breakup of the feudal economy in Europe and the rise of early capitalism. Slowly and surely, capitalism led to the formation of the modern world as we know it. Supported by the Reformation, the economy picked up pace as making profits became the new goal and would in fact help one from getting into heaven rather than preventing one. Colonisation was a course that had to happen for the European economies to survive as they had limited natural resources of their own, and it also led to their division into nations. Prior to colonisation, say, in the times of Queen Elizabeth I and William Shakespeare, nation states did not exist as such. People identified with a particular region — Sicilians, Neapolitans, Romans, Venetians and other slices of Italy did not really stick together. The Ottoman, Byzantine and Islamic empires at different times dominated a large group of regions jumbled together so there was always a sense of together and not-together.

Not only did exploration, colonisation, trade and the death of massive and uncontrollable empires lead to the formation of nation states in Europe, it also carved up the rest of the world. The colonised regions of the world, which includes great landmasses from most of the continents including the Americas, Africa, Asia and Australia, also was affected by the great economical development that was capitalism. Accordingly exploited, converted and culturally dominated to different extents in different regions and by different colonisers, these countries could not help but be affected. Eventually colonisation and the division of assets between the European nations (the French and English conflicts in Canada and Australia, the Spanish in Latin and South America and so on) determined the

boundaries of the new independent nations of the last fifty years, not the least being the broken up Indian subcontinent.

This effectively means that the developments in capitalism formed the world as we know it today and both directly and indirectly determined the cultural movements that have happened in the last three centuries. However, this does not mean that novels and fiction anywhere are stylised and marketed in the same manner. There are commonalities for which we can classify a 'postmodern' genre for contemporary literature, but at the same time, the differences between the literatures and writers can not only be traced back to the country of origin and national history but also can be accounted for by the forces of economy, ~~at~~ namely capitalism. These disparities are specifically because each piece in the jigsaw puzzle of the global economy has played a different role, strategically, geopolitically, culturally as well as economically. All these factors taken into consideration, and with a careful look at the shifts and changes in capitalism over the generations reveals a very close and mutually dependent relationship between late capitalism and postmodernism, which was termed the 'cultural logic of late capitalism' by Fredric Jameson. While Jameson's assessment is not wrong, it is slightly limited as it does not travel back to the emergence of capitalism and how that led to industrialisation, which caused escapism and Romanticism, which was followed by modernism and postmodernism. And each link in the chain of literary-cultural movements is not only supported by the economy at large as it slowly comes together to form the global economy of multinational companies and impressive bodies such as the International Monetary Foundation or the World Bank, but also conversely supports and propagates the changes and developments in the economy itself. This tallies in with sociologist Max

Weber's reassessment of Karl Marx's original assertion that the economy is the base and everything else is the superstructure. In fact, the base is the economy, culture, politics and religion and each strand can tug at and be tugged by the others, both restricting and causing changes in the weaving of everything.

In this analogy, the five novels that will be used as examples to substantiate the analysis that each nationality and culture gives rise to a particular mix because of all that preceded in terms of the economy are: Salman Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, Kurt Vonnegut's *Hocus Pocus*, Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Memories of My Melancholy Whores* and Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*.

Stepping back some centuries into the history of the novel, one finds writers submitting instalments of their work to literary magazines that were read widely, leading to the public eagerly anticipating the next instalment of *The Pickwick Papers* or *David Copperfield*. Today, that eagerness is reserved for the next episode of *CloseUp-1*, and the awe that used to be reserved for Charles Dickens in his later years when he toured America has been emulated when Zinedine Zidane visited Bangladesh. In this environment, books take up a different space and fulfil a different purpose. Moreover, instead of being restricted to an educated elite as high modernists such as the deeply learned TS Eliot would have left literature, books now have to become more accessible and more appealing, able to touch people around the world. It is still about 'making it new', exciting audiences with new insights and outrages and fusing the 'sacred and profane' (Emile Durkheim). More than anything, postmodern literature has become about

unveiling new viewpoints and relating them to the whole, deconstructing the conventional or mainstream further and further. Earlier novels such as *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* by Milan Kundera reveal 'words misunderstood', delineating concepts and objects that have completely polar significances to separate individuals. Meanwhile Mark Haddon's 2003 novel, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* presents itself as a detective story, but really serves as a means of revealing an alternate way of seeing the world: through the eyes of an autistic child. The novel is narrated by Christopher Boone, a boy with Asperger's syndrome and the chapters numbered not 1, 2, 3 and so on, but with prime numbers, as he likes math and logic. Not dissimilar to this alternate unconventional presentation of a narrative, Kurt Vonnegut's *Hocus Pocus* is separated into not chapters but sections according to the size of the scrap of paper he wrote on, and the figure that defines his life – the number of men he killed and women he slept with - is not given directly at the end of the novel. Instead, the reader is told to follow a math problem, using figures scattered elsewhere in the book, to thwart the people who will try skip to the last pages to find out this number, so 'only those who have read the whole book will have no trouble solving.' (p. 323)

Today's novels that fall into the postmodern category do have commonalities accounted for by postmodernism and globalisation, but at the same time differences because of economic and geo-political nuances particularly of each country the author comes from, which result from the latest condition of capitalism. That explains why postmodernism is called the cultural logic of late capitalism, according to Fredric Jameson.

As a movement, postmodernism includes so many different participants – more than any preceding literary or cultural movement – that it has become a giant sponge that absorbs more and more new elements and yet remains a sponge. Romanticism carried over from Europe to Bengal, and modernism found new forms in the Caribbean as Simon Gikandi outlined in *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature*. But modernism did not affect more than a certain elite class, for as new, original and far-reaching T S Eliot's *The Waste Land* is, it is beyond the understanding of the everyday man. Postmodernism, with its blurring of the distinction between high and low culture is a place where Greek mythology can serve as fodder for a popular television show like *Xena, Warrior Princess* without attempting to be accurate. Rather, it integrates the newly accepted values of feminism, the civil rights movement and other more recent ideals. The postmodern landscape has shown itself to be not something altogether new, but an accumulation of the old, where an Indian born author based in London can write a novel about rock and roll with a hero inspired by John Lennon and Elvis Presley, and the mythology is both Indian and Greek, Zoroastrian and American Dream — celebrities, gods, sacred and profane are all the same. Literature has been blown wide open by the new voices, new views and new blends that have emerged in the postmodern age. Even if postmodernism wanes and a new centre, a new absolute emerges, these voices, now that they have been introduced, cannot be muted. Does that mean that the after-effects of the postmodern era will remain for, perhaps not forever, but at least several generations? For in some sense the preceding movements have been able to survive and remain, contained in the great sponge that is postmodernism. A work can be at once elegant, incoherent, passionate,

romantic, spiritual, cynical and universal; it can be several genres at the same time, a melange.

This dissertation starts out as an analysis of the emergence of capitalism in Europe and how this played a role in the development of consequent literary movements as well as a decentring look at Karl Marx and Friedrich Engel's *The Communist Manifesto* and what they didn't see coming. There will also be an examination of ideologies such as feminism that have been so deeply integrated into postmodernist discourse so that feminist theory succeeds in affecting, if not dictating this discourse globally and how that fits into the economic model. Fiction has been humanity's magic mirror, to praise and to horrify, and postmodern fiction succeeds in finding more means of doing that everyday as the othered other finds voice. This process of bringing the marginalised onto a mainstream platform is infinite, for a new periphery emerges all the time. Thus as long as inequality exists, which is probably as long as humanity exists, postmodern fiction cannot run out of things to say. Even if it is unnatural for humans to have no absolute truth or one central faith, at the end of the day a postmodern landscape allows the input of so many nearly out-of-reach peripheral discourses that they cannot be cut out to make for a new centre. Once an absolute monarchy is overthrown, it doesn't come back; revolutions lead to the formations of states that grow and cannot regress to have one central figure.

Chapter One: Capitalism and postmodernism

A hasty summary of the history of capitalism and modernism

‘Capitalism was what the people with all our money, drunk or sober, sane or insane, decided to do today.’¹

In *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Fredric Jameson puts forward three cultural eras that carry their own cultural logic: the age of realism, the age of modernism and the age of postmodernism. The third is where the purest form of capitalism dominates, even though capitalism began and developed before modernism did, though it enabled the development of modernism and affirmed and was affirmed by postmodernism. In the third phase, novels are products to be marketed and so cannot afford to be unilateral. Fiction is written with an awareness of the greater currents that have been contained in the era of late capitalism: feminism and postcolonialism are two such currents. Such currents come about for simple economic considerations: look at the feminist movement, for instance. Without a fresh input of labour the western economy would not have been able to continue. Women entering the labour force was necessary to make up for the shortage of labour; therefore the agrarian-patriarchal base is slowly being eroded by the free market, which, by commodifying everything, naturally makes each unit of a commodity of the same value. Democracy, then, is best demonstrated when it is necessitated rather than embraced by a revolution.

¹ Vonnegut, Kurt. *Hocus Pocus*. The Berkeley Publishing Group. 1990. p. 95.

Each of the novels discussed in this dissertation raise the question of seeing the world from different standpoints, which arise purely from the different life experiences characters have. Vonnegut's Eugene Debs Hartke is the product of a father who wanted to be able to show off his son, a fat mother, a soldier's life, the Vietnam War and so on. Each influence determines him as a cynical, equivocal, womanising and atheist character. Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time* reveals how different the world can be for an autistic child, his dislike for brown and liking for red appearing to be completely arbitrary and yet no more arbitrary than the commoner likes and dislikes that society deems 'normal'. Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Memories of My Melancholy Whores* puts forward an aged man whose ramblings in a column in the local newspaper still draws interest, a 90-year-old who falls in love for the first time in his life with a sleeping child he sings lullabies to. These characters are only protagonists because postmodernism has done away with a fixed centre — there is no clear, winning, reasonable hero with high moral values who is either unanimously well-liked by society or unanimously decreed a worthless vagabond. Each of these characters is estranged from the mainstream in one way or another, and yet, each of their stories is still a commodity that is valued and sold and studied. Why?

With the passage of time, capitalism has given rise to many cultural movements that were not anticipated by either supporters or foes of capitalism. Most of all, Karl Marx outlined a result that was both reasonably accurate and also quite far off from the actual outcome. He envisioned capitalism taking over and commodifying everything, exploiting everyone. Most interestingly, he said that the modern 'bourgeois society, with its relations of production, of exchange and of property, a society that has conjured up such gigantic

means of production and of exchange, is like the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells.² It is a very accurate description of the current global financial crisis wherein despite the colossal build up of debt, the government can bend over backwards with a USD 700 billion bailout plan to feed the ever widening black hole.

The (widely chosen) reality is (as there is no unmediated singular reality), to be able to expand one's market, one must appeal to local, keeping to the central message and yet conveying more or less the same thing in different cultural contexts. In this vein, Coca Cola or any other multinational corporation will spend a significant amount of time and money translating slogans and launching advertisement campaigns in different countries that all suggest a similar, almost ^{the} same understanding of what Coca Cola represents. Fiction is not all that different; it is the story of the world and the story of a particular community. The lines between global and local are blurred as is so much else in the postmodern era. But the blurring is done in particular strokes determined by the economy and the shifts and changes in the economy. The push into free-market economy in Europe and the acceptability of such a pro-profit system in the Islamic Empire as well made exploration, trade and then exchange of mineral resources possible. This also meant that the more technologically advanced societies with less resources could press for their advantage – for if it were not for colonisation the United Kingdom would have really had its back against the wall – and effectively exploit the less technologically advanced. The process of cultural hegemony and domination slowly emerged as the most efficient way of keeping the balance of order. And then eventually independence when colonisation

² Marx, Karl. *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Marx/Engels Selected Works, Volume One, Progress Publishers, Moscow, USSR, 1969, pp. 98-137.

threatened to result in more responsibility and desperate consequences, the colonising nations wisely stepped aside and helped the colonies to become independent fledging nations, mostly fragmented and uncertain of their identity. This chain of events explains the development of postmodernism over time and also how initially it was supplementary to the goals of capitalism. Now, however, things have progressed to a symbiotic relationship wherein the postmodern condition fuels the capitalist system and the capitalist system affirms the postmodern condition. Mythology, numerology and biology all come together and stop contradicting each other because no core value system exists anymore; and the lack of the core value system means anything sells. Meaning is arbitrary and only truly exists in the subjective sense.

‘At least the World will end, an event anticipated with great joy by many. It will end very soon, but not in the year 2000, which has come and gone. From that I conclude that God Almighty is not heavily into numerology.’³

In this line, Vonnegut walks the often confusing line between modernism and postmodernism. The sarcasm and the light way that ‘God Almighty’ is treated determine that it is the latter. The novel makes one aware of the futility of war, for the narrator participated in the Vietnam War, ‘which was about nothing but the ammunition business’ (p. 2) which is something that resonates soundly in the 21st century in light of the war on terror and the pick-and-choose method with which First World nations involve themselves in civil wars and genocide particularly in Africa – a choice usually dependent on whether or not the political situation will clog the flow of raw materials or the

³ Vonnegut, Kurt. *Hocus Pocus*. The Berkeley Publishing Group. 1990. p. 2.

investment climate. At the end of the day it is a nation's value in terms of assets, raw materials as well as the strength of its services sector that determines its political status quo and also the level to which it is in touch with popular culture and the global economy. Bangladesh, as the supplier of 'cheap chic' through its garments industry is one of the discs in the vertebrae of the falsely inflated US economy. Thus labour and political unrest are very much tied to the sales and supplies to Walmart and other retail chains not just in North America but in Europe as well. That added to the human resources Bangladesh sends out to the world, particularly labour to the GCC region and UN peacekeeping forces to missions around the world but mostly concentrating in Liberia, makes the country a concern of North America, the UAE countries and the UN. It is inevitable, therefore, that the country be prone to obeisance to these other political forces and thereby more open to influence culturally as well. This is not the case in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's native Colombia where the main interference comes from the US's geopolitical strategy in the growingly leftist Latin American region as well as its interests in the Colombian drug cycle. The cultural context of *Memories of My Melancholy Whores* is eerily disconnected to the global scene that Rushdie, Vonnegut and Kundera link up to because of the country's lack of connectedness to the global economy.

'The exposition will take up in turn the following constitutive features of the postmodern: a new depthlessness, which finds its prolongation both in contemporary 'theory' and in a whole new culture of the image or the simulacrum; a consequent weakening of historicity, both in our relationship to public History and in the new forms of our private temporality, whose 'schizophrenic' structure (following Lacan) will determine new types of syntax or syntagmatic relationships in the more temporal arts; a whole new type of emotional ground tone – what I will call 'intensities' – which can best be grasped by a return to older theories of the sublime; the deep constitutive relationships of all this to a whole new technology, which is itself a figure for a whole

new economic world system; and, after a brief account of postmodernist mutations in the lived experience of built space itself, some reflections on the mission of political art in the bewildering new world space of late or multinational capital.'

— Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*

As Max Weber argued, the economy is not the base of everything; culture, politics, religion and the economy are all interrelated and can influence each other simultaneously.

Capitalism materialised as an economic system and was supported by the wave of Reformation; Romanticism and Modernism were the future cultural developments, the first trying to escape from industrialisation via retreat into nature and the second a horrified retreat from the Frankenstein of science and technology that could create an atom bomb, and the free trade that would provide developing nations arms to carry out civil war. Capitalism emerged as the new economic system in Europe after feudalism pushed the economy to its utmost limits and the system had to change or fall apart; modern capitalism officially begins between the 16th and 18th centuries when European trade and colonisation began and rapidly advanced. The principles of money-making and accumulating wealth was supported by the Protestant work ethic, unlike Catholicism which frowned on good business. Protestantism encouraged people to believe that success and gaining material wealth was a sign of God's favour. Of course, with the development of the free market economy came industrialisation and specialisation or division of labour, which added to the loss of the individual. A person could no longer be a carpenter or a candle-maker because such products could be made en masse in a factory where each member of an assembly line specialises in only one action. Thus the final product is not the creation of an individual alone and there is a loss of creative freedom right there. This contributed to the loss of faith that was so prominent in the Modernist

movement; for reasoning, science and technology had lead to industrial development, but had deprived humans of a sense of purpose.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engel's *Manifesto of the Communist Party* denounced capitalism and advocated communism as the solution. At the risk of oversimplifying the Marxist viewpoint, after the collapse of feudal society, social divisions remained, though they took new forms. The bourgeoisie changed the new scenario to make everyone paid labourers, and resolve 'personal worth into exchange value' bringing it down to 'that single, unconscionable freedom — Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.'⁴

Marx was not totally inaccurate. It is not too difficult to see in the growth of multinational corporations and franchises the 'need of a constantly expanding market for its products [...] over the entire surface of the globe.'⁵ Nonetheless he was not too wrong about 'naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation'. The obvious example of slavery, followed by 'indentured labour' now followed by the current terms of 'human resources' or 'outsourcing' shows that the sale of labour is something that is not going to diminish anytime soon. In fact, it is this need for more labour that has been forcing the shift towards more democratic or more egalitarian values everywhere. To maximise the economies of scale, land, labour and capital must continue to grow in order for bigger and better revenues to be realised. And for labour to keep increasing, under capitalism no one can afford to limit labour to a certain class, race or gender, and nor can capitalism

⁴ Marx, Karl. *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Marx/Engels Selected Works, Volume One, Progress Publishers, Moscow, USSR, 1969, pp. 98-137.

⁵ Marx, Karl. *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Marx/Engels Selected Works, Volume One, Progress Publishers, Moscow, USSR, 1969, pp. 98-137.

allow these stratifying factors to limit the pools for each type of labour – skilled, semi-skilled and highly skilled being the categories applied ~~to~~ nowadays.

From today's viewpoint, one finds the postulation of the concepts of capitalism and communism as two polar opposite points as absolutist. What Marx did not and could not foresee was the evolution and growth of both these ideologies over time till they both became barely recognisable from their origins. Capitalism has evolved vastly.

Communism has become unrecognisable in China, where after 59 years of the ruling Communist Party, human rights are hardly held highly in comparison to the out-and-out exploitative western world. 21

Although the world economy did reach ~~a~~ near self-destruction after the stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression of the 1930s ~~but~~ that did not lead to a complete collapse of capitalism; instead, capitalism got smart. President Franklin D Roosevelt's administration introduced labour standards, minimum wages and prices so that there were limits to profit maximisation, which is seen as an important reason for the collapse. Of course, economic theorists looking back now also blame the Federal Reserve policies, saying that 'what happened is that [the Federal Reserve] followed policies which led to a decline in the quantity of money by a third. For every \$100 in paper money, in deposits, in cash, in currency, in existence in 1929, by the time you got to 1933 there was only about \$65, \$66 left. And that extraordinary collapse in the banking system, with about a third of the banks failing from beginning to end, with millions of people having their savings essentially washed out, that decline was utterly unnecessary.'⁶

Roosevelt's Chairman of the Federal Reserve, Marriner S Eccles, outlined what he

⁶ Friedman, Milton and Schwartz, Anna J. Interview with PBS. Oct. 1, 2000.
<http://www.worldnetdaily.com/index.php?fa=PAGE.view&pageId=59405>

believed were the causes of the Depression in his memoirs:

'As mass production has to be accompanied by mass consumption, mass consumption, in turn, implies a distribution of wealth — not of existing wealth, but of wealth as it is currently produced — to provide men with buying power equal to the amount of goods and services offered by the nation's economic machinery. Instead of achieving that kind of distribution, a giant suction pump had by 1929-30 drawn into a few hands an increasing portion of currently produced wealth. This served them as capital accumulations. But by taking purchasing power out of the hands of mass consumers, the savers denied to themselves the kind of effective demand for their products that would justify a reinvestment of their capital accumulations in new plants. In consequence, as in a poker game where the chips were concentrated in fewer and fewer hands, the other fellows could stay in the game only by borrowing. When their credit ran out, the game stopped. That is what happened to us in the twenties. We sustained high levels of employment in that period with the aid of an exceptional expansion of debt outside of the banking system. This debt was provided by the large growth of business savings as well as savings by individuals, particularly in the upper-income groups where taxes were relatively low. Private debt outside of the banking system increased about fifty per cent. This debt, which was at high interest rates, largely took the form of mortgage debt on housing, office, and hotel structures, consumer installment debt, brokers' loans, and foreign debt. The stimulation to spend by debt-creation of this sort was short-lived and could not be counted on to sustain high levels of employment for long periods of time. Had there been a better distribution of the current income from the national product — in other words, had there been less savings by business and the higher-income groups and more income in the lower groups — we should have had far greater stability in our economy. Had the six billion dollars, for instance, that were loaned by corporations and wealthy individuals for stock-market speculation been distributed to the public as lower prices or higher wages and with less profits to the corporations and the well-to-do, it would have prevented or greatly moderated the economic collapse that began at the end of 1929.'

— *Beckoning Frontiers*

Whatever the causes were, it nevertheless resulted in the working class's living

conditions being raised to a certain standard. Profit-making or not, corporations are expected to fulfil those standards, ergo are much less villainous to look at than their predecessors. The employers are not just fulfilling a monetary minimum as Karl Marx stipulates in *The Communist Manifesto*, saying that 'The average price of wage-labour is the minimum wage, i.e., that quantum of the means of subsistence which is absolutely requisite to keep the labourer in bare existence as a labourer. What, therefore, the wage-labourer appropriates by means of his labour, merely suffices to prolong and reproduce a bare existence. We by no means intend to abolish this personal appropriation of the products of labour, an appropriation that is made for the maintenance and reproduction of human life, and that leaves no surplus wherewith to command the labour of others. All that we want to do away with is the miserable character of this appropriation, under which the labourer lives merely to increase capital, and is allowed to live only in so far as the interest of the ruling class requires it.'⁷ Therefore, capitalism has fulfilled the promise of communism: health insurance, spouse support, child support, housing allowance and other forms of coverage come from corporations today. Capitalism and communism have lost their polar relationship; modernism, which feared the monster of industrialisation, commercialisation and ultimately globalisation and the effacement of individual identity, matured and learned to accept the softened, more humane and less crude capitalist set up.

The horrors of the World Wars have diminished as it has become clear that no matter what disaster comes about, whether it is the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki or the genocide in Rwanda, people will move on and the world will not come to an end. In WB Yates's terms, the second coming does not happen. The world's hide becomes thicker as

⁷ Marx, Karl. *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Marx/Engels Selected Works, Volume One, Progress Publishers, Moscow, USSR, 1969, pp. 98-137.

postmodernism worries little about originality and 'making it new'; it has recognised that a good idea is not one that is unheard of and outré, but one that ~~retails~~ the universal archetypes identified by Carl Jung.

One feature of the world of late capitalism that comes out predominantly in Rushdie's novel *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* is how so much of what people hear and see everyday in the news, in the papers, on television, comes across as mythical. With the loss of the gods of Olympus, mankind has found new ones in celebrities (e.g. Madonna), politicians (e.g. Bill Clinton) and financial moguls (e.g. Donald Trump). These are respectively elites of the ruling orders of society according to Max Weber – culture, politics and economy. There has been an interesting shift from accepting that there is a divine order and linking the ruling elite to the divine, to leaving out the belief in divinity and yet obsessively following the doings of the elite orders, internalising their actions and attitudes and dedicating to whatever new thing they choose to represent. This can be dedication to Pilates because Madonna does Pilates, support of Clinton-ite foreign policy or even buying any one of Donald Trump's books to learn from his way of doing business. The gods are not gone, they are merely not the same anymore; they have taken human form once more and are as distant and as inaccessible as the gods of Olympus used to be, yet capable of disseminating narratives. This trend is ever present in the story of Ormus and Vina's rise to fame. The Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the Reformation, Romanticism, Realism, (post)modernism all appear to lead back to deification of individuals. Instead of Daphne chased by Apollo it is Diana chased by paparazzi. The human ability to empathise with each of these stories is no different.

The economic breakdown: Columbia, India, America, Czechslovakia and the UK

Each of the novels was written by people of different nationalities and also in different decades. The slight overlap of Rushdie's British connection and Mark Haddon's Britishness hardly makes a difference as their experiences are separated by race, culture, origin, and also perhaps the deification of fame. (Rushdie is after all no reclusive author. He is a rock star too, standing on the red carpet, making outrageous statements and marrying beautiful younger women and carrying off a knighthood, even if he mocks Ormus Cama's titled parents Lady Spenta and Sir Darius.) Though all of the works can easily be termed postmodern, it is by looking at the socioeconomic background of the nations that one can see a direct and symbiotic link between the rise of capitalism and the creation of postmodernism. Each feeds on the other and accounts for both the commonalities and the differences in each of the cultures and the novel – of course, apart from the stories themselves.

The fourth largest country in South America, ^oColombia like India is a former colony, though a colony of Spain, not of Britain. According to the BBC country profile⁸, it has 'been ravaged by a decades-long violent conflict involving outlawed armed groups, drug cartels and gross violations of human rights.'⁹ The neighbouring countries too are former Spanish colonies, but predominantly each of these nations ⁷are going socialist, as they have natural resources of their own and are capable of refusing US authority. Venezuela and Hugo Chavez come to mind. Before the revolution of Che Guevara and Fidel Castro swept through the South American and Latin American region, these nations had hardly any legs to stand on. Poverty, slow growth and little development are all present. Brazil is a nation with an outstanding number of people living under the poverty line, and also

⁸ Country profile: Colombia. BBC © MMVIII. Saturday, 19 July 2008 12:41 UK.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/country_profiles/1212798.stm

does not do well on indicators of violence – it has one of the highest domestic crime rates from around the world, which has led to the development of the Maria de Penha code, a self-contained set of laws for the protection of women who are victims of domestic violence, giving them access to separate courts and shelters. After attaining independence, like the new nations of the Indian subcontinent, the situation was dire and each became dependent on the benevolence of foreign aid and investment. Initially dependent on cash crops for sustaining their economy, a number of nations were derogatively named ‘the Banana Republic’ and were completely under the thumb of exporting nations who dictate the price, and today still dictate the size, colour and curvature of an acceptable banana.

Columbia has not yet gone down the socialist path. Strategically it is important to the US to keep it that way, and the drug trade makes a perfectly plausible excuse for US troops to remain stationed pretty much anywhere they feel like, including at the border with Venezuela. The drug trade and the tremendous supply of cocaine to the US is a delicate business. Its sheer volume substantiates the existence of the Drug Bureau, meaning that along with the illegal status of marijuana the Bureau will hardly need to justify any budget it puts forward. Also the amount of revenue from the trade is colossal for the Americans receiving and distributing it in the US. The Columbian drug lords sell at an absurdly cheap rate since it is not they who can peddle it across the country, so it is safely assumable that this is one invisible and colossal source of revenue to the US, even cutting out the amount that is caught and the number of people who lose their lives. So, Columbia is important for financial and geopolitical or strategic purposes but apart from that not too many people are interested in its development or checking its health, social,

political or economic indicators. It is reasonably sheltered from the onslaught of the world media, compared to say Bangladesh where it is unavoidable with all the international organisations sitting and passing judgment^s every other day. There is also the fact that in terms of mineral resources, Columbia has little to go on. What mineral resources it has will require a good deal of investment and equipment to excavate, and fortunately or unfortunately, companies have learned that mining is a losing business that just looks bad – destroys communities and causes enough pollution for the company to have to compensate ~~to~~ everyone in the region of an excavation site.

So Columbia has had little cultural interference since the Spanish left, with only the consciousness of ‘countless civil wars’ (p. 11) but little real political involvement from the people. As a result the breakfast the 90-year-old narrator has is not Nescafe sachets with sliced bread, but brewed coffee, ‘a large cup sweetened with honey’ and ‘two pieces of cassava bread’ (p. 7). No one would bother ^{to} export cheap mass-produced goods for the use of the middle-class, for that is the class the narrator belongs to, a former ‘poor teacher (p.14) and columnist living in his colonial house and yet laboriously scraping together the ‘fourteen pesos’ he needed for his birthday night with a fourteen-year-old virgin. The premium on virginity is something that is slightly outdated in, say, Vonnegut, Kundera, Rushdie or Haddon’s context, but perfectly feasible in this rather culturally stagnated part of the world. Catholicism is still important, and virginity too – the author’s fourteen-year-old, whom he names ‘Delgadina’, is very poor and sews buttons to support her family, but must maintain appearances and cannot be known as a prostitute. She carries the ‘medal of the Virgin’, a touch of religiosity that is difficult to find in more globalised nations. The insistence on secularism is something that did not make it into this

metaphorical island.

India, of course, is entirely different. 'Whatever you say about India, the opposite is also true'¹⁰. One thing that can be said about India is that of all the nations that have attained independence in the 20th century, India's literary voice has clamoured the loudest. Indian writers have truly made the English language their own, played with it and put it through the process of 'chutneyfication'. India is much more diverse than Columbia in terms of race, religion, language, culture – everything. There are the fabulously rich and the ultra-poor. There is the desert and there is the beach, the tropical forests and the urban jungles. There is nothing India cannot claim to be today, from a tourist destination to a medical one. From a struggling economy in the 1950's after independence, it has emerged as one of the fastest growing economies of the world, and along with Brazil, can pull its weight at international platforms such as at the World Trade Organisation (China was late in joining and so is being put through rigorous procedures, paperwork and recommendations). India has an advantage over China in terms of proficiency of the English language, which has allowed India to rapidly grow its services sector, particularly communications.

How is this reflected in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*? It makes it possible for both Ormus and Vina to become international celebrities and for them to be signed with the same record company. It makes Vina's multiple families – all abandoning or abandoned by her – something perfectly plausible, for Indians are everywhere, from driving cabs in New York and doing construction work in Dubai to partying with high society in London. There is money, there are resources, there is an ancient civilisation and culture

¹⁰ Macdonald, Sarah. 'Holy Cow: An Indian Adventure'. Broadway. 2004.

originally quite different from Christianity but alike enough to be able to absorb Christian missionaries and culture. Parsees, Christians, Buddhists, Jews, Sikhs, Rajputs, Maharastrans, Bengalis – India is more of a melting pot than America can ever be. Also, India's connectedness to the world economy makes the cultural infusion of the Beatles possible – it is questionable whether Beatlemania ever reached Columbia. Ormus's dead twin brother, who is always with him, is at once a remnant of Persian, Hindu and Christian superstition, and his ability to write and create music that he has never actually heard but does exist is a curious instance of magic realism that cannot be attributed to any one culture. Ormus and Vina's mythology-transcending love story is something that is as 'empirical, chaotic, and heterogeneous'¹¹ as Fredric Jameson sees postmodernism to be. As the BBC country profile for the USA says, 'The US is the world's foremost economic and military power. It is also a major source of entertainment: American TV, Hollywood films, jazz, blues, rock and rap music are primary ingredients in global popular culture.'¹² America is not as diverse as India, despite what people may say. There is a natural segregation that happens out of the changes in history and economy; the brutal and inhuman history of slavery will endure and keep the poorer African-American community apart, not because they will never forget, but because it has entrapped them in a cycle of poverty and violence. The affluence, success and overall brilliance of the upper segment of this community hardly changes the condition of the rest – derogatively, Obama and Oprah are disconnected from the rest of the African-American community. More integrated is the Asian community; from a marginalised immigrant community in the earlier part of the 20th century, when 'Chinaman' and 'Chink' were still not

¹¹ Jameson, Fredric. 'Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism'. Verso, 1991. Chapter 1.

¹² Country profile: USA. BBC © MMVIII. Wednesday, 5 November 2008.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/country_profiles/1217752.stm

considered offensive terminology, there is a token Asian in every mainstream American television show who does not need to represent his or her culture the way that a token African-American would. Vonnegut's narrator in *Hocus Pocus* is white, and quite oblivious to other races, except for his Vietnam War experiences. The novel unflatteringly examines the dingier aspects of the American dream, not bothering to sentimentalise or highlight suffering. Hartke's insane wife and mother-in-law are dismissed as soon as it is established that they are mentally unstable. In a similar fashion, people are written off as delinquent, failures or traitors in this bleak story. Naturally this too can be tracked back to the rise of the USA as the neo-colonial superpower that followed a neck-and-neck space race with the USSR. With 'the most highly-developed mass media in the world', the USA does dictate according to 'elements of self-interest'¹³ and *Hocus Pocus* and its author do reflect that. Not only is the novel highly critical of the judicial system and bias against any non-mainstream group, from convicts to illiterates, but the impact of the humorous, satirical and self-digressive writing style on the writing world is tremendous. Vonnegut, with the power of his nation and his nation's media behind him, swiftly becomes a standard of postmodernism's presence in fiction.

Czechoslovakia is the other side, a fragment of the yang that counterbalanced the ying of the USA during the Cold War. It was under Communist rule since the 1940s; when Milan Kundera writes of his broken nation in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, he presents a set of people who are going on with their lives as best ~~as~~ they can, given their quirks, flaws and of course weight. Light Tomas goes from a brilliant surgeon to a window cleaner, settled and yet separating sex and love, and Sabina floats like a feather in her

¹³ Country profile: USA. BBC © MMVIII. Wednesday, 5 November 2008.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/country_profiles/1217752.stm

lifelong effort to avoid kitsch. It is kitsch that she abhors and cannot stand; the chasteness and purity of the frightening 'grinning clown' culture that the rulers insisted was real horrified her more than the atrocities of everyday life. This scenario is of course made possible because of the step by step break up of Russia, a very poor and very vast nation with a history of revolutions and idealism that never quite saved anyone from the brutality of real life. From the fall of the Romanovs to the Bolshevik Revolution to the rise of Stalin, each stage was in line with the domino effect of the World Wars which redistributed the balance of power and also twisted around the economic spines of the nations. In due course Germany's economic condition after the First World War deteriorated to such an extent that it was really a question of dying of starvation or joining Hitler's SS. The Big Four, instead of helping Germany get back up, let the economy run to the ground. Russia too played its part in the wars and aside from that, being such a vast nation with so many poor people it became inevitable that one day they stopped believing in the system – government, ideology, people, future – and the USSR fell apart. The effort to hold it together and continue to exploit the lowest rung of the ladder is a frightening memory that the Czech Republic can look back to. The effort to patch things over with the pure, egalitarian ideal fantasies of Communism is a nightmare that Sabina cannot stand precisely because it mocks the real suffering that is going on.

The UK on the other hand is a former coloniser that has eased its way out of the central position of bullying that it used to be, tactfully stepping off the world stage along with the other Allies from both the World Wars. It is still a 'major player in international affairs

and fulfils an important role in the EU, UN and Nato' ¹⁴ but its former identity as the ruler of the world and the source of not only science and technology but civilisation and culture has lost its shine. It is not completely gone, but merely eroded under the assault of Orientalism and the festering growth of other nations. The most interesting thing about Mark Haddon's novel in this aspect is how oblivious the entire setting, memory and reality is to other races and other cultures. This is the one novel that is told from a racially unaware viewpoint and it is interesting how a child who is so particular about colours, order and schedules is completely unaware of racial, ethnic and cultural diversity that the UK government very much wants to highlight – multiculturalism, immigration and national identity being the concerns of the day. Haddon's narrator is racially blind and that actually says more of the nation that traditionally saw itself as both the norm and the positive, the personification of patriarchy in a nation. This is a boy who is unbelievably good at math – and unable to emote or empathise with human beings.

¹⁴ Country profile: UK. BBC © MMVIII. Tuesday, 8 July 2008.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/1038758.stm

Chapter Two: The postmodern bad-woman-good-woman dichotomy

Gendered readings of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, *Memories of My Melancholy Whores* and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*

Milan Kundera's novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* is easily labelled both a modern and a postmodern novel as he takes his time probing the interiors of the lives of four people, breaking traditional definitions and questioning the meaning of existence. He does not however completely break away from binary logic, just brings in alternate forms in the ideas of lightness and weight, soul and body. This allows him to explain Sabina and Tomas's behaviours in the context of lightness and weight, rather than in the terms of the conventional ideas of betrayal, adultery, irresponsibility and immorality. Nevertheless, he retains the framework of binary logic, and in that sense, the bad-woman-good-woman dichotomy remains visible in the text, though it takes a different form under a new language. And, as Kundera questions whether 'lightness is positive, weight negative' (p. 5), it is also open to debate which one is the good woman and which one of the bad woman. Clearly, Tereza is heavy, and Sabina is light, and this defines them as two different categories of women that basically classify each other, though the good and bad of it is uncertain; this is the postmodern aspect that the age-old dichotomy has taken in Kundera's writing. Of course, at the same time Tomas is also light, and Franz is heavy, so it might appear that the labels apply to each gender in the same manner. However, while Tereza's heaviness compels Tomas to take in the 'child put in a pitch-daubed bulrush basket and sent downstream' (p. 10), Franz's heaviness compels Sabina to leave

him and disappear out of his life without a trace. There is a difference between the way heavy and light individuals interact, depending on their gender.

The bad-woman-good-woman dichotomy before the postmodern movement was a part of the patriarchal ideology that divides women, the othered gender, into subdivisions of good and bad, where they define each other and the role of a woman by embodying what is and what is not acceptable behaviour. Going back to Jane Austen, one can see clear-cut divisions between her heroines and the other women; Fanny Price's high principles and shyness winning over Mary Crawford's conformist thoughts and vivaciousness (*Mansfield Park*), the intelligent and composed Anne Elliot winning over the empty-headed and immature Louisa Musgrove (*Persuasion*), and the clever, warm-hearted and giving Emma Woodhouse over her own Frankenstein, Harriet and the odious Mrs Elton (*Emma*). Thus the positive and the negative are clear: ethical, modest, intelligent, rational, kind women on one side, and immoral, snobbish, foolish and unkind women on the other. It is the good women that make good wives, and can be the 'angel in the house'¹⁵ while the bad woman^e have their place in the streets or in the nightclub, and offer up a man's fantasies. This is 'a binary system in which women are either idealised or demonised'¹⁶ and while the binary remains, the idealisation and demonisation is much shiftier and difficult to catch out. While lightness is supposed to be positive and Sabina therefore should be the new good woman, it is Tereza who suffers and cannot cope with

¹⁵ Coventry Patmore's 'The Angel in the House' was a poem he wrote about his wife, whom he considered the ideal Victorian wife: 'She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed daily. If there was a chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it ... Above all, she was pure' Virginia Woolf famously wrote that the angel wife 'bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her.'

¹⁶ Véronique Desnain. 'Les Faux Miroirs: The Good Woman/Bad Woman Dichotomy in Racine's Tragedies'. *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 96, No. 1 (Jan., 2001), pp. 38-46

lightness, who draws in the readers sympathy, ultimately making Kundera's point, that the 'only certainty is: the lightness/weight opposition is the most mysterious, most ambiguous of all (p. 5). Good and bad too are extremely ambiguous in the postmodern age, when everything is relative and nothing can take the position of an absolute truth.

In Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, womanhood takes different forms and is as varied and independent as any Second Wave Feminist could wish, though it could hardly make a Third Wave Feminist happy. Persis is the good girl who does the right thing and sacrifices her own happiness to help the ultimate lovers, because that is what myth or legend as well as society expects of a good girl. Vina is her polar opposite, and therefore the bad girl, and yet she too has her limits; though she 'hints at bisexuality' she is singularly straight-laced about her sexual orientation, leading the reader to conclude that in that era or in the Indian consciousness, there is a line where 'bad' ends and nudges out everything else into 'unspeakable'. Vina, although she talks and outrages, tells Rai 'I want more than I want' (p. 129), is nonetheless part of a mythical couple, the Eurydice to Ormus Cama's Orpheus. From Greek mythology to Indian tradition and then to western rock legends, Rushdie traces an epic love of the same magnitude as Orpheus and Eurydice's. The new Eurydice is at the end of the day a loud, unstoppable child, hardly matured from the girl who found her mother dead or the girl who told Pilo Doodhwala to kill his goats. It is significant that she names herself 'Vina Apsara', not anyone else; she rejects the names all her other foster parents placed on her. (This is contrastive to Marquez's Delgadina, whose real name we never find out.) She changes her hair, her clothes, she finds affinity for ayurveda and meditation but she is still the pure expression

of Freudian id. There is no limit, no superego to provide her limits to her behaviour. She wants, she reaches, she reacts. Vina is the purest expression of no self-restraint. Especially significant is Maria, who believes herself to be meant for Ormus, who appears to his comatose body despite all sorts of security guarding him. She is at once the crazed groupie wanting to unite herself with her idol, and also the temple prostitute dedicated to a god. She aspires to be what 'Penny Lane' was in the 2000 movie *Almost Famous*, as played by Kate Hudson – a 'Band Aid', not just a nymphomaniac wishing to sleep with a rock star, but someone who is a muse in service to an artist, who can 'love a stupid piece of music so much that it hurts'.¹⁷ Once again, it appears that the motifs or archetypes as Carl Jung would have it, have resurfaced, but in a form that is very much in tune with postmodern culture, a Parsee from India becoming a rock legend who is at once a fusion of and a tribute to Elvis Presley and John Lennon. Individuals can become marketed and publicised so aggressively by the media, which capitalistically disseminates what sells, what is popular, irregardless of the actual content, that a person can become a god or goddess, worshipped, adored, hated and at once completely alone and the centre of the world.

Words misunderstood

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¹⁷ *Almost Famous*. 2000.

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An important question in feminist theory is what makes a woman a woman. Is it the lack of male genitalia, the presence of female genitalia, or is it purely the gender roles women and men are induced to take on? Even the biological aspect is not absolute; people are not born only male and female, there is a continuum in between of hermaphrodites, the transsexual, the transgendered and other categories. Putting aside the question of biology, which itself is no light one, the gender roles are easier to refute, and yet the arguments made against them by Second Wave feminists are absolutist and vulnerable to postmodern criticism. Both Lucy Irigaray and Simone de Beauvoir assume the existence of a monolithic female self-identity — Beauvoir sees patriarchy assign a lack to women that men can define themselves against. Men are the positive and also the norm, cutting out women as abnormal and negative, the gender that is defined by what it is not. Yet the idea that lies beneath this unifying being that every woman can connect to is to overlook the other stratifying factors of race, religion and class, as Judith Butler astutely pointed out in her book on feminist and queer theory, titled *Gender Trouble*.

Again, within the box of women are the divisions of good woman and bad woman, which again define each other by their condition as polar opposites. Binaries, then, continue branching out into divisions and subdivisions of good and bad, self and other, zero and one. As Franz reveals when he tells Sabina 'Sabina, you are a woman' (p. 85) and as she consequently realises, 'the word woman [...] represented a value. Not every woman was worthy of being called a woman.' (p. 85).

If Sabina, the extreme of lightness, who sees betrayal as a flight to the unknown, a romance of breaking ranks, is a woman, then which ones are those women not worthy of being called a woman? As Sabina thinks about it, she turns to the presupposed pairing, Marie-Claude, Franz's wife, to whom she is the other woman. It is broken down to show that Franz does not 'respect Marie-Claude' (p. 86) but 'the woman in Marie-Claude' (p. 86) whom Franz must never hurt and always respect. This respect is due to the woman in her who has the 'emotional intensity' (p. 86) to threaten to kill herself if he would ever leave her. The capability of love and the threat of death is what characterises the woman in her, and the woman in her is whom Franz respects, even though she never surfaces again in the rest of their married lives except to claim him back when he dies. It is the woman in her who makes the declaration 'Love is a battle' (p. 118) and refuse to give Franz a divorce. And the woman in her is his mother, who is the same as 'the Platonic ideal of womanhood' (p. 86). Therefore Franz represents the heaviness of older values that give meaning and weight to life and being.

By the same token, Tereza is a woman too, because her love and her arrival with her suitcase also command Tomas's respect; he cannot make her a part of his series of experiences with women. She too does not wish to be one of the many bodies, but this does not mean a refusal of sexual relations altogether, and it also reflects on her horror of bodies resulting from her childhood with a mother who had no inhibitions and did not understand privacy. She is heavy, but she is nonetheless a woman. Therefore, Tereza and Sabina are both women and define each other by their opposing lightness and weight, their choice of soul or body.

Sexuality

The old model of good and bad woman was most prominently defined by sexuality. Good women not only do not have sex, they do not enjoy it within the socially acceptable parameters of matrimony, but put up with it as a means of having children, and having children is the fulfillment of a woman's life, traditionally speaking. The female body does not merely exist on its own, it is imbued with 'cultural mechanisms [...] that encode the female body with meanings.'¹⁸

It is the bad woman who is sexualised, who is wanton and is the definition of pretty much all the most serious and commonly used insults that the English language — slut, bitch, whore, strumpet, loose, fast. None of these words exist in the tandem of lightness and weight that Kundera presents.

Tereza has a horror of bodies, including her own. Her nightmare of herself and other naked women singing while marching around a swimming pool is indicative of the childhood she had. She does not wish away sexuality altogether; she screams when Tomas makes love to her. Her desire that he also love her soul and not make her one of the 'two hundred' women's bodies he has conquered. Her inability to accept Tomas's philosophy that love and sexuality can exist separately shames her and makes her see herself as weak; it is also what nearly drives her mad. She says 'They're the same' in reference to a nude beach and the Russian invasion, leaving everyone, and apparently the

¹⁸ Frug, Mary Joe. 'A Postmodern Feminist Legal Manifesto (An Unfinished Draft),' *Harvard Law Review*, Vol. 105, No. 5. (March 1992), p. 1049.

narrator as well, confused: 'Neither the editor nor the photographer understood her, and even I find it difficult to explain what she had in mind when she compared a nude beach to the Russian invasion.' The body and the Russians create the same horror in her. She is a step further from the Victorian angel; she can have sex but she cannot accept her own physiology. Does that make her the new 'good woman'?

Sabina, like Tomas, celebrates the body; her bowler hat is part of her daring and her link to her heritage. Sabina's belief, which is also Tomas's, that 'Physical love is unthinkable without violence (p. 108) makes her see Franz as weak, because he does not use his strength on her and he believes that love is 'renouncing strength' (p. 108). This violent and male-dominant view of sex can be interpreted as misogynist; Tomas always commands 'Strip!' to women and is taken aback when 'the woman who looked like a giraffe and a stork' (p. 198) throws the order back at her. This episode of lovemaking is one that is very new to Tomas; the woman mirrors everything he does, suggesting an equalising experience. She could almost be Lilith to his Adam, if Tereza can be called Eve. He is excited when he sees the 'frightened expression of equilibrium lost' (p. 199) in her face, again an indication that the male should be the one commanding and causing both fear and pleasure. His promiscuity is to find 'the joy of having acquired another piece of the world' simply by experiencing a new woman and learning new sources of excitement. In his own way, his sexuality is his way of exploring the world, experimenting and being a philosopher.

Ultimately the question of which is good and which is bad is a very difficult one to make, for lightness and heaviness remain as ambiguous at the end of the book as they were at the beginning; postmodernly, Kundera gives no answers. What can be more easily explained is the balance of power between the women.

Marie-Claude, the heaviest, kitsch-est woman, establishes what 'the real balance of power was between the two of them' (p. 104) when she tells Sabina 'That pendant is ugly', as Franz himself realises – it is her way of showing that she is still in power, capable of judging and putting Sabina down. And ultimately, it is Marie-Claude's kitsch that wins out when he dies and she takes away his identity by saying he had returned to her. She is, then, the dominant one.

As for Sabina and Tereza, it is when they are photographing each other, it is Sabina who takes on Tomas's role and utters the command 'Strip!' to Tereza, using the word that their common lover used to bring about an 'erotic situation' from an 'innocent conversation' (p. 62). Therefore, it is Sabina who dominates in the relation with her other, being the 'man' in this woman-to-woman erotic moment. Perhaps in the contemporary context, it is Sabina who is the good woman because she represents the newer ideals: hatred of kitsch, refusal of traditional relationships, love of the body, lightness, bringing the argument back to Parmenides's decision that lightness was positive. But at the end of the novel, when she is living completely unattached and without any weight to burden her while Franz, Tereza and Tomas are dead, she is not any happier, though she has followed these ideals through and through, right down to her decision to be cremated. In the end,

there is no good and bad, only polarity; neither of the options is better or worse than the other, and neither reward or punish in a consistent manner. That, ultimately, is the postmodern argument for no centre, no absolutes; yet at the same time, the binary remains. It is merely divested of morality. The postmodern bad-woman-good-woman dichotomy is one where bad and good have been dropped and the polarity remains. Sabina's and Tereza's lives do not present themselves as desirable and undesirable respectively.

Marquez's sexuality is different – *the woman?* it is more passive, more traditional Spanish circa 19th century at the very latest. The girl never takes any initiative except for the one night that she is dressed up in the madam's jewels for him, only to be called a whore by the narrator who shows the old Spanish jealousy of the body. Disconnected from the culture of sexual freedoms and added to the fact that the narrator does after all belong to a generation that had more centred ideals, this is not only possible in sheltered Columbia but also explains why of all the fetishes to appeal to his fancy, it is back to King Cophetua, the sudden and total jealous love of the obeisant and barely nubile poor girl. The isolation from the aggressive streams carried from the media around the rest of the world explains why it is old Japanese romanticism that Marquez chooses to replicate – the idea of worshipping a naked sleeping girl and not touching her is one that comes from Japanese culture, a fetish that is particular to that nation before blatant Americanism has made it a mad consumer society which loves everything American and has taken baseball and Kennedy love to new levels. But before this cultural invasion, Japanese romanticism was not all that different from Spanish romanticism – there is the same feudal, patriarchal base with the image of an ideal woman altogether too beautiful and too pure to be corrupted. It is not a

coincidence that Marquez adopted this particular fantasy – it is just a natural choice considering the socioeconomic factors. The fantasy of two women and one man, which is supposed to be the sexual dream of any red-blooded American man, is not one that would make its way into Marquez’s heart. What fits with Marquez, with Columbia and with his readership is this extract that he places before the beginning of the book, taken from *House of the Sleeping Beauties* by Yasunari Kawabata. ‘He was not to do anything in bad taste, the woman of the inn warned old Eguchi. He was not to put his finger into the mouth of the sleeping girl, or try anything else of that sort.’ The passive watching man is not fitting with the image of the action hero who sweeps women off their feet in Hollywood movies; in American culture, the passive man who merely watches is a pathetic or creepy stalker, not a real man. Delgadina is an example of a good girl ready to please, with her madam, Rosa Cabarcas coming off as the scheming and exploitative bad woman who is no prostitute with a heart of gold no matter how friendly she is to the narrator and how much she appears to consider his wishes. Marquez’s values are quaint, because capitalism has left him in a pocket and enabled him to be so. His alternative views, beauties and overall quaintness that are all integrated into the absolutely brilliant writer that he is are a reason why he is postmodern – he provides a bright strand in the strange weaving that is world culture.

Epilogue: The whirlpool

In each instance, in each novel, a different story was told. The elements were not presented in the same way and yet each one of the novels examined were all in one way or another indisputably postmodern in their unconventionality, alternative viewpoints and nonconformist nature. In particular, Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* shows that there is always a new point of view to reveal. Even though Haddon has been accused of misleading readers with inaccuracies about autism, it remains that the novel shows what it is like to not be able to conceptualise the world in the same manner that we are bred to accept it. It is perfectly possible to create a new system of values arbitrarily and unaffected by existing social constructs when one is not 'normal'. It reminds one of the schizophrenic question – who is to say that the voices a schizophrenic patient hears is not real? What difference is there between madmen and prophets save that someone believed in the latter and made messiahs of them? In every case, arbitrariness of values and of meaning is what comes across, in each of these continents that the novels are based in and the authors are from.

This arbitrariness has become universal in the English writing world. It is not just the way readers and critics interpret texts; the arbitrariness of life, of meaning and the ease with which fixed ideologies can be done away with is another commonality that has arisen. With Marquez, he did away with the idea that love can leave one untouched till the very end of one's lifetime, something he explored once with *Love in the Time of Cholera*. With Haddon, the very basics of what a smile can mean and how frightening human touch and the most simple of human lies can be take on a new light from the eyes of an

autistic child. And these differences and commonalities are all traceable to the progression of the economic system of the world, right from Europe in the 1600s. In four centuries the free market system has penetrated the furthest corners and brought the whole system together in a way that enables each piece of the jigsaw to contribute its own element. It is the breaking of the white light into a spectrum of colours, and each colour has a range that mathematically, logically and economically corresponds to the original prism that broke the ray of light up. From continent to continent, village to city, child to adult, each instance is interconnected and forms a fine sequence of causes and effects that all trace back to the failure of feudalism and the end of the Dark Ages. With capitalism and all of its expected and unexpected developments, postmodernism has emerged, first as a prop, then as a crutch and now an important internal organ.

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